

Fact Sheet

**Office of the Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues
Washington, DC**

March 7, 2007

Secretary of State Confers the First International Women of Courage Awards

"Women of courage are standing up for freedom and human dignity, and the United States stands with them. We must not forget that the advance of women's rights and the advance of human liberty go hand in hand."

-- Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, March 8, 2006

In celebration of International Women's Day 2007, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice announced the annual Award for International Women of Courage. The Award recognizes women around the globe who have shown exceptional courage and leadership in advocating for women's rights and advancement. This is the first Department of State award that pays tribute to emerging women leaders worldwide, and offers a unique opportunity to focus on transformational diplomacy in the field of international women's issues.

On March 7, 2007, the Secretary of State will pay tribute to 10 Women of Courage in an awards ceremony at the State Department. The honorees, representing Afghanistan, Argentina, Indonesia, Iraq, Latvia, Maldives, Saudi Arabia, and Zimbabwe, are transforming their societies and serve as an inspiration to the international community. They are among more than 80 exceptional women of courage who were nominated by U.S. Embassies worldwide for their diverse contributions to freedom, justice, peace, and equality.

This year, we honor the following women of courage from six regions:

Africa - Ms. Jennifer Louise Williams - Zimbabwe

Ms. Jennifer Williams is the founder and inspirational leader of "WOZA" (Women of Zimbabwe Arise), one of the most active civil society organizations in protesting government abuses in Zimbabwe. Ms. Williams has suffered arrest, harassment, and physical abuse. By uniting women in Zimbabwe of all races and ethnic backgrounds to advocate for issues directly affecting them, she has brought social, economic and political issues to national attention. Ms. Williams and WOZA lead annual peaceful marches on Valentine's Day and Mother's Day to promote peace and development. These marches have led to the mass arrest of peaceful women who are seen as threatening to the Government of Zimbabwe, but the women remain undeterred. Ms. Williams and the organization she founded have provided an example of courage and leadership by working for change through peaceful and nonviolent means.

East Asia/Pacific - Dr. Siti Musdah Mulia - Indonesia

Dr. Siti Musdah Mulia is the first woman to earn a Ph.D. in Islamic thought from the State Islamic University, and the first woman appointed a research professor by the Indonesian Institute of Sciences. A prominent Muslim feminist, Dr. Mulia has used her extensive knowledge of the Quran and Hadiths to advocate for women's rights. Dr. Mulia was part of a team of experts that produced a Counter Legal Draft of Indonesia's Islamic legal code; recommendations included prohibiting child marriage, and allowing interfaith marriage. In the face of violent protests, the Minister of Religious Affairs canceled the project. Though faced with death threats and condemnation, Dr. Mulia continues to educate Indonesian women about their rights.

Europe - Ms. Ilze Jaunalksne - Latvia

Ms. Ilze Jaunalksne is a journalist and anchor of Latvia's top current affairs TV program, DeFacto. She is a trailblazer in the fight against political corruption in Latvia. In March 2006, Ms. Jaunalksne broke the story of a vote buying scandal involving prominent national political leaders from several parties. By shining the light on the investigation through news reports, the case could not be compromised by political pressure. Her report led to the indictment of several high-ranking political figures, and forced the resignation of a minister. In the face of harassment by public figures attempting to discredit her, and by extension her work, Ms. Jaunalksne took the government to court and sued for defamation of character. Her case was the first of its kind in Latvia. The judge ruled in her favor, and the State was ordered to pay her damages, another landmark achievement. In the face of great opposition and threats to her own life, Ms. Jaunalkse is helping to bring about reform for this democratic nation.

Near East - Dr. Samia al-Amoudi - Saudi Arabia

Dr. Samia Al-Amoudi is an obstetrician-gynecologist and former Vice Dean of the College of Medicine and Allied Science at King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah. She diagnosed her own breast cancer at a very advanced stage in March 2006, and struggled to get confirmation of the diagnosis and treatment options despite her own medical career. She was the first Saudi to share her personal battle with this disease, breaking the silence to speak out about its impact. As a single parent, full-time physician, and cancer awareness spokeswoman, Dr. Al-Amoudi has advocated effectively to increase awareness and to highlight the urgent need for enhanced medical care. Dr. Al-Amoudi understands that a woman's silence can quickly lead to death if cancer is ignored or if women do not have access to care and treatment. She has contributed to raising public awareness for Saudi women and families across the Kingdom and throughout the region.

South and Central Asia - Ms. Mariya Ahmed Didi - Maldives

In a Muslim country making an arduous transition to a democratic system of government, Ms. Mariya Ahmed Didi is one of six women in the 50-member parliament, and one of only two elected women (the other four were appointed by the president). Ms. Didi organized the first-ever women's rights rally in Maldives in March 2006, in response to plain clothes police arresting a female activist from her home late at night. Ms. Didi has faced physical harassment, and arrest. She remains tireless and tenacious in her efforts in a political scene dominated by men. She serves as a role model for a nation full of young women just beginning to become active in politics.

Western Hemisphere - Ms. Sara Susana del Valle Trimarco de Veron - Argentina

Ms. Susana Trimarco de Veron has faced danger and threats in her efforts to combat human trafficking and to find her daughter, who was kidnapped by traffickers. Desperate to find her missing daughter, Ms. Trimarco put herself in dangerous situations, disguised as a prostitute, trolling bars and alleys in search of anyone who might know her daughter's whereabouts. Despite false leads and death threats, she has uncovered evidence of trafficking networks operating in the Argentine provinces of La Rioja, Tucuman, Buenos Aires, Cordoba, and Santa Cruz. Thanks to Ms. Trimarco's work, human trafficking is now gaining public and government attention in Argentina, and victims are being encouraged to report the crime.

This year, the State Department also honors the achievements of four courageous women from Afghanistan and Iraq:

Ms. Mary Akrami - Afghanistan

Mary Akrami is the Director of the Afghan Women Skills Development Center, which is a women's shelter in Kabul. Women come to the shelter to escape domestic violence or forced marriages, and no one is ever turned away. Women are allowed to stay as long as needed while they recover from the violence they have suffered, often at the hands of a male relative. The Center is the only shelter in Kabul providing comprehensive assistance and permitting women to stay longer than a few nights. Shelter staff provide legal advice, literacy classes, psychological counseling, and basic skills training. Under Ms. Akrami's leadership, several women at the shelter have made the virtually unprecedented move of denouncing their abusers publicly and filing court cases against them. Notwithstanding threats she has received, Mary Akrami refuses to be intimidated and remains dedicated to her work. She is on call for women who need her

assistance 24 hours a day.

Ms. Aziza Siddiqui - Afghanistan

Aziza Siddiqui is Women's Rights Coordinator with Action Aid, an Afghan NGO. She travels into Afghanistan's greatly underserved countryside to conduct first-hand research on the situation of rural women. Currently, she is educating women in Afghanistan's Northern Provinces on their rights. Ms. Siddiqui organizes training meetings on decision-making in numerous remote villages. Ms. Siddiqui is also conducting research on violence against girls in public high schools and how this may impede their access to education. Despite personal threats against her for her groundbreaking research on gender, Ms. Siddiqui forges ahead with her investigation into the lives of women around the country and uses that information as a platform to draw attention to the needs of women in Afghanistan.

Dr. Sundus Abbas - Iraq

Dr. Sundus Abbas is the Executive Director of the Women's Leadership Institute in Baghdad, and an activist for women's rights in Iraq. She has worked tirelessly, despite severe obstacles, to improve the capacity of Iraqi women to become involved in the Iraqi political process, to play greater roles within their political parties, to take part in local and national politics, the constitutional drafting and amending process, and in national reconciliation and conflict resolution efforts. Dr. Abbas, a political scientist by training, regularly speaks out in the public media about women's rights, the constitution, the problem of women's political marginalization within Iraqi political parties and government agencies, and women's role in achieving national unity. She has also worked to build the capacity of Civil Society Organizations to take part in national reconciliation efforts and decrease sectarianism and sectarian violence. Additionally, Dr. Abbas writes regularly for Iraq's main daily newspapers on women's rights, and has held numerous press conferences to directly address issues of concern to women, and has been interviewed numerous times on Baghdad's major television stations.

Ms. Shatha Abdul Razzak Abbousi - Iraq

Ms. Shatha Abdul Razzak Abbousi is a member of the Iraqi Council of Representatives, from the Iraqi Islamic Party, where she is also sits on the Human Rights Committee. Ms. Abbousi is a prominent Iraqi activist for reconciliation and for women's rights, and a member of The Pledge for Iraq, a women's rights activist group. Through her work both within and outside parliament, she has courageously fought for women's rights, and Ms. Abbousi's dedication, courage and leadership has set an example for young Iraqi women who are interested in taking an active role in their nation's political process.

Ms. Abbousi is a teacher by education, specializing in both biology and Islamic studies - thus demonstrating that science and religion can coexist. During the previous regime, however, she was banned from teaching in any state schools because of her refusal to join the Ba'ath Party. After the war, she began teaching in a public school, but took a leave of absence in order to fully participate in politics.

Office of the Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues

phone: 202-312-9664

e-mail: g-iwi@state.gov

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