For Steadfast Resistance to Evil at Great Personal Risk

Civil Courage News

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Ambassador William J. Burns,
President of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, will be the keynote speaker Thursday, October 18th. In 2014, he retired after a distinguished 33-year diplomatic career. He holds the highest rank, career ambassador, and is only the second serving career diplomat in history to become deputy secretary of state.

Russian opposition leader Vladimir Kara-Murza has been awarded the 2018 Civil Courage Prize. A journalist, author, and documentary film maker, his mission is for Russia to become a free and democratic country, where the rule of law and human rights are respected. Kara-Murza is the vice chairman of the Open Russia Movement, an NGO which promotes civil society and democracy.

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At the initiative of President Emeritus Edward Streator we are undertaking a campaign to bring the idea of civil courage to a broader audience. This will include modernizing our outreach vehicles, notably our website, which will have more visual material. We would like to show our laureates in action, ideally including their work, as well as describing them, and show some of our speakers actually delivering their words, as well as printing selections from the texts. We hope that these changes will find favor with a wider public.

We acknowledge with great pleasure a substantial new contribution by the Achelis and Bodman Foundation; also, an increase in their level of annual contribution by the Clarence and Anne Dillon Dunwalke 'Trust, who are represented by their Chairman, Christopher Allen, for which, again, we are most grateful.

We do not solicit contributions, and thus it is with particular appreciation that we acknowledge these, along with those of our long-time Patrons.

The Story of The Civil Courage Prize

Many years ago, John Train became concerned with the situation of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, the great Russian hero and author, whose works helped destroy the prestige of Stalinism. After being exiled, he had moved to rural Vermont, but was living in poverty. Train was able to obtain substantial private support for him, and accompanied him to London, where Prince Philip handed him a check in a Buckingham Palace ceremony.

Train, who delivered the English-language response at the ceremony, realized that there was no word in English for the virtue that Solzhenitsyn so nobly exemplified, but that there should be, perhaps "civil courage," as distinct from valor in war. He resolved to create a prize for this virtue, and asked if Solzhenitsyn would like to receive it, or have it named after him, or be a judge. He chose the last, and acted in that role for the rest of his life. His son has followed him.

We believe in, or dare to espouse. The noblest causes may be those that seem hopeless at the time. Civil courage empowers us to face the world alone.

Recent News

The 2009 Civil Courage Prize-winner, Aminatou Haidar, has long been a non-violent champion of self-determination for Western Sahara, which Morocco claimed and occupied after the departure of the Spanish colonial powers in 1975. Since then, Morocco has tried to ensure control over the disputed territory, engaging in a 16-year war with the Polisario Front independence movement, the self-declared Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic. While Mrs. Haidar is not member of the organization, she considers the movement the only representative of the Sahrawi people.

Her goal is for Sahrawis to control their own destiny and consequently, their own resources. Western Sahara sits on vast mineral deposits, including part of the world’s largest phosphate reserve (considered essential for European agriculture), along with rich offshore fishing and possibly oil.

On February 27th, in a decision that the US-Western Sahara Foundation said "reaffirmed the Sahrawi people’s inalienable right to self-determination," the European Court of Justice (ECJ) challenged the legitimacy of Morocco’s claim to Western Sahara’s resources. The Court ruled that a long-standing fisheries agreement between Morocco and the EU does not apply to the waters adjacent to Western Sahara since it does not belong to the “Moroccan fishing zone referred to in the Fisheries Agreement.”

The Court further affirmed that the EU-Moroccan agreements could not include Sahrawi resources because citizens of Western Sahara had not been in a position to agree to its conditions. According to the Court’s Advocate General, the deals did not “respect the right of the people of Western Sahara to self-determination [and should have been] based on the condition in international law that any wealth gained from exploiting Western Sahara’s rich marine life should benefit its people.”

The ruling was the second international court decision for the Sahwaris in less than a week, following one by the South African High Court over a disputed cargo of Western Saharan phosphate.

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he was tapped to help reset relations with Russia. Secretary of State John Kerry lauded his "quiet, head-down, get-it-done diplomacy," adding, "he has more than earned his place on a very short list of American diplomatic legends." President Obama called him "a skilled advisor, consummate diplomat, and inspiration to generations of public servants."

Regarding U.S.-Russian relations, Ambassador Burns observes, "since the end of the Cold War, profound grievances, misperceptions and disappointments have often defined the relationship between the United States and Russia" "...whatever the difficulties in our relations—and, certainly, today we have profound difficulties with the current Russian leadership—it is important to develop a sense of respect for that history, and what Russians as a people have not only endured but also achieved."

He sees the world as "an increasingly complicated place [as] information flows faster and in greater volume than any time before. [The] challenges for professional diplomats are, I think, as great as I've ever seen them." He adds, "I continue to believe that our work matters as much as it ever has. Our ability to add value and to help navigate a very complicated international landscape in the pursuit of our interests, remains enormously significant."

William J. Burns to Give Keynote Address

Kara-Murza Fights For Democracy in Russia

continued from page 1

He continues, "If we give up and run away, what future and what prospects does our country have? And what kind of message does that send to millions of people around Russia who reject this regime and who want Russia to be a normal, modern, democratic, European country? We have no right to run away—and we’re not going to."

"No matter how powerful the forces against them, when people are prepared to stand up for what they believe, they succeed. That’s the basis of my hope for the future of Russia.”
The Civil Courage Prize honors civil courage—steadfast resistance to evil at great personal risk—rather than military valor. The acts so recognized should have taken place deliberately, over time.

Nominations for the Prize are solicited primarily from non-profit, non-governmental organizations worldwide. Further information may be obtained from our website: www.civilcourageprize.org.

“The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”
—Edmund Burke