



CIVIL COURAGE PRIZE

Introduction by Michele Bachelet

Lydia Cacho and
Treveni Acharya

2011

Good evening and let me just say from the start that I am very pleased to share this special evening with you. I want to thank Chairman John Train for his leadership and the Train Foundation for all you do and for holding this Civil Courage award ceremony.

This evening gives all of us an invaluable opportunity to reflect on civil courage, and what it means to put up steadfast resistance to evil, and to do so at great personal risk for the protection and the well-being of others.

All over the world, individuals are standing up for human rights and justice. I just returned from Egypt, where I met with young women and men leaders from Arab States across the region. In all countries where protests occurred — from Tahrir Square in Egypt to Saa'na in Yemen, women are standing equally alongside men fighting to determine their own future and the future of their countries, and they are putting their lives on the line.

All over the world, women are demanding peace and justice.

We are indeed very fortunate to honour two women tonight for their tremendous civil courage. In our presence is Lydia Cacho Ribiero, a journalist and activist who founded a shelter for battered and sexually exploited women and children in Cancun, Mexico. And we are joined by Triveni Acharya, the President of the Rescue Foundation, an organization that fights trafficking and prostitution of women and children in Mumbai, India.

My friends, we are in the presence of two very strong and powerful women. Their courage and moral power are not vested within established institutions. They took the courage they have to direct action, and created their own organizations to fill the gaps in justice.

They stand out because they break the silence on gender-based violence, a human rights violation that has long been neglected and viewed as inevitable and even acceptable. They stand out because they acted on their profound belief in human rights and equal rights for all.

Their power lies in defending the rights of women and children to live free of abuse, exploitation and violence. And they do so at their own peril!

Because they speak the truth and stand up for the rights of others, their own lives are in constant danger. Because they identify organized criminal networks and corrupt officials, and stand up to husbands who abuse their wives, they have been imprisoned and tortured and still face death threats.

The award winners stand up against one of the most pervasive yet least punished crimes in the world — violence against women and children.

They stand up against one of the fastest growing segments of organized crime, and one of the most profitable — human trafficking and sexual slavery.

For their courageous work, we owe them deep respect and gratitude. In standing against human trafficking and sexual slavery, they champion human dignity.

The sale of women and children in the global economy, as commodities such as shoes or handbags, poses a direct threat to our humanity and to the notions of decency and human rights to which nations have subscribed.

The two women being honored tonight fight this impunity and the dark and hidden nature of sexual slavery that allows this criminal activity to thrive. Through their courageous work, they act as undercover agents, conducting their own investigations, freeing victims of trafficking from horrendous conditions of captivity, humiliation and degradation. They publish their findings; they bring to light what is kept in the dark, and shine a light of justice.

The challenge in the fight against this form of 21st century slavery is ignorance, the lack of information, or simply saying, "It does not concern me." We know it's one of the most lucrative illicit businesses, and it is almost impossible to calculate how many women and children are bought and sold and humiliated and degraded every day.

According to UN estimates, there are about two million women and girls who are sexually exploited and trafficked each year. About 80 percent of victims are trafficked for purposes of sexual exploitation, and of these, 80 percent are girls and women.

This reality highlights the urgent need for public intervention. This is about the violation of fundamental human rights. Trafficking involves the negation of the human condition. It is making millions of women and children into objects of abuse and consumption.

Just as no woman or child should be bought and sold like merchandise in a market, no trafficker should be allowed to get away with this heinous crime. The two women being honoured tonight take courageous actions every day to deliver much needed justice.

This call for justice is echoing around the world. People are coming together calling for an end to greed and corruption by a few. They are disillusioned with the established order and

frustrated with inequality. They are distrustful of institutions and entrenched interests and they ask to be heard. This is direct democracy. And there can be no democracy without the participation of women and men.

I have served as a Minister of Defense and as President. I have worked to build strong institutions functioning as agents of democracy, social protection and the rule of law. I know firsthand what a dictatorship is like. I am now the Executive Director of UN Women — a new United Nations agency that was created by demand and became operational at the beginning of this year in January.

And I believe we are at a critical juncture. We have entered a new period of history. We are still trying to figure out what we are shaping in precise terms because developments are coming very quickly and it is hard to process all that is going on. At the very least, this is a period of history that will be characterized by increased participation in which people are connected as never before through new technology and instant communication. And it will be marked by a shift in the balance of power both between and within countries.

All over the world, and let there be no doubts about this, women are demanding their rights, and in doing so they are demanding the rights of others. There is growing solidarity. Gender equality is gaining ground, and women such as those being honored tonight are leading the way forward joined by many others.

Just recently, the Nobel Committee in Oslo awarded the Nobel Peace Prize to three women, to Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Leymah Gbowee of Liberia and Tawakkul Karman of Yemen, "for the non-violent struggle for the safety of women and for women's rights to full participation in peace-building work." In awarding the Peace Prize, they sent a powerful message around the world. Women play a vital role in building peace, justice and democracy.

Today the discrimination and violence faced by women and girls violates their human rights and their self-determination; and it threatens the peace, security and development of nations.

We know that violence against women takes many forms — from domestic abuse to sex trafficking to rape to honor killings. It is an epidemic that costs lives, violates human rights and damages psyches, physical health and the human spirit.

Gender-based violence harms families and communities, reduces women's productivity, damages the development and well-being of children, and costs nations billions in losses each year.

According to a study in India, a woman loses an average of at least five paid work days for each incident of intimate partner violence. Here in the United States, the annual costs of intimate partner violence are calculated at US\$5.8 billion.

And the costs and consequence of violence against women last for generations. Children who witness domestic violence are at increased risk of anxiety, depression, low self-esteem and

poor school performance, among other problems that harm their well-being and personal development.

In Nicaragua, for instance, 63 percent of children of abused women had to repeat a school year and they left school on average four years earlier than other children. And children, both girls and boys, who have witnessed or suffered from gender-based violence, are more likely to become victims and abusers later in life.

Gender-based violence is one of the most pervasive violations of human rights in our world today and yet it remains characterized by impunity, which allows it to continue.

Through the brave work of tonight's Civil Courage prize recipients, and the work of other women and men around the world, there is a growing movement to end violence against women and children. There is solid progress to build on.

Just a few decades ago, rape and sexual violence in conflict were considered an inevitable part of warfare. Today rape in war is seen for what it is: a violation of human rights and a crime to be prosecuted.

During the past four decades, we have witnessed dramatic advances in legal reform to protect women's rights. Today 125 countries outlaw domestic violence, and 117 countries outlaw sexual harassment. And 186 nations have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, signaling their commitment to fulfilling the human rights of women and girls and breaking down the barriers to achieving gender equality and justice.

Dozens of countries have ratified a new international agreement to protect human beings from being bought and sold as commodities for exploitation and profit. The United Nations Protocol against Trafficking in Persons — the foremost international agreement in this area — is being implemented by countries and traffickers are being arrested.

Yet we all know, and none more so than the two women being honored tonight, that despite the gains, in many countries of the world, the rule of law still rules women out. Too often, justice institutions, including the police and the courts, deny women justice.

We also see that women parliamentarians, lawyers, judges and activists are driving change and making a real difference. The women being honored tonight are making a real difference in thousands of women's and children's lives.

Ending violence against women and girls, and the impunity that allows it to continue, are top priorities for UN Women. Our other priorities, which reinforce progress in this area, are increasing women's participation and leadership, engaging women fully in peacemaking, peacebuilding and reconstruction; prioritizing gender equality in national plans and budgets; and advancing women's economic empowerment. By working on these fronts simultaneously, we will make greater progress.

Today progress is being made by women such as Lydia and Triveni who risk their own lives in the defense of human rights and the lives of others.

In honoring Lydia Cacho Ribiero and Triveni Acharya tonight, we honor the spirit of solidarity and the universal values that unite us as humanity. We honor the inherent dignity and worth and equal rights of every human being and the courage to defend human rights, dignity, and freedom.

Thank you.