

Women of courage in the face of danger

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Today marks the third anniversary of the murder of the Russian investigative journalist Anna Politkovskaya. Yesterday the human rights organisation Reach All Women in War presented the annual Anna Politkovskaya Award, set up to recognise women defending human rights in zones of war and conflict, to the One Million Signatures Campaign for Equality in Iran. This group of women are risking their lives to collect signatures in support of a petition to change the laws which discriminate against women. Many have faced imprisonment, and torture and abuse in detention; they have been banned from travelling abroad and their lives have been in danger. But this has not stopped their determination to struggle for equality. They live a life of courage in the face of danger, just as Anna did.

In October 2007, we presented the first Anna Politkovskaya Award to Natalia Estemirova for her courage in seeking and telling the truth about the torture, disappearances and murders of civilians in the war in Chechnya. We were outraged by the killing of Natalia on 15 July. Nobody has been charged for this crime and two other humanitarian aid workers helping children disabled by the war, Zarema Sadulayeva and her husband, Alek Dzabrailov, were abducted and killed in Chechnya on 10 August.

We call again on the Russian government to bring to justice those who killed Anna and Natalia and their colleagues in Chechnya, and to end the killings of journalists and human rights defenders in the Russian Federation. We also call on world leaders to take action to protect the journalists and human rights defenders in areas of war and conflict. We owe it to the memory of Anna and Natalia to protect those who still speak out on behalf of those to whom nobody wants to listen.

Mairead Maguire, Betty Williams, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Elena Bonner, Frank Judd, Gillian Slovo, Azar Nafisi, Rigoberta Menchú Tum, Eva Hoffman, Vaclav Havel*, Susan Sarandon and 99 others, RAW in WAR