Letter from the Committee of Supporters of the RAW in WAR Anna Politkovskaya Award

7 October, 2010

We the undersigned are all supporters of the human rights organisation RAW in WAR (Reach All Women in War). Yesterday evening we presented the annual Anna Politkovskaya Award, set up to recognise women defending human rights in zones of war and conflict, often at great personal risk, to Dr. Halima Bashir of Darfur (Sudan).

Today marks the fourth anniversary of the murder of the Russian investigative journalist Anna Politkovskaya.
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This young and brave woman, a trained medical doctor, risked her life to speak the truth. In early 2004, as she treated the traumatized victims, Halima bore witness to the torture and rape of over 40 girls as young as eight, and their teachers, from a primary school in Darfur by the Janjaweed militia. The Sudanese secret police threatened her to keep silent or face the consequences. Halima refused to remain silent. She gave a detailed witness statement to the United Nations representatives about the rapes. Several days later she was herself abducted by Sudanese soldiers, held hostage and gang-raped for three days, to punish her for speaking out. They told her they would let her live because “we know you’d prefer to die”. Knowing she would no longer be safe in Sudan, she fled the country, and sought asylum in the United Kingdom. Halima continues to advocate for justice for the women and girls in Sudan despite the danger to her own life. She lives a life of courage in the face of grave danger, just as Anna did. We pledge our ongoing support and solidarity for Dr. Halima Bashir.

Last year in 2009, we presented the award to The One Million Signatures Campaign for Equality in Iran – a unique group of women, risking their lives and facing imprisonment and torture to collect signatures in support of a petition to change the current laws which discriminate against women in Iran. In October 2007 the first annual Anna Politkovskaya Award was presented to Natalia Estemirova for her courage in seeking and telling the truth about the torture, disappearances, and murders of civilians in Chechnya. We were shocked and outraged by the killing of Natalia last year, on July 15th 2009. To date, no one has been brought to justice for her murder.

We call again on the Russian government to bring to justice those who killed Anna and Natalia and their colleagues in Chechnya, for whose murders justice has not been done, and to end the killings of journalists and human rights defenders in the Russian Federation. We call on the world’s leaders to pledge to do everything in their power to protect the journalists and human rights defenders who work in areas of war and conflict.

We owe it to the memory of Anna and Natalia to protect the very few who continue to speak out on behalf of those who are still not listened to or heard.

Mairead Maguire, Jody Williams, Shirin Ebadi, Rigoberta Menchú Tum, Elena Bonner, Tatiana Yankelevich, Vaclav Havel, Desmond Tutu, Jon Snow, John Pilger, Andre Glucksmann, Gloria Steinem, Sergey Kovalyov, Alexei Simonov,

Vladimir Bukovsky, Malalai Joya, Gillian Slovo, Adam Michnik, Tom Stoppard, Bernard-Henri Lévy, Natasha Kandic, Elisabeth Rehn, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Mariane Pearl, Asma Jahangir, Carl Gershman, Hina Jilani, Susan Sarandon, Jane Birkin, Sophie Shihab, Eva Hoffman, Naomi Klein, Sister Helen Prejean, Ariel Dorfman, Vanessa Redgrave, Eve Ensler, Michael Cunningham, John Sweeney, Jonathan Schell, Noam Chomsky, Marina Litvinenko, Heidi Bradner, Lyudmila Alekseeva, Desmond O'Malley, Anne Nivat, Annabel Markova, Frank Judd, Nicolas Rea, Anthony Giddens, Nazir Ahmed, Shirley Williams, Molly Meacher, Vivien Stern, Helena Kennedy QC, Professor Yakin Erturk, Elena Kudimova, Sister Marya Grathwohl, Andrey Nekrasov, Meglena Kuneva, Peter Gabriel, Stina Scott, Anna Stavitskaya, John D Panitza, Dubravka Ugresic, Katrina vanden Heuvel, Victor Navasky, Aidan White, Holly Near, Elizabeth Frank, Elizabeth Kostova, Zoe Sallis-Huston, Denise LeBoeuf, Julian Popov, Oleg Panfilov, Stefan Tafrov, Tsvetana Maneva, Mihail Simeonov, Susan Allee, Edward Friedman, Arlene Lederman, Bill Bowring, Amanda Sebestyen, Irena Grudzinska Gross, James Lecesne, Cal Skaggs, Laura Flanders, Elena Cook, Martin Dewhirst, Zoya Grannes, Elena Jandova, Marta Coigney, Jenny Diski, Monica Ali, Isa Blyden, Nayereh Tohidi, Claire Bertschinger, Georgi Borissov, Vanora Bennett, James Meek and more than 100 others.

For the full list of the Committee of Supporters to the Anna Politkovskaya Award please see:
http://www.rawinwar.org/content/view/65/202/