Anna Politkovskaya Award 2009

Wednesday 7 October marks the third anniversary of the murder of Anna Politkovskaya, the campaigning Russian journalist and outspoken government critic, who exposed the brutal treatment of civilians in Chechnya at the hands of both the Russian forces and the Moscow-supported Chechen officials. No closer to having her assassin brought to justice, three years on, the Russian authorities remain reluctant and show no political will to identify who ordered the killing and to see justice done.

To mark the anniversary of Anna Politkovskayaâ€™s murder and to honour Anna and other women like her in the world, RAW in WAR (Reach All Women in WAR) annually presents the Anna Politkovskaya Award to a woman human rights defender from a conflict zone in the world who, like Anna, stands up for the victims of this conflict, often at great personal risk.Â Anna lived a life of courage in the face of grave danger, just like her friend, colleague and first recipient of the Award, Natalia Estemirova, who was abducted and murdered on 15th July 2009. This yearâ€™s award ceremony also remembers Natasha, who was a truth-seeker with every fibre of her being.

RAW in WAR aims to support women human rights defenders working in countries in war and conflict, and to help end abuse and persecution against them, as well as to strengthen their work in areas of conflict, or â€œforgotten conflictâ€•, where there is limited or no support from the major humanitarian agencies and organisations. Mariana Katzarova founded RAW in WAR in 2006, after working as a journalist and human rights advocate in the war zones of Bosnia, Kosovo and Chechnya, including 10 years as the Russia Researcher for Amnesty International.Â

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Â The winner of RAW in WARâ€™s third annual Anna Politkovskaya Award is The One Million Signatures Campaign for Equality (Iran). The grass roots campaign, launched in 2006, aims to collect one million signatures of Iranian nationals to a petition demanding an end to legal discrimination against women in Iran. Legislation in Iran, for example, values evidence given by a woman in court only worth half that given by a man. Girls under the age of 13 can be forced to marry once her father permits it. Women do not have equal rights with men when it comes to marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance.

Although campaigning peacefully and legally, activists are often subject to arbitrary arrests and imprisonment. The recent political protests have increased government pressure and persecution of those actively supporting the campaign. Charges against members range from acting against the national security of the state and propaganda against the state to membership in the One Million Signatures Campaign itself. Many activists are serving suspended sentences and face regular harassment and persecution by the government. For example, on 14 June 2009 Shiva Nazarahari, a blogger and active member of the campaign was arrested in her Tehran home following the post-election protests of June 2009. Held without access to a lawyer, she was held in Tehranâ€™s notorious Evin Prison, known for holding political prisoners and torture practises. On 23 September she was released on bail for $200,000. One of her lawyers, womenâ€™s human rights

defender Shadi Sadr, was pulled into a car and beaten by plain clothes security officers on 17 July, and also taken to Evin Prison, only to be released on 28 July.

Leila Alikarami, a lawyer and human rights activist, collected the Anna Politkovskaya Award on behalf of the Campaign. Alongside the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Shirin Ebadi, Ms.Alikarami has defended many of the women members of the Campaign including Aliyeh Eghdam Doust, who was the first womenâ€™s rights activist in Iran to be imprisoned for the full term of her 3-year sentence.

A group of more than 100 influential cultural and political leaders have joined the Committee of Supporters for the RAW in WAR Anna Politkovskaya Award. Among them are: President Vaclav Havel, Archbishop Desmond Tutu,Â Andre Glucksmann, Mairead Maguire, Betty Williams, Shirin Ebadi, Jody Williams, Wangari Maathai, Elena Bonner, Terry Waite, Vladimir Bukovsky, Sergey Kovalyov, Lyudmila Alekseeva, Lord Frank Judd, Lord Nicolas Rea, Lord Anthony Giddens, Elizabeth Rehn, Sister Helen Prejean, Jane Birkin, Oleg Panfilov, Adam Michnik, Marek Edelman, Baroness Helena Kennedy, Baroness Shirley Williams, Baroness Molly Meacher, Mariane Pearl, Vanessa Redgrave, Gloria Steinem, Ariel Dorfman, Susan Sarandon, Monica Ali, Azar Nafisi, Yakin Erturk, Asma Jahangir, Naomi Klein, Michael Cunningham, Eve Ensler, Noam Chomsky, Gillian Slovo, Eva Hoffman, Anne Nivat, Alexei Simonov, Peter Gabriel and many others.