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Media Contact:
Alyson O'Mahoney
(914) 241-0086 ext. 13
aomahoney@robinleedyassociates.com

Foundation Contact:
Berneta Akin
340-775-8035
media@gruberprizes.org

Online Newsroom: www.gruberprizes.org/Press.php

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**ACTIVIST AND ADVOCACY GROUP TO SHARE
2009 GRUBER WOMEN'S RIGHTS PRIZE FOR
ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY AND PEACE IN AFRICA**

**On 10th Anniversary of Prize Program, Recipients Recognized for Setting in Motion Systemic Changes
that Build Peace and Expand Human Rights for African Women**

June 24, 2009, New York, NY – The Peter and Patricia Gruber Foundation today announced that it will award the 2009 Women's Rights Prize to an individual and an organization that have brought about significant advances in the quest for peace and gender equality in Africa.



**Leymah Roberta
Gbowee**

Leymah Roberta Gbowee – executive director of Women in Peace and Security Network – Africa, a peacebuilding organization that acts to build relationships in West Africa to support women's efforts to prevent, avert, and end conflicts. Ms. Gbowee was instrumental in bringing about an end to civil war in Liberia and getting women's groups represented in negotiations and demilitarization efforts. At great personal risk, she worked with colleagues to break the power grip of dictators and warlords, culminating in the first democratic election of a female head of state anywhere in Africa.



**Women's Legal
Centre (WLC)**

Women's Legal Centre (WLC) – a nonprofit law center based in South Africa that seeks to achieve equality for women – and black women in particular – through litigation, the provision of free legal advice, the support of advocacy campaigns by gender-based and other organizations, and the delivery of training to explain the impact of court decisions on women's rights. WLC has expanded the rights of women through successful court challenges of discriminatory laws and has helped to place stricter obligations on employers' duty to eliminate sexual harassment from the workplace.

The Women's Rights Prize will be awarded in a ceremony this fall celebrating the achievements of the recipients, who will share the \$500,000 prize. Additionally, a special event celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Gruber Prize Program will be held on July 1, 2009, at Rockefeller University in New York City.

"Both Leymah Gbowee and the Women's Legal Centre have challenged deeply entrenched power structures and cultural biases and, through their fearless commitment to change, achieved remarkable results," said Judge Akua Kuenyehia, International Criminal Court. "Ms. Gbowee has succeeded in

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mobilizing women in her country from different religious and cultural backgrounds into a highly effective force for peace in the region. The Women's Legal Centre has won for women in South Africa basic rights in many areas, including inheritance and property ownership, as well as labor practices. Both recipients play a critically important role in redefining, in a very positive way, the status of African women in the 21st century."

Based in Accra, Ghana, **Leymah Roberta Gbowee** has been executive director of Women in Peace and Security Network – Africa (WIPSEN – Africa) since 2006. The organization works with women in Liberia, the Ivory Coast, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone to create positive change through peace activism, literacy, and electoral politics. Since 2004 she has served as the commissioner-designate of the Liberia Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Gbowee is a founding member and former coordinator of the Women in Peacebuilding Program/West African Network for Peacebuilding (WIPNET/WANEP). During her tenure with that organization, she organized collaborative peacebuilding initiatives for women peace builders from nine of Liberia's 15 counties. She helped bring an end to a seemingly intractable civil war by mobilizing Christian and Muslim women in a collaborative resistance movement that was able, through sit-ins and other acts of resistance, to get President Charles Taylor to meet with rebel groups at the peace table in Ghana and eventually agree to peace terms. In the period following the war, that movement played an important role in demilitarization efforts and in providing valuable support to Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf in her successful campaign to become president of Liberia and the first elected female head of state in Africa. The story of Gbowee and her peacebuilding network is told in an award-winning documentary, *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*. Gbowee has received the Blue Ribbon for Peace from Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government and a "Leaders for the 21st Century" Award from Women's eNews. She holds an M.A. in Conflict Transformation from Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Virginia.

(A complete biography is available at <http://www.gruberprizes.org>.)

Women's Legal Centre (WLC), located in Cape Town, South Africa, is focusing on five strategic areas in the 2008-10 timeframe: violence against women, fair access to resources in relationships, access to land/housing, access to fair labor practices, and access to health (particularly reproductive health). Underlying the plight of many African women is the existence of a dual legal system that includes laws that have historically governed matters such as marriage and the ownership of property, as well as civil law introduced by colonial powers. WLC seeks to incorporate a rights-based system into African culture. Since its founding in 1998, it has successfully challenged primogeniture rules, thus enabling a female to inherit from her father; discriminatory provisions of law relating to intestate succession, enabling a woman to inherit from her spouse in both monogamous and polygynous Islamic marriages; provisions preventing a woman from claiming damages when injured by the actions of her spouse in a motor vehicle accident; discriminatory remnants in the law that precluded a woman in a polygynous marriage from claiming loss of support when her husband died; and provisions in the law preventing a survivor of child abuse from claiming damages. WLC also helped to place stricter obligations on employers to keep discrimination in the form of sexual harassment out of the workplace. The organization has made significant progress in developing the state's duty of care in enforcing a woman's right to be free from violence and has participated in successfully defending legal challenges to the right to reproductive healthcare.

(A complete biography is available at <http://www.gruberprizes.org>.)

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The official citation reads:

The 2009 Gruber Women's Rights Prize is proudly presented to Leymah Roberta Gbowee, and the Women's Legal Centre for two different but complementary kinds of activism:

Leymah Roberta Gbowee of Liberia, for helping to build peace in her homeland by mobilizing women in a resistance movement that was instrumental in finally bringing an end to the Liberian civil war, and for continuing to promote women-power in peace building; and

the Women's Legal Centre of South Africa, for successfully challenging legal and cultural obstacles to women's rights through the courts especially in the areas of inheritance and gender-based violence, and empowering women with free legal advice on the impact of court judgments in their favor.

Additional Information

The Women's Rights Prize of The Peter and Patricia Gruber Foundation is presented to an individual or group that has made significant contributions, often at great personal or professional risk, to furthering the rights of women and girls in any area and to advancing public awareness of the need for gender equality to achieve a just world.

In addition to the cash award, Ms. Gbowee and the Women's Legal Centre will each receive a gold medal.

Members of the committee that selected the 2009 Women's Rights Prize recipients:

- **Sakiko Fukuda-Parr**, The New School
- **Pinar Ilkkaracan**, Women for Women's Human Rights – NEW WAYS
- **Akua Kuenyehia**, International Criminal Court
- **Cecilia Medina Quiroga**, University of Chile
- **Thandabantu Nhlapo**, University of Cape Town
- **Geeta Rao Gupta**, International Center for Research on Women
- **Sakena Yacoobi**, Afghan Institute of Learning

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Laureates of the Gruber Foundation Women's Rights Prize:

2008

Ms. Yanar Mohammed – a cofounder of Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq, has succeeded in protecting numerous Iraqi women threatened by domestic abuse and "honor killings"

Ms. Sapana Pradhan Malla – a member of Nepal's Constituent Assembly, has helped extend gender equality in many areas through effective advocacy of legal reforms

Dr. Nadera Shaloub-Kevorkian – a leading scholar and activist, has worked to end domestic violence against Palestinian women, particularly in "honor killings"

2007

Ms. Pinar Ilkcaracan –recognized both individually and for her leadership in two organizations that she co-founded; helped reform Turkish laws to advance gender equality and advocated for sexual and reproductive rights

Women for Women's Human Rights –played a critical role in advancing women's civil and reproductive rights and raising awareness about gender-based violence

The Coalition for Sexual and Bodily Rights in Muslim Societies –helped shatter myths about customs and religious practices and united women's rights advocates from 14 countries in an effort to protect women and girls

2006

Unión Nacional de Mujeres Guatemaltecas (UNMG) –a leader in working toward peace-building and equitable participation in Guatemala

Sweatshop Watch –strong advocate for the economic and political rights of migrant workers in the US

Judge Cecilia Medina Quiroga –advanced the rights of women through international law

2005

Shan Women's Action Network –dedicated to ending the oppression of minority women along the Thai-Burma border

The Women's League of Burma –a multi-ethnic umbrella organization committed to empowering women and enabling their participation in the democracy movement

2004

Professor Sakena Yacoobi –founded a grassroots program within the International Rescue Committee that quadrupled the number of Afghan girls enrolled in school

Afghan Institute of Learning (AIL) –provides health and human rights education to 350,000 women and girls in Afghanistan and in Pakistan's refugee camps

2003

Judge Navanethem Pillay –the first black woman to serve on the bench of the High Court of South Africa; strong advocate for human rights and women's issues

Pro-Femmes Twese Hamwe –an umbrella organization comprising over 40 women's groups across Rwanda; dedicated to achieving peace and eradicating discrimination





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The tenth anniversary of the Gruber International Prize Program will be celebrated on July 1, 2009, in a special event at Rockefeller University in New York City. The event will include a symposium entitled "DNA, the Brain, and Society," featuring distinguished scientists David Botstein, Linda Buck, Fred Gage, and Solomon Snyder. To attend the event or to obtain additional information, visit <http://www.gruberprizes.org/GruberPrizes/TenthAnniversary.php>

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The Peter and Patricia Gruber International Prize Program honors contemporary individuals in the fields of Cosmology, Genetics, Neuroscience, Justice and Women's Rights, whose groundbreaking work provides new models that inspire and enable fundamental shifts in knowledge and culture. The Selection Advisory Boards choose individuals whose contributions in their respective fields advance our knowledge, potentially have a profound impact on our lives, and, in the case of the Justice and Women's Rights Prizes, demonstrate courage and commitment in the face of significant obstacles.

The nomination form for the 2010 awards and additional information about nomination requirements and selection criteria may be found on the Foundation web site at www.gruberprizes.org/Nominations/Nominations.php

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The Peter and Patricia Gruber Foundation honors and encourages educational excellence, social justice and scientific achievements that better the human condition. For more information about Foundation guidelines and priorities, please visit www.gruberprizes.org.

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For more information on the 2009 Gruber Prizes, email media@gruberprizes.org or contact Bernetia Akin of the Gruber Foundation at (340) 775-8035. Media materials and additional background information on the Gruber Prizes can be found at **our online newsroom:** www.gruberprizes.org/Press.php.

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