



GRUBER FOUNDATION

Media Contact:

Cassandra Oryl
For Lunchbox Communications
+1 (202) 309-2263
pr@lunchboxcity.com

Foundation Contact:

Bernetia Akin
The Peter and Patricia Gruber Foundation
+1 340-775-4430
media@gruberprizes.org

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

EMBARGOED - 9:00AM US EDT, JUNE 23, 2011

2011 GRUBER WOMEN'S RIGHTS PRIZE WILL GO TO AVEGA AGAHOZO FOR SERVICE TO GENOCIDE SURVIVORS

Organization Provides Education, Training, Counseling, Health and Legal Services
to Improve Quality of Life in Rwanda

June 23, 2011, New York, NY – Left without the legal protection of husbands after the ugly bloodletting of 1994, fifty women stood together in Rwanda to form AVEGA Agahozo, the Association of Widows of the Genocide, and 17 years later they are still helping one another and thousands of other survivors to get on with the business of living.



AVEGA Agahozo

For their work, the group will receive the 2011 Women's Rights Prize of The Peter and Patricia Gruber Foundation, a \$500,000 unrestricted cash award, to be presented in a ceremony later this year.

This is the Foundation's ninth and final Women's Rights Prize. In establishing the award in 2003, Peter Gruber said, "Our hope is to redress restrictive laws and customs that deprive women not only of their human rights, but also of their ability to enrich the human condition." This mission will continue at Yale University in 2012 under a newly created Gruber Program for Global Justice and Women's Rights, supporting seminars, lectures and fellowships.

"We are truly gratified that AVEGA will receive the last Women's Rights Prize for it embodies the ideals of the award," said Patricia Gruber. "These women not only help one another, they have reached out to orphans of the genocide, to parents who lost children, to the elderly and disabled, and in short have improved life for all of Rwanda – and set an example for the rest of the world.

"There is also an unintended symmetry in the selection of AVEGA," she added. It is one of many women's groups in Rwanda associated with an umbrella organization that was a joint recipient of the inaugural Women's Rights Prize.

In a historically patriarchal society, AVEGA has helped to achieve legal reforms that, for the first time, gave Rwandan women inheritance rights, established rape as an act of genocide and defined other crimes of sexual violence as serious crimes.

The group seeks to promote the general welfare of widows through legal advocacy, social and economic development projects, and education, training and other support that contributes to income generation and self-sufficiency. It also operates three health centers and provides medical services to thousands.

Headquartered in Kigali, Rwanda, AVEGA Agahozo provides services across the country and includes among its members more than 20,000 widows and more than 71,000 dependents and orphans. Of the 300,000 to 400,000 survivors of the Rwandan genocide, widows outnumber widowers ten to one. It is the

-more-





2011 Gruber Women's Rights

widows and orphans who witnessed the atrocities and, in many cases, suffered extreme violence themselves. Sexual violence was often used to humiliate and degrade women during the 100 days of the violent scourge, with estimates of the number of women raped ranging between 250,000 and 500,000. Traumatized and shamed, many of these women are seeking help now only because they are ill. For these women, AVEGA is a refuge, providing medical services, psychological counseling, education and training, housing and legal services. AVEGA offers medical help to those suffering from AIDS and has coordinated voluntary testing for HIV for more than 10,000 of its members. It also delivers antiretroviral treatment and wraparound care and treatment, including nutrition support, to more than 1,500 HIV+ women. Last year it introduced a new program to provide educational support to children born to survivors of rape, a particularly marginalized group in Rwanda.

AVEGA also assists widows who wish to testify against those accused of genocide. Members are accompanied to court and receive assistance by AVEGA in the resolution of their cases. In national, international and community-based Gacaca courts, an estimated 800,000 perpetrators have been convicted so far. Originally, when many women were unwilling to come forward, AVEGA sent hundreds of trainers into the villages to teach them how to testify. In Kigali, the organization has helped prepare witnesses for testimony in over 150 landmark legal cases. AVEGA is now teaching widows and orphans about land law as well. It has built houses for many widows and orphans, and has provided about 13,000 of its members with shelter. Women had no inheritance rights before the genocide. AVEGA pushed for reform, lobbying lawmakers, judges and journalists until a law was passed in November 1999 that allowed widows the right to inherit a husband's property. More recently, AVEGA's advocacy played a pivotal role in securing the introduction of Rwanda's first gender-based violence law, enacted in 2009. AVEGA has also helped women become involved in income-generating activities, such as business projects, farming, basket-weaving and other handicrafts. Garments produced on modern tailoring machines are now marketed worldwide.

The motto of AVEGA, translated from the French, is "Let not the screams of our martyrs lead to our silence or make us forget." But while the organization is ever mindful of the past, its focus now is on the future and making life better for tomorrow.

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

* * *

Additional Information

The Women's Rights Prize of The Peter and Patricia Gruber Foundation honors individuals who have made significant contributions to human rights that advance the rights of women and girls around the world.

In addition to the cash award, AVEGA Agahozo will receive a gold medal and a citation that reads:

The Peter and Patricia Gruber Foundation proudly presents the 2011 Women's Rights Prize to AVEGA Agahozo, an association of genocide widows in Rwanda which has, through strategies of advocacy, legal aid, health care, housing, trauma counseling and income generation, restored the dignity of thousands of women survivors.

AVEGA, founded by 50 genocide survivors in 1995, has fought successfully for legal reforms raising the penalties for rape and sexual violence and enabling widows to inherit their husbands' property. They have counseled survivors to testify against genocide perpetrators in the traditional courts, achieving perhaps their greatest victory when the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda made the historic ruling that rape was an act of genocide.





2011 Gruber Women's Rights Prize...3

Members of the committee that selected the 2011 Women's Rights Prize recipients:

Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, The New School; **Françoise Girard**, Open Society Foundations; **Pinar Ilkcaracan**, 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; **Sakena Yacoobi**, Afghan Institute of Learning.

Laureates of the Gruber Women's Rights Prize:

- **2010: CLADEM**, which has used treaties and legislation to hold governments to their human rights commitments to women in Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Center for Reproductive Rights, which has used US and international human rights law to expand access to reproductive healthcare
- **2009: Leymah Gbowee**, who helped form a coalition of Christian and Muslim women to end the Liberian Civil War; and the **Women's Legal Centre**, for court and legislative advocacy in South Africa and for educating women about their legal rights
- **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

-more-





GRUBER
FOUNDATION

2011 Gruber Women's Rights Prize...4

The 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 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.

* * *

In the spring of 2011, Yale University and The Peter and Patricia Gruber Foundation signed an agreement that established the Gruber Foundation at Yale, which will carry on its philanthropic mission. For complete details, see the press release at <http://www.gruberprizes.org/Headline2.php>

* * *

For more information on the 2011 Gruber Prizes, email media@gruberprizes.org or contact Bernetia Akin of the Gruber Foundation at +1 340-775-4430. Media materials and additional background information on the Gruber Prizes can be found at our online newsroom: www.gruberprizes.org/Press.php. Find The Gruber Foundation on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/GruberPrizes>

