



Highlights of the 2021 International Women of Courage Virtual Celebration

PRESENTED BY AMERICAN WOMEN FOR INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING
APRIL 29TH, 2021



American Women for International Understanding proudly premiered the 2021 International Women of Courage Virtual Celebration on April 29, 2021, in collaboration with the United States Department of State.

Fourteen extraordinary women from around the globe were honored by the Secretary of State for their courageous efforts in advocating for peace, justice, human rights and women's equality, often at great personal risk. The Secretary of State also presented a posthumous honorary group International Women of Courage Award to seven Afghan women who were assassinated in 2020 while serving their communities.

Click here to watch the 2021 International Women of Courage Virtual Celebration, produced by Emmy Award-winning company Herzog & Co.

The International Women of Courage Award and AWIU's Celebration

2021 marked the 15th anniversary of the Secretary of State's International Women of Courage (IWOC) Award which honors women around the globe who have demonstrated exceptional courage and leadership in advocating for human rights, women's equality, and social progress.

In a typical year, the honorees travel to Washington, D.C. to receive their awards from the First Lady and the Secretary of State in a special ceremony held on or near International Women's

Day (March 8th). The honorees then go across the United States to participate in specially designed International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) experiences. Their IVLP visits culminate with AWIU's International Women of Courage Celebration. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2021 State Department award ceremony, the IVLP experiences and the AWIU event were all hosted virtually. AWIU continued its tradition of providing grants to every honoree to continue their vital work in their respective home countries.

2021 International Women of Courage Virtual Celebration



Rachel Scott

The 2021 IWOC Virtual Celebration kicked off with a warm welcome from ABC Congressional Correspondent Rachel Scott, the virtual host of the program. Willow Bay, Dean of the USC Annenberg School and Chair of the Honorary Committee, commended the awardees for demonstrating the power of using their voice. The program included highlights from the State Department's 2021 ceremony, with remarks from the First Lady and the Secretary of State.



Willow Bay

The heart of AWIU's IWOC Celebration is the honorees' stories. Award-winning journalist Lisa Ling interviewed five of the International Women of Courage and their stories are below. Said Lisa Ling of the honorees, "There is no doubt that these are extraordinary women, but they are also ordinary women, seeking health and safety for themselves and their families, and peace and justice for their communities and countries."



Lisa Ling



Sister Alicia Vacas Moro

Awardee Sister Alicia Vacas Moro is a Spanish nun who lives in the West Bank of Jerusalem. She works with the Bedouin community providing training programs for women, schooling for children, and healthcare for the community. Sr. Alicia explained that the Bedouins' way of life is changing. "They are aware their children will not be Bedouin anymore, that they need to prepare another life for them, and education is the key."

Venezuelan Awardee Ana Rosario Contreras is president of the Caracas Nurses' Association. She fights for the rights of women, labor unions, and medical professionals, pushing for democratic change in defiance of the repressive regime. Despite the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela, Ana Rosario affirmed, "Venezuelan women are on the front lines of this fight, and we know that we will be like the Phoenix and rise from the ashes."



Ana Rosario Contreras



Ranitha Gnanarajah

A human rights lawyer from Sri Lanka, Awardee Ranitha Gnanarajah helps victims of enforced disappearances, and prisoners detained without charge under Sri Lanka’s Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). She said detainees can be held with no access to lawyers or family, and they can be tortured into making confessions. “I want the world to know that the PTA affects every one of us in Sri Lanka. It is used as a tool to silence any voice of dissent by the opposition.”



Judge Erika Aifan

Guatemalan Awardee Judge Erika Aifan is a High-Risk Criminal Court judge who presides over high-profile corruption and war atrocity cases, resulting in threats of violence against her. She explained what keeps her going in the face of danger, “First and foremost is the belief in justice.” She continued, “Despite all the risks, the threats and challenges, I consider this position as judge to be that of privilege. I continue to do this work because of the victims.”



Shohreh Bayat

Awardee Shohreh Bayat is a Category A international chess arbiter from Iran, who was photographed at the 2020 Women’s Chess World Championship without her hijab. Refusing to apologize to the Iranian government, Shohreh sought refuge in the UK. She said she could not apologize because, “I know there are many Iranian women who are in prison because of protesting against the hijab. If I apologized, how could I look in the eyes of the Iranian people?”

The AWIU Internationalism Award

AWIU was honored to present the 2021 Internationalism Award to Deloitte. Deloitte was recognized for being one of the first companies to understand the necessity for empowering and advancing women in business, and for its transformational work in addressing issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace. Accepting the award on behalf of Deloitte was Dr. Terri Cooper, Vice Chair of External Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.



Dr. Terri Cooper

2021 IWOC Virtual Celebration Panel Discussion



Rachel Scott

The IWOC Virtual Celebration continued with a live panel discussion moderated by Rachel Scott with awardees Julienne Lusenge from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Canan Güllü from Turkey. Julienne is the DRC’s leading activist fighting against gender-based violence. Canan is a champion for gender-equity in Turkey and she also educates politicians and people about the effects of gender-based violence.

[Click here to watch the discussion.](#)





Julienne Lusenge

Julienne declared that one of her greatest challenges is the need for resources. It is expensive for victims of gender-based violence

to access legal counsel. A woman may have a strong case, but if she doesn't have sufficient resources, she can't bring the case to court. "If we want things to change," Julienne said, "We must find the courage to document cases, to make the voices of the women heard, and to go to court. If we do not document the cases, the perpetrators will continue to do the crimes."



Canan Güllü

Canan stated that despite her 30-year fight against gender-based violence, gender inequality persists. But she is not afraid of threats, and she promises in every interview that she will never give up. At the conclusion of AWIU's conversation, Canan thanked Rachel Scott for wearing red. Canan explained she always wears red when she is doing this work because there are women in Turkey who were raped for wearing red lipstick. Canan said to Rachel, "I see the red on you, and I want to thank you. This is our fight."

2021 Sponsors

AWIU acknowledges and deeply appreciates Deloitte's 11th consecutive year as the Global Leadership Sponsor of the International Women of Courage Celebration. A leader on the global stage, Deloitte is committed to fostering a culture of inclusion, embracing the idea that a diversity of perspectives helps us look deeper to find answers.



The 2019 International Women of Courage Honorees with Deloitte Volunteers at the 2019 IWOC Celebration

AWIU thanks all its generous sponsors of the 2021 International Women of Courage Virtual Celebration



American Women for International Understanding will present the 15th Annual International Women of Courage Celebration in Spring 2022. Please visit awiu.org for further information on AWIU, the International Women of Courage Celebration, and the International Women of Courage Awardees.

