

IPS' 31st Annual Letelier-Moffitt Human Rights Awards

award presentation

Appeal for Redress

Eve Ensler

I feel honored to be here tonight, particularly on the heels of listening to Colombian Senator Petro who moves me to my core--for risking his life and standing in the face of danger and for standing up for truth in the midst of genocide. I want to say also to be at the Institute of Policy Studies in a crowd of people who have fought with their lives for peace, justice and equality gives me great hope and confidence and stamina.

You know, I was thinking about this award that I am about to give and this last year on V-Day we focused on women in conflict zones. So I had an opportunity to travel to some places and meet with women from Lebanon, from Haiti, from Afghanistan, from Iraq, and recently I spent a great deal of time in the Democratic Republic of Congo. I have to say that there I hit a threshold of understanding of what war can do--particularly to the bodies of women who are the holders of life and the future. And I have to say that being in Washington, here we are on the heels of the potential of another war that this country or this administration or this empire--I don't know what it is at this point--is thinking of launching towards Iran. I have to say, here and now, that if we are brave and bold as American citizens then we will not let this happen. We must do everything in our power to make sure that it does not happen.

Even before this horrific war and occupation of Iraq began, families of young women and men who were facing possible deployment to Iraq began to mobilize to try to stop it. Just a few months after the invasion of Iraq, IPS presented its 2003 Letelier-Moffitt human rights award to Military Families Speak Out. An organization of several thousand family members of U.S. soldiers in recognition of their courage and commitment in opposing the rising war. Over the next several years, MFSO and other rising organizations Gold Star Families for Peace, Veterans for Peace and soon Iraq Veterans Against the War emerged at the very center of our peace and justice movement, taking their place at the very core of anti-counter recruitment and veterans rights mobilizations. Today, while military families and veterans remain central to our movement, a whole new component of military resistance has emerged: activity duty GIs who have taken up publicly the demand to end the occupation and bring all the troops home.

GI resistance has a long and defiant history in the U.S., perhaps most powerfully during the Vietnam War. And now we're seeing the latest incarnation of that proud legacy with the creation of the Appeal for Redress. These exceptional--and I got to meet them this afternoon, exceptional is accurate--exceptional active duty service members, almost all of them young, many of them people of color, almost all of them in the lower ranks of the military hierarchy, have taken an extraordinary risk. They have taken the words of our constitution as truth and it's lucky we still have one. So we want to bless them that for

that, knowing that joining the military entails giving up almost all constitutional rights even beyond those we watch being shredded day by day by an Administration unaccountable and out of control. They have taken the risk of signing a short simple statement. They have joined their fellow GIs to say the following:

“As a patriotic American proud to serve the nation in uniform, I respectfully urge my political leaders in Congress to support the prompt withdrawal- prompt withdrawal- of all American military forces and bases from Iraq. Staying in Iraq will not work and is not worth the price. It is time for U.S. troops to come home.”

These brave soldiers do not believe their superior officers claims that the Geneva conventions are quaint, that torture is legitimate, their Iraqi deaths are somehow worth less than Americans. These are service people of whom we can all be proud, whose understanding of duty means the duty to speak truth to power. WE honor them tonight. Please welcome Liam Madden, co-founder of Appeal for Redress, who will accept the Letelier-Moffitt human rights award for his brave organization.

Liam Madden

Thank you so much. On behalf of the more than 2,000 service members who have signed the Appeal for Redress, I have to say that I am deeply humbled and honored to have the Appeal for Redress recognized tonight. And before I introduce my partners I'd like to take the opportunity to let you know what it means to be mentioned in the same breath as Orlando Letelier and Ronni Karpen Moffitt. To me it means obligation--an obligation of those that live in the belly of the beast. The obligation of those who have the power of proximity, an obligation to our ideals--everyone in this room--to our ideals but not only to our ideals but to the senator Gustavo Petros', to the Orlando Leteliers, to the Ronni Karpen Moffitts, to the people of Cuba and Bolivia and Zambia- the people all over the world that rely on us.

Before I introduce my good friend Jonathan I'd like to thank Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky who mentioned the word legitimacy earlier. While she was extending all her agglitation to the senator from Colombia, I'd like to thank you Congresswoman for defending the remaining shreds of legitimacy in our government by selecting to impeach a war criminal, our Vice President Dick Cheney.

I am going to hand the mike off to someone who gives me hope for my generation, someone who keeps the spirit of revolution alive for when my generation is the generation that is the one that makes decisions in this world. And I mean a revolution of conscience and a revolution of justice. I like to say that you can tell Jonathan's been somewhere because he leaves a puddle of justice on the ground. So please welcome, warmly welcome, no make it a hot welcome, celebrate a soldier, a sailor, a service member, someone who serves justice, Jonathan Hutto.

Jonathan Hutto

I was off the coast of Iraq in January of 2006 on board the USS Theodore Roosevelt when I received this book in the mail from a professor, a friend of mine from Howard University. It was a book that I had never read, it was a history that was unknown to me and I thought that I knew just about all there was about at least Vietnam history coming out of Atlanta, Georgia falling under the influence of Doctor King, Muhammad Ali, Julian Bond, and John Louis. I mean, how could you not? But I did not know there was a movement of active duty military within the ranks themselves during Vietnam. And one of the things that inspired me and inspired all of us was an open petition that they took out. The irony that this book was written by a doctoral student sitting before us today, Dr. David Cortright. Please stand up and come up here with us.

The irony that this book was written by a doctoral student 32 years ago, a student of Mark Raskin at IPS. So 32 years later, this book being an inspiration to us and the open appeal they took out in the *New York Times* of 1,365 of those active duty GIs during Vietnam. So what I said to myself, as I contacted my friend Lindsay who I knew was an active duty ranks, and as I met Liam in Norfolk in June, that year when we brought Dr. Cortright down, if they could do that during that time then what prevents us from trying to do something to give voice, to give purpose and to give meaning to our service.

Just because we took an oath to defend the constitution against all enemies foreign and domestic does not mean that we have sacrificed our rights under that Constitution. And it is because of that and it's based on a military whistleblower protection act that gives all of us the right to appeal to members of congress on our own time, off duty, off base and without any reprisals for having done so. The result: over 2,000 active duty members of the military have signed from 10 countries all around the world, 85% enlisted, at least 60% have done one tour of duty in Iraq. But most importantly, setting a stage for us to build a democracy movement within the military. We have seen every element of our society press this government through the ballot box, through the marches, through the legislation, through letters. But we've got to get the voices of our constituency. And we believe that when those voices move, we'll be able to not only bring the troops home, take care of them when they get here, but also bring justice and bring some respect back to this country because so many violations are committed in our names.

Two final points that I will make. One, and this is piggybacking off of Eve, we talk about the service members in Iraq constantly--and we should, those are our brothers and sisters--but also our brothers and sisters are not just within the ranks of the military but throughout the entire world. And so we not only speak about those 3,000 plus who have sacrificed their lives and did so honorably because the government asked them to do so but we also speak for the hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians whose communities have been decimated, whose hospitals have been destroyed, whose schools have been destroyed, and whose lives have been turned upside down by an illegal, unjust and immoral war.

And finally, with one minute remaining, I end. I read these words as a young freshman at Howard and they've been implanted in my head since the moment I read them. A gentleman by the name of George Jackson--I had never heard of George Jackson. People honored him as the father of the modern day prison movement. Some of you before my time remember the rebellion at Attica that was inspired by his advocacy for prisoners' rights. But when I read those words, any time I speak, anytime I have anything to say, I end by saying: "Settle your quarrels. Come together, understand the true reality of our situation, understand that Fascism is here, that millions have died that could have been saved and that millions more will die or live half, butchered, poor lives if we fail to act. Do what must be done; embrace your love and humanity in a worldwide revolution. Join us. Join us and give up your life for the people."

Thank you.