



CIVIL COURAGE PRIZE

Introduction by the Hon. Nicholas Platt

Min Ko Naing and Anna Politkovskaya

2005

The Civil Courage prizes that the Northcote Parkinson Fund awards, go to the lonely brave, who risk their lives over long stretches of years, to speak out against evil, completely exposed, totally unprotected, motivated by conscience and values alone, their lives threatened by their own governments, for the most part.

The risks taken by ambassadors and soldiers are not in the same category as the courage of Min Ko Naing, the Burmese democratic leader, who spent fifteen years in prison, tortured and confined in solitary. Second in importance in that country only to Nobel Prize Winner Aung San Suu Kyi, Min Ko Naing has been, and we hope will remain, central to the Burmese democracy movement.

Similarly, the courage of Anna Politkovskaya, one of Russia's leading journalists, stands out in sharp relief. She has exposed the atrocities of the war in Chechnya, in books and articles in *Novaya Gazeta*, persisting despite the wrath of the Kremlin, and in the face of death threats, intimidation and poisoning.

Munir Said Thalib, one of Indonesia's best known human rights campaigners, died for his beliefs, by arsenic poison at the age of 38, after becoming a searing critic of the Indonesian military, and particularly its abuses in Aceh and East Timor. Best known as a founder and director of the highly effective Commission for "Disappeared" Persons and Victims of Violence in Jakarta, Munir represented many human rights victims and activists in high profile cases, and regularly spoke out for justice in the face of intimidation. Human Rights Watch officials describe him as "in a class by himself."

Rajan Hoole and Kopalasingham Sritharan, are worthy of distinguished mention. Under a death sentence from the Tamil Tigers for reporting objectively, they have been in hiding for fifteen years, but continue to send in objective reports on the deadly ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.

These are the kinds of persons deserving of recognition for Civil Courage, for steadfast resistance to evil at great personal risk. I congratulate the Northcote Parkinson Fund for identifying them and singling them out for Awards this year. I participate gladly, though humbly, in the process of honoring them.

The retail side of foreign policy is often incompatible with the wholesale side, which emphasizes smooth relations with governments, many of which are persecuting those who are civilly courageous. The

challenge for foreign policy practitioners is to weigh the contradictions and act, knowing that the results will often be inconsistent.

The fight against evil and the abuse of authority is ancient, endless and world wide. Protection of human rights and the search for civil courage have always been important impulses of American civil society as well as our government's foreign policy. All the resources we can muster, both public and private, need to be put to use in the struggle. Fortunately, the supply of civil courage seems to be inexhaustible, too, which gives such meaning to our meeting tonight.

Thank you.