



# CIVIL COURAGE PRIZE

## Introduction by the Hon. Hodding Carter III

Rafael Marques de Morais

2006

It is a great privilege to be with you to celebrate Rafael Marques de Morais upon this occasion, one made even more fraught with meaning by the fate of last year's honorees. You have already heard from Musa Klebnikov of Anna Politkovskaya's brutal murder just weeks ago. Know, too, that her fellow honoree last year, Min Ko Naing, was arrested and detained by Burmese authorities late last month. His apparent crime: preparing to celebrate the anniversary of the founding of a democratic opposition party.

Against that stark background, it is well to remember the words of Sir Michael Howard as he prepared to present the first Civil Courage Prize six years ago. That great historian and strategic thinker said the following about those the prize was established to honor:

"... Troublemakers, yes. Maddening, most certainly. Disturbers of general opinion and public tranquility, absolutely."

Yet, he went on:

"... these are the people on whom the values of our civilization ultimately depend: lonely, unpopular and isolated; under test, and in constant danger, not for a brief, heroic moment, but for a lifetime; 'bearing witness' in the Biblical phrase, in season and out of season."

Sir Michael's words encapsulated truth within stirring rhetoric. His was a fine launch of this timely prize.

As we all know, however, rhetorical appreciation is as close as most Americans will ever come to meeting the terms of the Civil Courage Prize. For the most part, we can individually and collectively speak truth to power without fearing for our lives. We can disturb the even tenor of the nation's days without being hauled off to secret prisons on trumped up or non-existent charges. No one dumps our mutilated bodies into the sea from high-flying helicopters.

Troublemakers and loud dissenters may be isolated out of the mainstream; a few may even lose their jobs. One protestor here, two agitators there, may be beaten to the ground for daring to challenge the orthodoxy of the moment. These are not negligible things; they must not be tolerated, let alone applauded. But they are isolated rather than universal. They are not enough to justify or rationalize the silence of the untouched majority.

And God knows all is not silence. The gong show debaters and cable channel demagogues bray their jackass themes out into the ether ad nauseum. But Gresham's Law seems to prevail. Too many individual dissenters prefer to speak their truths behind closed doors or only to those with whom they already agree. Public silence on issues of great moment may not be the rule. Such silence may not prove assent, but it most certainly does not suggest dissent. It is simply ... silence.

Which reminds me of a few straightforward admonitions aimed at us—the comfortable Americans—by another Civil Courage Prize speaker, the magnificent South African jurist Richard J. Goldstone. He offered them in this room four years ago, less than a year before the Iraq invasion and ten months after the terrorist devastation of the twin towers. They resonate prophetically today.

First, pointedly noting that international law allows the use of military force only in self-defense, absent a Security Council resolution, Judge Goldstone urged that the US not initiate unilateral action against Iraq. Then, he went on:

"I have been extremely concerned at the instances of apparent disregard for the law and for the protection of civil liberties in the United States in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks ... and the wide acceptance of that approach by so many people in this country. One could cite the disregard of clear provisions of the Geneva Conventions ... in Guantanamo Bay. One could refer to the hundreds of people who have been rounded up and kept in solitary and secret confinement..."

What does any of this have to do with the extraordinary bravery—the civil courage—of our honoree tonight, Rafael Marques de Morais?

Everything.

Rafael Marques de Morais knows what it is to be held without charge, incommunicado. He knows what government death threats smell and feel like. He knows that a government that holds itself above the law is lawless.

He also knows that a nation that tolerates such abuses is not an open society, not a free society, not a nation in which civil society can flourish. And so, in the face of unchecked government power, he has spoken out repeatedly.

He, like his predecessors at this podium, makes real the meaning of the word, hero, so regularly debased by its promiscuous application in this country.

Let me tie all this together with a small knot. There is nothing permanent about tyranny and there is nothing permanent about the rule of law. Wise people have said fatuous things about the inevitability of both, and been proved wrong shortly thereafter.

What is permanent, however, in the building and preserving of a decent civil society is the need for the individual voice of conscience,

- demanding to be heard,
- demanding that oppression be lifted,
- demanding that human rights be restored.

All this most assuredly in Angola or Burma or Russia where the reaction can be lethal.

But also assuredly here in the United States, where it is not yet truly dangerous, nor likely to be tomorrow.

But where it could be soon enough if we stand mute as an overweening state flaunts the rule of law, national and international, in the name of security.

Rafael Marques de Morais, you honor us with your presence, your courage and your perseverance. You are our exemplar, our reminder that bearing witness is the first requirement of an open society.

Let us hope you inspire men and women in every land to emulate your example, wherever they may reside.