

Allard Prize for International Integrity
2017 Prize Ceremony - September 28, 2017
Remarks of Peter A. Allard, Q.C.

Honoured and distinguished finalists and guests:

First off, a huge heartfelt thanks to all members of the Prize Committee, especially Nicole Barrett, and to Kari Streelasky, Maxe Fisher and Lisa Dam for their tireless work, Across Borders, our videographers, who face extremely tight schedules, sometimes under dangerous conditions, to bring us such wonderful inspiring stories, Tiago Rorke of Portugal for his beautifully-crafted unique sculptures, Sheraton Vancouver Wall Centre, and Donald Best, one of Canada's most methodical and well-documented "whistleblowers", for his much-needed assistance to the Allard Prize.

And all of our finalists and their representatives, Glenn Greenwald for his well-reasoned and articulated journalistic conversations, Jimmy Dore, Stef Zamorano and Jordan Chariton's associates for standing up for the 99% who bring "Truth to Power".

My generation, "The Baby Boomers", were indirect beneficiaries of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower's "New Deal" socialism, where the economic, social and legal needs of the mass population were addressed.

Almost everyone was involved in the Second World War effort, including more than sixteen million military men and women called to active duty in the United States, and more than one million in Canada. Very few citizens, if any, escaped the horror and tragedies of war in Canada, United States and the free world.

After the war, major infrastructure jobs were created with the launch of massive development projects, including the "Interstate Highways" project in the US and the "St. Lawrence Seaway" project in Canada. The National Interstate and Defense Highways Act in the US raised the minimum wage, extended social security, and created the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. While difficult in terms of Federal spending, this helped fuel millions of related jobs, extra buoyancy, and allowed for a balanced budget. Tax rates soared, but everyone benefited from a balanced system of socialism and modern capitalism.

However, basic infrastructure development, "the engine of prosperity" that helped to create our wealth, is now being forgotten and we have not learned from history or the realities of New Deal Socialism.

As well we have not learned from history when democratic principles are not vigorously and courageously defended and enforced, transparency, accountability and the Rule of Law are allowed to erode.

At the Allard Prize ceremonies of 2013 and 2015, I was astonished at the sacrifice of the individuals and organizations we recognized who have fought, endured and suffered against corruption at every level to preserve what is left of our concepts of judicial, economic and social justice. The stories were brought to life by the finalists speaking of their causes and their work,

and by the brief videos prepared to depict their courage and resilience to establish “right” over “wrong”.

In 2015, the co-winner John Githongo of Kenya, who talked about the hollowing out of our institutions and the insidious and systemic erosion of our freedoms through corruption, approached me and asked me why I had founded the Prize. I gave him just a few examples of corruption that goes on in Canada and other first world countries, with zero accountability and leadership by those at the top. John Githongo said “Oh, it sounds to me as though you have an African problem” and I said “No, unfortunately it’s a world problem”. It is, indeed, a human problem.

Please do not confuse economic activity with the concept of democracy. Having one percent of the population holding 99% of the wealth, while steadily and inexorably strangling the middle class, is a recipe for disaster.

The last 35 years of our existence have introduced us to the concepts of “short-term gain versus long-term growth and stability”, “other people’s money”, and “get what you can while you can”, regardless of the greater good. Ignore the 99% and inflict severe hardships on them, and deny them the ability to share “The American Dream”. The public is aware!

The old economics concept of “guns versus butter”, with a recent 16 percent rise in military spending in the US - 5.6 percent of GDP - means the day of reckoning will happen sooner rather than later. Where are all the fiscal conservatives who have to balance their personal and business budgets?

Just since the 2015 Prize ceremony, checks and balances put in place in the US 240 years ago have flown out the window at an ever-accelerated speed.

The corporate media has been “bought”, and so have judges, lawyers, police and other leaders in our increasingly segmented society. Those at the top must be held to the same accountability as the average citizen; otherwise democracy cannot resurrect itself and flourish. We are left only with internet YouTube videos to sift out the truth. Very few people are prepared to stand up and say “The Emperor has no clothes”, and the formerly trusted fourth estate has dissolved into manufactured propaganda in a very frighteningly fast time. This churns the stomach.

During this past two-year period, we have witnessed the right of “habeas corpus”, which was granted by King John in 1215 under the Magna Carta and is reflected in the US Constitution, removed in the US. Journalists have been jailed in the name of security under the Espionage Act.

Russia has recently jailed a dissident for three and a half years, for daring to call for a referendum.

In Canada, members of the legal profession and judicial system allowed a highly respected undercover investigator to go to prison for failing to appear in court; based upon completely fabricated evidence.

This intentional abuse and deceit upon the courts was used in an attempt to extort a settlement in a civil lawsuit and to gain information for use in extra jurisdictional purposes. Who acts for the average citizen when this unchecked, oppressive, oligarchic, and institutional abuse takes place?

That is all to say that serious corruption is alive in North America and Europe as it is around the world.

But we must not lose hope, heart or courage.

Springing up from all this economic, legal and judicial disharmony and abuse of power are our three extraordinary 2017 Allard Prize finalists:

Car Wash Task Force of Brazil, Khadija Ismayilova of Azerbaijan, and Azza Soliman of Egypt, selected from 260 nominations from 70 countries around the world. I know you will be inspired when you learn of their stories in the video we are about to present, and when you hear their voices. They give us hope.