

Mr. Peter A. Allard, QC

Remarks at the inaugural Allard Prize for International Integrity Award Ceremony

Faculty of Law at Allard Hall, The University of British Columbia

September 25, 2013

Esteemed honourees and distinguished guests,

This day is not about me, but rather the finalists in this inaugural year of the Allard Prize who have endured and prevailed in their fight for transparency, accountability, the Rule of Law, and basic human rights. These fights are real, despite being mostly invisible to those of us who live and work comfortably.

Today is about recognizing heroes in these fights, and telling their stories, in the hope that doing so will inspire change - not just in our systems, but in each of us personally.

Once the construction of the army hut classrooms was completed here at UBC, just after the end of the Second World War, the generation of UBC Law students who preceded me came forward with a new sense of hope and commitment to build a better and more just world. Tens of millions of the world's citizens had just died horrific deaths through the most cruel savagery, atrocities and traumas imaginable.

Political regimes preceding WW 2, both on the extreme left and right, clearly demonstrated that, despite their constitutions and manifestos to the contrary, the realities of their political administrations stripped citizens of their basic democratic rights of fairness and justice through denial of an equitable Rule of Law. Tyranny reigned.

After the War, with the assistance of a number of initiatives including the Marshall Plan and creation of The United Nations, democracy in North America and Europe began to encounter an era of peace and stability.

Every form of government is a constant "work in progress", demanding full transparency, accountability and value for those citizens who work and deliver revenue to the system. The goal is to ensure that those less fortunate are raised up to a minimum level, that checks and balances over power and abuse of power actually work, and that our democratic values and principles are rooted to the middle ground where a strong sense of right and wrong, social justice and the truth are in place and stabilized.

We often naïvely think that issues of accountability, corruption and the lack of the Rule of Law are Second and Third World issues. But the reality is that our Western democracies are subject to precisely the same concerns.

Over the past 30 years, the necessary checks and balances have been increasingly eroded

through deregulation and the influence of money over substance and democratic principles. Stability and the Rule of Law have, to a significant extent, given way to unfettered power in the hands of a few, and an over-taxed and increasingly vulnerable middle class. Personal self-interest and short-term greed are threatening legal systems around the world, and long-term protections are disappearing.

Much of this degradation has been accomplished with or sanctioned by the concurrence of our legal and judicial brethren. Furthermore, there has been a loss of judicial independence over time, and judges themselves, some of whom come to their positions through elaborate political networking systems, are themselves subject to the temptations of their own and their associates' interests.

In order to protect each and every democratic principle that we hold dear, it's imperative that we foster more independent, probative, balanced and impartial justice systems worldwide. We must protect and fight for the basic rights that some people have today and for which others yearn. For history has warned us that they are fragile. And they can disappear overnight.

What better place to highlight the need to strengthen the concept of the Rule of Law, ethics and international integrity within the legal profession and the broader community than at UBC Law?

And how better to support this activism than to focus attention on those guiding lights in the world who tirelessly and selflessly fight, often at great personal risk, on behalf of those who are denied equal access to a just and fair legal system?

The carefully considered Allard Prize criteria are all critical and essential criteria that must be weighed individually before choosing the Prize winner. Anti-corruption and human rights are not themselves the focus of this Prize. Rather, the Prize honours those precious and inspirational souls whose work and actions embody all of the Prize criteria - including leadership, courage, transparency, accountability and the Rule of Law.

The Prize creates its own integrity by properly weighing the criteria and must never give way to political expedience, networking influence or a concern about how UBC Law might look on an international stage in the choice of recipients or honourees. The Prize Committee, balanced 50/50 from academia and the private sector, itself engenders internal integrity.

Each of this year's finalists - Global Witness, Anna Hazare and Sima Samar - embody all of the Prize criteria. It was an extremely difficult task for the Prize Committee to select one Prize winner from amongst the three. All are extraordinary and all are deserving. And we hold all of them in the highest esteem.

I would like to thank all of those who have made this Prize possible.

Many people have dedicated their time, and in many cases their free time, to help develop the Prize and its many components in its inaugural year - from the creation of the prize criteria and the establishment of the nomination and selection process by the Prize Committee, to the submission by nominators of more than 115 nominations from 48 countries, to the review and consideration of the nominations by the Prize Committee, to the input from the Advisory Board on the nominee shortlist, to the young designers from New Zealand who created the awards

that will be presented this evening and which capture the meaning and significance of the Prize so beautifully and effectively, to the international art community who contributed photographs that reflect the Prize criteria, to Maxe Fisher, for her work and creativity with respect to the award design and photo competitions, to the public relations, website development and translation professionals who have assisted us in this endeavour, and to Across Borders Media, the videographers who have helped us to tell the compelling stories of our finalists, as you will soon see.

To my lawyer Geoff Lyster, and his firm Fasken Martineau, for their active and ongoing participation in the development of the Prize.

And, not least of all, to the Faculty of Law at Allard Hall - Lainie Shore, the Allard Prize Manager, Simmi Puri, the Faculty's Communications Manager, student assistants Michelle Reinhart and Sam Turcott, and especially Dean Mary Anne Bobinski and Assistant Dean, External Relations Kari Streelasky, for not only sharing my vision for the Prize and the Faculty, but by making a tremendous personal and organizational commitment to achieving its realization.

To all of those and many more, my heartfelt thanks.

To a large extent this Prize is meant to honour the generation that preceded me along with their ideals and hopes for a just and better life, and who had hopes and dreams for their families and their families' families for a safer and more secure society.

It is now time for us to encourage the next generation to be actively engaged and vigilant, and disparate groups to come together, to effect positive change and find common sense solutions to the constant threats to basic human rights and security.

I challenge all of us to become participants in the quest to improve all of the systems that we are responsible for managing. Not just in Canada, but worldwide. And I challenge all of us to spend less time on pure commentary, and more time on incorporating our collective intellects into progressive and equitable action.

My objective is for all students passing through the halls of UBC Law, and indeed law students around the world, to honour the memories of our legal brethren who have stood up for transparency, accountability and the Rule of Law by listening to and being inspired by the stories of those who are chosen as Prize recipients and honourees, and to steadfastly work to instill the Prize criteria in their own day-to-day actions and dealings with others in the legal community and elsewhere, and thereby help to rebalance the system.

This evening we are honouring three exceptional individuals and organizations who epitomize the ideals of the Allard Prize. Let us all be inspired by their stories, and be active agents of positive change in our own communities of influence, each and every day.

Thank you.