# Right Livelihood Awards for 2006

[This is a shortened version of a Press Release issued by Right Livelihood Award Foundation, Stockholm, Sweden, September 28, 2006]

Founded in 1980 the Right Livelihood Awards are presented annually in the Swedish Parliament and are often referred to as 'Alternative Nobel Prizes'. They were introduced "to honour and support those offering practical and exemplary answers to the most urgent challenges facing us today".

Jakob von Uexkull, a Swedish-German professional philatelist, sold his business to provide the original funding. Since then, the Award has been supported by individual donors. The prize money is currently SEK 2 million (USD 275,000/EUR 220,000).

The 2006 Right Livelihood Honorary Award goes to Chico Whitaker Ferreira (Brazil), "for a lifetime's dedicated work for social justice that has strengthened democracy in Brazil and helped give birth to the World Social Forum, showing that 'another world is possible'".

The 2006 Right Livelihood Award of SEK 2 million is shared between three recipients:

Daniel Ellsberg (USA), whose 'whistleblowing' helped end the Vietnam War, is awarded "for putting peace and truth first, at considerable personal risk, and dedicating his life to inspiring others to follow his example."

Ruth Manorama (India) is the sub-continent's most effective organiser of and advocate for Dalit women, belonging to the 'scheduled castes' sometimes also called 'untouchables'. The Jury honours Manorama, a Dalit herself, "for her commitment over decades to achieving equality for Dalit women, building effective and committed women's organisations and working for their rights at national and international levels."

The Festival Internacional de Poesia de Medellin (Colombia) is a unique poetry festival, which has helped build peace in one of the most violent cities in the world. The jury recognises the Festival "for showing how creativity, beauty, free expression and community can flourish amongst and overcome even deeply entrenched fear and violence."

# **CHICO WHITAKER FERREIRA**

Francisco ('Chico') Whittaker Ferreira, is a Roman Catholic activist, who has worked for democracy and against corruption throughout his life, both at home and exile. He is one of the key people behind the burgeoning World Social Forum.

In 2000 Whitaker was one of those who conceived the idea of the World Social Forum (WSF) and played a key role in bringing it to realisation. The idea

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was to hold a large conference event, a parallel to the World Economic Forum in Davos, to share the various insights of those from around the world who were working for alternatives to "world domination by capital, within the parameters of neoliberalism." The slogan was 'Another World is Possible'. The idea was taken forward by eight leading Brazilian organisations, operating by consensus.

The first World Social Forum was held in 2001 in the city of Porto Alegre in Brazil, attracting 4,000 delegates and 16,000 individual participants from many countries - far more than the organisers had anticipated. People came from Porto Alegre and other places in Brazil and neighbouring countries, as well as from Europe, North America, Asia and Africa. It was such a success, that a second event was held in 2002, attended by 15,000 delegates representing 4,909 organisations and movements in 131 countries, with another 35,000 'non-delegate' participants. During 2002 several regional or national forums were organised in all continents, and a World Social Forum took place again in Porto Alegre in 2003, with 100,000 participants. That year also saw the first Asian Social Forum being organised in Hyderabad. In January 2004, the WSF itself moved to Mumbai, and attracted 120,000 to take part. In 2005 the WSF was back in Porto Alegre, with 150,000 participants, and in 2006 was decentralised in three regions of the world: Mali, Caracas and Karachi. The 2007 WSF will be in Nairobi.

From the beginning, the Forums have been much more than just meeting places. They have become platforms for civil society organisations from all around the world to exchange views, form coalitions, work on concrete strategies and coordinate campaigns.

The success is explained by Whitaker by the principles adopted to organise the Forums: horizontality, non-directivity, respect of diversity, no spokespersons, no final document or orientations, self-organisation of the participants' activities in the forums. These were defined in 2001 after the success of the first Forum, in a Charter of Principles, which is now the sole criterion for participating in the Forum events. It provides for anyone to take part, except government representatives, military organisations and political parties.

Liberation Theology, the inspiration underlying Whitaker's life's work, is the radical Catholic theology, which —as he puts it—says that "true religion, especially Christianity, basically means working for the upliftment of the poor, fighting for their rights and against the exploitation of the have-nots by the haves."

### DANIEL ELLSBERG

Daniel Ellsberg is a former Pentagon official, who followed his conscience and leaked secret information about the US government lies on the war in Vietnam—the so-called Pentagon papers. Ellsberg has ever since campaigned for peace and encouraged others to speak truth to power.

Daniel Ellsberg was born in 1931, graduated from Harvard in economics in 1952, served in the US Marine Corps from 1954-57, and obtained a PhD in economics from Harvard while working for the Rand Corporation in 1962.

His academic specialisation was decision-making under uncertainty, and this was his focus as a strategic analyst at Rand, which he joined in 1959. Specifically his focus was on the command and control of nuclear weapons and the guidance to nuclear war plans. In 1959-60 he became a consultant to the Commander-in-Chief Pacific and during 1961-64 to the Departments of Defense and State at the White House, specialising in crises relating to nuclear decision-making. In 1964 he joined the Defense Department to work principally on decision-making in the Vietnam War—his first day there coincided with the Tonkin Gulf incident which sparked the eight-year bombing of Vietnam. In the next five years, which included a spell of two years actually in Vietnam on the front line he became progressively disillusioned with the war. This period culminated in 1969 in his decision that he had to do what he could to stop the Vietnam War.

#### WORKING FOR PEACE

In 1975-76 he was involved (as organiser participant and fundraiser) in the Continental Walk for Peace and Social Justice. For several years he was on the National Strategy Task Force of the Freeze Campaign, and later served on the Board of SANE-Freeze. He has taken part in scores of actions and estimates that he has been arrested 70 times, most recently in protests against the Iraq War near the Bush ranch in Texas. He campaigned against the neutron bomb and later against the development of Cruise and Pershing, in Europe as well as the US. He sailed on a Greenpeace boat to protest against Soviet nuclear testing. He considers that it was the popular success of the Freeze campaign against Cruise that caused President Reagan to propose the 'zero option' on intermediate-range missiles in Europe, which the Soviets unexpectedly accepted, terminating the development of Cruise and Pershing in Europe.

In 1992, with Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR), Ellsberg launched Manhattan Project II, "aiming to achieve a consensus among anti-nuclear, arms control and disarmament groups on a comprehensive program of concrete steps to end the nuclear arms race and proliferation and bring about radical reduction in nuclear arms and ultimate abolition". The consensus was achieved—but of this programme, only a test ban treaty has been achieved (as a result of decades of activism), and that is under grave threat with current US policy.

The parallels with the Iraq War were obvious, and in 2004 Ellsberg founded the Truth-Telling Project to encourage the insiders to expose official lying. The Project started with an op-ed in *The New York Times* in the run up to the Iraq War and was launched in September 2003 with a letter signed by eleven former officials. It was a 'Call to Patriotic Whistleblowing' and involved both Katharine Gun from the UK and Frank Grevil from Denmark, who had been indicted for whistleblowing in their own countries.

## **RUTH MANORAMA**

Ruth Manorama is India's most effective organiser of and advocate for Dalit women.

Dalit women in India suffer from three oppressions: gender, as a result of patriarchy; class, from being from the poorest and most marginalised communities; and caste, from coming from the lowest caste, the 'untouchables'. Although discrimination on the basis of caste is against the Indian constitution and prohibited by many laws, its practice is still widespread, especially in rural India.

Ruth Manorama is a Dalit woman. Born in 1952 in Madras, her parents escaped the worst consequences of being Dalits by becoming Christians. In 1975 Manrama took a Master's degree in social work from the University of Madras and has trained in both the community organisation methods of Saul D'Alinsky and the conscientisation methods of Paolo Freire. In 2001 Manorama was granted an honorary doctorate "for the distinguished contribution made to church and society" by the Academy of Ecumenical Indian Theology and Church Administration.

Manorama has been consistently associated with a range of issues - the rights of slumdwellers, domestic workers, unorganised labour and Dalits, and the empowerment of marginalised women. She stresses the interconnectedness between these issues, and the common cause that marginalised people share the world over.

#### WORKING FOR THE RIGHTS OF THE DEPRIVED

In the 1980s and 1990s, Manorama was at the forefront of mass struggles against eviction and the 'Operation Demolition' by the State Government of Karnataka. She led mass processions of 150,000 people along with other activists, demanding the protection of the roofs over their heads, a fair deal of security and safety and allowing them to live legally and with dignity. On behalf of the Slum dwellers, Manorama was involved in legal cases at the High Court as well as the Supreme Court of India. Since then, she has been working with the urban poor protecting and voicing their rights.

Manorama has been involved in Women's Voice and mobilised the women at the grass-root levels since the 1980s. She has been consistently urging the Indian Government for pro-poor policies like providing infrastructure and basic amenities to the poorer women who are living in slums. In more than 120 slums, women are now mobilised, trained and capacitated to face the issues on their own and take leadership in their communities as well as in society. Women are also trained to protect their rights against violence, discrimination and deprivation.

Looking at the deplorable conditions of the Dalits, Manorama felt it is necessary to work with the Human Rights organisations to advance the emancipation of Dalits. She has participated in several struggles against human rights violations, for land rights and for the cause of Dalit women. The Dalit women in the rural areas as well as in the slums suffer unique violence and discrimination. This led Manorama to form a special platform to address their concerns. In 1995, the National Federation of Dalit Women (NFDW) was established as a platform for Dalit women. It allows them to articulate the social ostracism and exclusion, powerlessness and poverty, violence and discrimination, which they daily experience.

## FESTIVAL INTERNACIONAL DE POESIA DE MEDELLIN

The International Poetry Festival of Medellin is one of the largest and most prestigious poetry festivals in the world. It started in 1991, when Medellin was one of the most dangerous and violent cities in the world. Through poetry readings in the streets, people have reclaimed their city.

## POETRY AGAINST TERROR

The International Poetry Festival of Medellin started as a protest against the political violence and hatred prevailing in Colombia and especially in Medellin. In the early 1990s, Medellin was ruled by fear, political terror and fighting between criminal groups. Some 100 people could be murdered on a weekend. After 6 pm, the city was usually dead due to a curfew imposed by the paramilitary.

"It seems a difficult task to find flourishing and tranquil decades in our country in the last 150 years, but the decade of the nineties was particularly sombre and mournful. (...) The festival arose from a proposal to overthrow the wall of terror and fear imposed by the internal feuds of our country." It was an attempt "to create through poetry an atmosphere that without ignoring the spiral of death and the inertial strength of hate could put a little light in this sombre scene."

The idea was simple: By organising poetry readings in the streets, the Festival initiators helped people to re-establish a cultural life and reclaim their city. More and more listeners overcame their own fear and atten-ded the poetry readings.

During the 10 days of the annual Festival in Medellin, there are public readings of poetry in the streets, in parks, residential areas, at the university and libraries, in theatres, cooperatives, schools and cultural centres, restaurants, malls, subway stations, factories, churches and even in prisons. Each year, some 80 poets from 55 countries participate actively in the festival. Up to 200,000 people come to listen to the 80 to 100 poetry readings.

"The Festival has the conviction that culture must and has to play a fundamental role in any process of development. It has the certainty that arts and poetry will contribute decisively to the up-surging of a new humanity, a new humane society."