

**Urgent Action**

**In Focus**

An insight into the stories behind UAs

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## **Lydia Cacho Ribeiro: Human Rights Champion**

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Lydia Cacho Ribeiro © AI

***"I am really happy especially because I am in a room looking at the faces of the people that saved my life. I am the one that is here thanking you for being Amnesty International, because what you did with your Urgent Actions, what you did to put pressure on my government to beat organized crime. Thank you so much."*** Lydia Cacho Ribeiro

AIUSA's 2007 Annual General Meeting was held in the city of Milwaukee between 23 and 25 March, and boasted more than 850 participants from around the country. We honoured a number of special guests, including former prisoner of conscience Saad Ibrahim, an internationally respected advocate of democracy and intellectual freedom in Egypt, and Jennifer Latheef, a photojournalist and an opposition political activist in the Maldives.

Lydia Cacho Ribeiro was also honoured as the 2007 Ginetta Sagan Award recipient due to her work on women's and children's rights. The Fund annually bestows an award of \$10,000 to "recognize and assist a woman doing effective work to protect the dignity, liberties and lives of women and children in crisis regions where abuse of human rights is widespread." The award's namesake, Ginetta Sagan, was a recipient of the 1996 Presidential Medal of Freedom and fought for the lives and rights of prisoners of conscience throughout the world.

Lydia Cacho was the subject of an Amnesty International Urgent Action, UA 37/05 (AMR 41/004/2005, 16 February 2005) and three follow-ups due to death threats against her and other members of her organization, on account of her advocacy work. While in police custody, she was ill-treated and held incommunicado in an attempt to intimidate her into abandoning her work to combat child abuse and people trafficking.

In spite of this, Lydia filed a successful countersuit for corruption and violation of her human rights. She became the first woman in Mexico to file a suit against a governor, district attorney and judge for corruption.

In May 2007, the Mexican Supreme Court will conclude its investigation into the violation of her rights to due legal process and a fair trial.

Lydia Cacho's tireless determination and drive as a human rights advocate was commended by the Ginetta Sagan Fund. On the evening of 23 March, Julianne Cartwright Traylor, Co-chair of the Ginetta Sagan Award committee of AIUSA, presented Lydia with the Award in recognition of her human rights accomplishments.

Lydia took the stage to a standing ovation and said, "I am really happy especially because I am in a room looking at the faces of the people that saved my life. I am the one that is here thanking you for being Amnesty International, because [of] what you did with your Urgent Actions, what you did to put pressure on my government to beat organized crime. Thank you so much."

The U.S. Department of State cites Mexico as a source, transit and destination country for trafficked persons, mostly exploited for sex and labour. Considerable numbers of trafficking victims are children. In 2005, Lydia Cacho published a book, *The Demons of Eden*, which exposed a child pornography and prostitution ring in Mexico. Despite the dangers that she has faced by exposing this dark world, she continues to champion the advancement of human rights for women and children because of her belief that everyone should live with dignity.

During her acceptance speech, Lydia remarked that her mother told her: "Never negotiate your freedom. If you lose your freedom, you lose your capability." For this reason, the audience affirmed that Amnesty International must continue to demand freedom for human rights defenders so that individuals like Lydia Cacho can continue to make great strides towards the realization of human rights for all.