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Art for Amnesty: U2 receives highest human rights award

Today, U2 band members were awarded Amnesty International's highest human rights accolade -- the "Ambassador of Conscience" Award for 2005.

"U2 have sung themselves to where great singing comes from, that place where art and ardency meet in the light of conscience," said Nobel Literature Laureate Seamus Heaney, upon hearing of the award to U2 band members Bono, Edge, Larry Mullen Jr. Adam Clayton and manager Paul McGuinness.

Amnesty International Secretary General Irene Khan also praised the work of the band and their ongoing commitment to human rights and Amnesty International, which stretches back over 21 years. "On the day when human rights are being celebrated around the world and Amnesty International launches its first global music venture 'Make Some Noise', U2 is being honoured with this year's 'Ambassador of Conscience' Award," said Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International.

"From Live Aid in 1985 and Amnesty International's 1986 'Conspiracy of Hope' tour, through to Live 8 this past July, U2 has arguably done more than any other band to highlight the cause of global human rights in general and Amnesty International's work in particular. Their leadership in linking music to the struggle for human rights and human dignity worldwide has been ground-breaking and unwavering. They have inspired and empowered millions with their music and by speaking out on behalf of the poor, the powerless and the oppressed."

Bill Shipsey, founder of "Art for Amnesty" -- the organization's global artist support network that organises the annual Award event -- said that "for their art and music alone U2 would be worthy candidates of Amnesty International's most prestigious human rights Award. With songs like 'Pride (In The Name of Love)', 'MLK', 'Miss Sarajevo', 'Mothers of the Disappeared', 'Walk On' (written for Burmese political activist Aung San Syu Kyi), and of course the song that has become an anthem to Amnesty, 'One', U2 has helped spread the human rights message of Amnesty International to a global audience."

He continued, "But U2 is, and always has been, about much more than just music. Band members have used their music and celebrity to champion countless human rights causes. Through their more recent involvement with DATA and The One Campaign they have brought the issues of debt, aid and trade -- particularly as they affect Africa -- to the world's attention. They have shown that it is not enough to leave it to the politicians and 'traditional' world leaders to change the world. They have empowered and inspired millions of people with their music, their example and their action."

The Award announcement also cited U2's promotion of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which features prominently on a giant video screen during all concerts on U2's current "Vertigo" World Tour. U2's Edge is quoted as saying that they regard the Universal Declaration as the "greatest piece of literature ever written"

Former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson joined in the tributes, quoting Eleanor Roosevelt, who stressed the importance of human rights "mattering in small places close to home". She added that "it helps to have them matter under bright lights on a big stage in front of thousands of people"

Background

Amnesty International's "Ambassador of Conscience" Award recognises exceptional individual leadership and witness in the fight to protect and promote human rights.

The Award, inspired by a poem written for Amnesty International by Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney, aims to promote the work of the organization by association with the life, work and example of its 'Ambassadors', who have done so much to inspire and uplift.

U2 joins past winners, including Vaclav Havel and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson as recipients of this distinguished human rights Award.

For more information, please see the Art for Amnesty "Ambassador of Conscience" web site <http://www.artforamnesty.org/aoc/index.html> or contact: bill@artforamnesty.org, tel: + 353 86 2564967

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