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U2 receives Human Rights award at Chile's National Stadium

(Santiago de Chile) In an event that took place last night at the National Stadium, Chilean President-elect Michelle Bachelet presented Amnesty International's Ambassador of Conscience award to the Irish band U2.

The award - inspired by Seamus Heaney's poem "From the Republic of Conscience" -- is a recognition of U2's commitment to the cause of human rights and to the work of Amnesty International.

"U2 has done more than any other public figure to support the work of Amnesty International in promoting and protecting human rights across the world. By helping to place human rights on the international political agenda, U2 has become an inspiration to millions across the world. Through their music, they have created a force for change," said Bill Shipsey, Founder and President of Art for Amnesty -- the organization's global artist support network that organises the annual Award event.

Representatives of a number of human rights organizations - including La Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos (Detainees Disappeared Relatives Association), the Fundación de Ayuda Social de las Iglesias Cristianas (Christian Churches' Social Aid Foundation) and the Movimiento de Integración y Liberación Homosexual (Homosexual Integration and Liberation Movement) -- were also present at the event and received a copy of the Poem "From the Republic of Conscience".

"The broad range of human rights organizations present at the ceremony clearly show that human rights in the 21st century need to look beyond prison walls and into the lives of women, men and children marginalized through discrimination and poverty, deprived of basic human rights. Human rights concerns in Chile and in all the Americas are not just a thing of the past, we need to understand what that means for us today" said Margarita Byler, Amnesty International Senior Director of International Mobilization - in Chile on behalf of Irene Khan, Amnesty International Secretary General.

Amnesty International's representatives noted how thousands of people in Chile and across the Americas continue to suffer grave human rights abuses - including torture, injustice, discrimination and lack of access to basic rights such as work, health, land and education.

"Who is accountable for those human rights abuses? It is those governments who defend the use of torture and ill treatment; those governments, corporations and armed groups who persist in abusing the rights of the very people they claim to protect or in whose defence they claim to act." Said Margarita Byler.

"There are still people in this country that are silent, they're sick with their secrets. Their secrets are making them sick. I would like to say to them, this is the moment, the beginning of a new Chile, to set you free from

those secrets," Said Bono, leader of U2.

"US Congressman Tom Lantos was, as a child, taken to the death camps in Hungary, by the Nazis. He said that the things that haunted him the most in his life was not the brutal treatment of the Nazis but the things that haunted him later on his life were the faces of the passers by, who saw them as children being put on trains and sent to the concentration camps. The mute, faces. The silence. Not asking questions.

So, when it comes to the poor that you have in Chile, I would like to say that we will not turn away because we know where these people are going. We will go down to the train and we will lie on the tracks and that is our job as artists and as human beings, said Bono.

"Today's award ceremony was full of symbolism. 20 years ago, music was being used in this very stadium to cover despicable human rights abuses. Today, music was used to create pressure for the implementation of a comprehensive human rights program in Chile," said Sergio Laurenti, Director of Amnesty International in Chile.

"No new government should come to power without putting human rights at the heart of its policies. We trust President-elect Michelle Bachelet, who knows all too well what human rights are all about, will implement a human rights program which sets an example to the rest of the region and the world," said Sergio Laurenti.

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