

BUILDING A VISION

THE COUNCIL OF CANADIANS CELEBRATES 20 YEARS OF ACTIVISM AT ITS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

In November 2005, Council members and chapter activists from across Canada came together to celebrate 20 years of citizen action for social and economic justice. The Council presented awards to people who have led personal and political struggles to uphold human rights and promote a vision of a fairer, more compassionate world. Here are some excerpts from their speeches.



Christina Riley

John Akpata and members of the Capital Slam poets entertained AGM participants with their sharp, politicized lyrics.

As Akpata rhymed:

True north strong and free

Is only a slogan that belongs to me

Because I belong at the bottom of
a two tier system

That does not belong to me.

MAUDE BARLOW

Maude Barlow, National Chairperson of The Council of Canadians, was honoured with a Special 20th Anniversary Award in recognition of her unparalleled dedication and leadership in furthering the Council's mission for progressive, democratic change in Canada and the world.

"We believe that joining the Bush revolution would be the worst possible thing for Canada and the world. And make no mistake, in signing this Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America, Canada has already become, in a way, an enabler, allowing the Bush team to stay its destructive global course, and say that it has got North America on board. A better course would be to seek out the millions of Americans who are equally appalled at what their government is doing and who have a different vision of what North America should look like."

ROY ROMANOW

Roy Romanow, former Premier of Saskatchewan and Commissioner of The Future of Health Care in Canada was presented with the Distinguished Canadian Award in recognition of exceptional leadership in the cause of promoting public health care in Canada.



Christina Riley

Roy Romanow and Maude Barlow

"In an age of unprecedented human and natural wealth in Canada, one cannot help but note that the gap between the rich and the poor is growing and not diminishing. Despite our incredible prosperity, child poverty levels remain higher than in 1989, when the House of Commons committed to ending child poverty by the end of 2000. The security of clean air to breathe and safe water to drink, as Maude discussed, is uncertain, to put it mildly . . . The confidence in our democratic institutions is waning . . . Rigorous accountability in governance seems more an illusion than a reality . . . And the ownership of our media by fewer and fewer brings with it a loss of varied and independent voices necessary for our pluralistic nation. Thus the importance of The Council of Canadians."

MONIA MAZIGH AND MAHER ARAR

In September 2002, Maher Arar was in Tunisia, vacationing with his wife Monia Mazigh and their two small children. On September 26, while in transit in New York's JFK airport, he was detained by U.S. officials and inter-



Jacqueline Reid

Maher Arar and Monia Mazigh

rogated about alleged terrorist links. Twelve days later, he was shackled and flown to Jordan aboard a private plane and from there, transferred to a Syrian prison where he was beaten and tortured. During his imprisonment, Monia campaigned relentlessly on her husband's behalf. After many interventions from Canadian citizens and organizations, including The Council of Canadians, the Government of Canada announced a commission into the events. Both Monia and Maher were presented with The Council's Human Rights Award in recognition of exceptional sacrifice and leadership in the cause of human rights.

MONIA MAZIGH:

"I think this award is an award to every one of us – to every Canadian who stands up for justice and never gives up. When I think about the last three years of our family life, I see how chaotic and how busy it was, especially with our little kids, and with all that happened to Maher . . . Unfortunately the road is still so long for us. Every day we hear cases of other innocent people suffering, being tortured and being thrown in jails. I still believe that our collective work can make a difference, and this improves our lives and those of our children."

MAHER ARAR:

"I had always believed that Canada was the country of my dreams. A country

that not only respected human rights, but promoted them to the rest of the world. Unfortunately, the horrible experience that I went through shook my trust in the system. But I have learned very valuable lessons from this long struggle. I learned that the Canadian people, through their very long support for my struggle, have demonstrated that they value freedom and democracy and that they are not willing to sacrifice their civil liberties for the illusion of security."

JEREMY HINZMAN



Jacqueline Reid

Jeremy Hinzman and Maude Barlow

Jeremy Hinzman, a former member of the U.S. Army's 82nd Airborne Division, came to Canada in January 2004 with his wife and small child to escape, as he describes it, an illegal and unjust war being led by the American military in Iraq. He, along with his fellow war resisters, was presented with the Council's Activist of the Year Award in recognition of their outstanding courage and leadership in opposing an unjust war, and inspiring a vision of a more just and peaceful world.

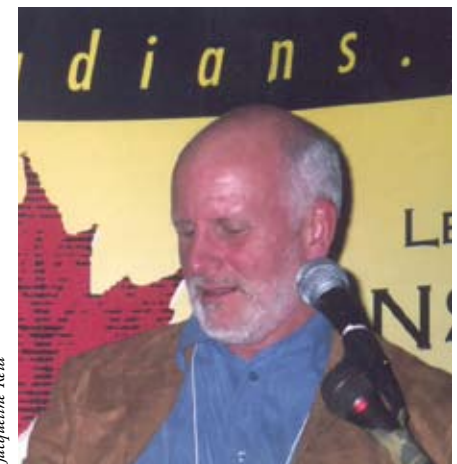
"I am here tonight to accept this award on behalf of the War Resisters' Support Campaign. It is not just me, it is not just the other people I am here with – this transcends all of us. It's about giving people of conscience a safe place to come to and a safe place to make a life where they don't have to live with the scarlet letter – saying they don't have

to be complicit and stay in an illegal and unjust war, and hence become war criminals."

TONY CLARKE

Tony Clarke, an international activist, author and former member of the Council's Board of Directors, was presented with the Ken Wardroper Founder's Award in recognition of his outstanding contribution to The Council of Canadians and the cause of citizen democracy.

"I want to pay tribute to the volunteers here tonight because it's the volunteers in all the chapters across this country that have put the face of the Council to work locally, engaging in the struggles and making things happen . . . In many ways, as far as I'm concerned, this award goes to you – the many people who are making this movement and building this movement across the country.



Jacqueline Reid

Tony Clarke

For more information on how you can support war resisters in Canada, go to www.resisters.ca. To learn more about Maher Arar's case, visit www.maherarar.ca. And to hear all of the AGM 2005 speeches in full, check out www.canadians.org.

Jan Malek is a Communications Administrator for The Council of Canadians.