

White Crows are the black sheep of corruption

Even 23 years after communism, people are still harassed for being engaged in public affairs, for acting as whistleblowers, or for highlighting breaches of ethics in their communities. For the sixth time, noble people who courageously defended public interest received White Crow Awards.

White Crow is not just a symbolic award. By promoting the stories of White Crows and by providing recipients with assistance, the Fair-play Alliance and VIA IURIS not only change their lives and their community lives, but also inspire the whole society to act alike. The existence of these amazing stories shows that in any given moment people can choose between good and evil, between preserving integrity and personal freedom or losing them.

Among the current recipients of the award are, for example, citizens of Pezinok who have been fighting for more than ten years against an unwanted waste dump in their town. Another are the staff of the administration of the Low Tatras National Park who were not afraid to present their professional, but not politically convenient, opinion in public. Zuzana Melicherčíková, a former employee of the Comenius University Law Faculty, who pointed out the suspicious admission of students is one of them too.

White Crows share not only courage, but also face injustice or threats to which they are

exposed. For example, recipient of White Crow 2010, forester Ján Mičovský, had to leave his job after he pointed out the inefficient and politicized decision-making of Forests of the Slovak Republic and he was exposed to pressure and humiliation.

This year's nominations

This year, recipients include teachers Vladimír Crmoman and Oto Žarnay. Being a teacher at the United School Novohradská in Bratislava, Mr. Crmoman has for years been outspoken about financial mismanagement in the education system and has taken actions to punish those responsible. As a teacher at a business high school in Košice (Obchodná akadémia), Oto Žarnay brought to public attention high bills paid by the school for legal services, after which he was "made redundant". He is still committed however: "one can feel free and happy only if one continues to pursue his ideals and can stand straight even in his own eyes, not allowing fear to express his own opinion to take hold," said Žarnay.

The next White Crow award went to Mariana Vavrová, who has

worked as a lawyer in the Social Insurance Agency Headquarters (Sociálna poisťovňa). She has criticized an internal order outlining how pensions of former police officers and soldiers should be calculated. In her opinion, such an internal order was against the law. She drafted a petition supported by 86 employees of the headquarters. She was fired immediately.

In 2013, the jury has for the second time awarded the White Crow Award for a long-term contribution to the society. This year's recipient is Katarína Šimončíková, who was awarded for her long-term commitment to environmental protection. Each year she participates in hundreds of administrative proceedings to prevent cutting trees, in particular in Bratislava. She has endured threats, efforts to bribe, and physical attacks for her activities. She has been engaged in several well-known cases aiming to protect the environment in Bratislava. "Passivity increases fear. When people remain silent, politicians have no limits. But politicians come and go – we are citizens for our entire lives," she says as she describes her mission.

Every year the White Crows are chosen by consensus of the award jury, consisting of a minimum of seven members. Members of this jury are opinion leaders and respected authorities coming from various social, cultural, or academic backgrounds, including former White Crow recipients. In 2013 the jury consisted of philosopher Fedor

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Blaščák, designer Daniel Fischer, journalist and screenwriter Eugen Gindl, political scientist Erik Láštic, director and songwriter Ján Štrasser, and White Crow recipients Zuzana Melicherčíková and Simona Rudavská. Each award was a tailor-made sculpture by well-known Slovak artist Fero Guldan, designed based on the particular story of each White Crow recipient.

A detailed list and the stories of the White Crow Award recipients are available at www.bielavrana.sk.

Not only a gesture

White Crow is not just a gesture. VIA IURIS and the Fair-play Alliance made a commitment to actively help recipients in their cases to seek justice. For example, thanks to enormous media attention, 2010 White Crow Zuzana Melicherčíková was able to find a new job after she was let go from Comenius University and both organizations helped her with related legal matters.

Or, thanks to our legal support, 2011 White Crow Erika Lakatošová could take part in the local assembly of her municipality of Ruská. The municipal assembly and mayor had unlawfully prevented her from becoming a local MP for almost a year after she, as municipal accountant, pointed out suspicious financial transactions made by mayor and actively fought against it. She was subsequently dismissed from her office.

White Crows are real heroes who speak out when everyone else is silent. But they do need support from all of us.



Milan Šagát
Acting Director
VIA IURIS

White Crow Award recipients (from left): Peter Paluda (2009), Simona Rudavská (2012), Marek Božik (2010), Katarína Šimončíková (2013), Ivan Čehelský (2011), in memoriam Marta Lauková (2011, daughter Zuzana Lauková), Zuzana Melicherčíková (2010), Erika Lakatošová (2011), Jaroslav Pavlovič (2008), Jozef Hašto (2009), Ján Mičovský (2010), Ludmila Babjaková (2009), Darina Kuchtová (2009), Dušan Čimo (2009), Juraj Babjak (2009), Oto Žarnay (2013) Vladimír Crmoman (2013) a Mariana Vavrová (2013).