



Cato Institute Honors Human Rights Group, the Ladies in White, with 2018 Milton Friedman Prize

April 20, 2018

The Cato Institute has announced that Cuba's Ladies in White (Damas de Blanco), will receive the 2018 Milton Friedman Prize for Advancing Liberty, a \$250,000 biennial award presented to a group or individual who has made a significant contribution to advance human freedom.

The Ladies in White have a simple message: The political prisoners of Cuba are our sons, our brothers, and our husbands. They must not be forgotten.

Every Sunday, the Ladies gather, or attempt to gather, for mass at Saint Rita de Casia church in Havana, followed by a procession down Fifth Avenue. They wear white to symbolize the peaceful nature of their protest, and each wears a photograph of a loved one who is incarcerated in Cuba's notoriously harsh prisons. For this, the authorities have constantly harassed them and organized mob violence against them.

The movement began on March 18, 2003, when journalist Héctor Maseda Gutiérrez was arrested in his home in Havana and sentenced to 20 years in prison for criticizing Fidel Castro's regime. His case drew worldwide attention, with Amnesty International calling him a prisoner of conscience and demanding his release. Around 75 others were arrested at the same time in an incident that has been called the Black Spring. All have since left prison, though not unconditionally, with the majority having had to leave Cuba. Since that time, sporadic arrests of journalists, lawyers, and other intellectuals have continued in Cuba, belying the myth that with normalized relations, Cuba's human rights record would improve. If anything, it has deteriorated.

Two weeks after Maseda was arrested, his wife, Laura Pollán Toledo, brought together a group of wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters of the imprisoned to pray for their loved ones. They have continued to gather each Sunday, and the movement has since spread to other churches throughout Cuba. They are not a political party and do not have an overtly political message, but rather they seek freedom of expression for all and the release of prisoners of conscience in Cuba. Because of their work, the Ladies have faced increasing police harassment and arrest in recent years, as the Cuban government tries to hide — but not change — its habit of quashing dissent.

"All who labor in the name of freedom take great inspiration from — and feel a tremendous debt to — courageous people who risk everything to stand up to oppression. The Ladies in White are a stirring example," said Peter Goettler, president and CEO of the Cato Institute. "We are proud,

and humbled, to award them the Milton Friedman Prize for Advancing Liberty, and hope this honor will bring more attention to their cause.”

Laura Pollán died in 2011 under gravely suspicious circumstances, but the movement she founded continues: The Ladies in White will meet, pray, and bear witness every Sunday until Cuba’s political prisoners are freed.

Established in 2002 and presented every two years, the Milton Friedman Prize for Advancing Liberty is the leading international award for significant contributions to advancing individual liberty.

The prize will be presented during a dinner at Cipriani 42nd Street in New York on May 17, 2018. Carlos Gutierrez, a Cuban immigrant, former CEO of Kellogg Company, former secretary of commerce, and the former vice chairman of Citigroup’s Institutional Clients Group, will deliver the keynote address.

Previous winners include Danish journalist and free-speech advocate Flemming Rose; former Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister of Poland Leszek Balcerowicz; Chinese economist Mao Yushi; Iranian writer and journalist Akbar Ganji; leader of a Venezuelan pro-democracy movement Yon Goicoechea; former Prime Minister of Estonia Mart Laar; property rights reformer Hernando de Soto; and the late British economist Peter Bauer.

The members of the 2018 International Selection Committee are:

Leszek Balcerowicz

Former Deputy Prime Minister
and Finance Minister

Poland

Janice Rogers Brown

Former Judge

U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit

Vicente Fox

Former President

Mexico

Sloane Frost

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Peter N. Goettler

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Herman Mashaba

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Harvey Silverglate

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