"Ginetta Sagan's name is synonymous with the fight for human rights around the world. She represents to all the triumph of the human spirit over tyranny."
- President Bill Clinton-

For more than three decades, the late Ginetta Sagan, recipient of the 1996 Presidential Medal of Freedom, fought for the lives and rights of prisoners of conscience throughout the world. A tireless crusader and eternal optimist, Ginetta's passionate dedication inspired generations of human rights advocates. In honor of her humanitarian achievements, Amnesty International USA created the Ginetta Sagan Fund in 1994, one of AIUSA's first permanently endowed funds and the only fund that specifically addresses the needs of women and children. The Ginetta Sagan Fund ensures the continuation of Ginetta's human rights legacy and brings worldwide attention to the abuses perpetrated on women and children.

Lydia Cacho, Mexico’s leading human rights defender, receives the 2007 Ginetta Sagan Award for Women’s and Children’s Rights

Risking her own life to defend women and children, the Mexican journalist was honored as the 2007 winner of the Ginetta Sagan Award for Women’s and Children’s Rights at the Amnesty International USA Annual Meeting in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The cash grant award of $10,000 recognizes Lydia’s commitment to protecting the most vulnerable groups of people in Mexico. She has sheltered women and children from abuse and challenged powerful government and business leaders who profit from child prostitution and pornography. Consequently, her life is repeatedly threatened and she has faced near death situations.
An investigative journalist and a specialist on gender-based violence, Lydia founded and directs the Refuge Center for Abused Women in Cancun and is also the president of the Center for Women’s Assistance. These centers serve as refuge for women and children, many of whom are victims of violent crimes. In protecting these vulnerable women and children, Lydia has put her own life at risk. In 1999, Lydia was raped at a bus station in an attempt to intimidate her from continuing her work. This incident only emboldened her further to protect and advance the rights of women and children in a country where impunity for crimes is widespread and commonly accepted as part of daily life.

In 2004, Lydia published a book *Los Demonios del Eden: el poder detrás de la pornografía infantil* (*The Demons of Eden: the power behind child pornography*) and named powerful men involved in this lucrative trade of the flesh. The price for her courageous act was repeated threats and judicial harassment to silence her effort to give voice to the victims. "Human rights work, especially when it challenges powerful individuals and institutions, remains extremely dangerous," said Julianne Cartwright Traylor, Co-Chair of the Ginetta Sagan Award Committee of AIUSA.

"To expose the criminals who destroy the lives of women and children is not enough; it is imperative to challenge the powers that be in order to stop impunity and corruption in Mexico. We do not ask for revenge, but rather for accountability for the criminals and the politicians that manipulate the justice system for money, thus sacrificing human rights and human lives.

*Ginetta Sagan’s spirit is walking on my side with this award, and her presence strengthens me to stay near the victims and to keep telling them, 'your life matters to us; recovering your safety and your happiness matters to us'.”*  
--Lydia Cacho

Raised by a strong mother who introduced her to the idea of social justice, Cacho responded to these intimidation tactics by filing a counter-suit for corruption and for violation of her human rights. She is the first woman in Mexico to file a federal suit against a governor, district attorney and a judge for corruption and attempted rape in prison.

Andrea Damesyn Claburn, who knew Ginetta Sagan well, and currently serves as Co-Chair of the GSF Steering Committee, saw strong resemblance between the two women. “Just as Ginetta Sagan risked her life to defend human rights, Lydia Cacho displays immense strength in the face of terrible threats and intimidation. Her courage is an inspiration to women everywhere.”

The Ginetta Sagan Fund aims to recognize, honor and assist women who, often at great personal risk, commit themselves to protecting and advancing the rights of others. Lydia embodies the spirit and purpose of the Fund. Even though her life is repeatedly threatened, she continues to champion human rights through her writing and advocacy. Ginetta Sagan would have been honored to know and support Lydia.
Lydia Cacho is recognized by the US State Department as one of eight “Heroes Acting to End Modern-Day Slavery” in 2007

Lydia Cacho, author of Los demonios del Eden, told USINFO on May 18 that the U.S. government’s recognition validates “what we are doing for trafficking victims; and I hope it helps the Mexican authorities to understand that trafficking of women is a global issue, and we have to deal with it as that.”


Lydia’s work continues to endanger her life. Shortly after she returned to Mexico after the Ginetta Sagan Award reception, she faced another attempt on her life. Below is an excerpt from AI’s Urgent Action.

Fear for Safety of Mexican Journalist Lydia Cacho

A car carrying human rights defender Lydia Cacho was reportedly tampered with on 7 May in an attempt to cause a fatal accident, in Mexico City. She was not hurt, but Amnesty International believes her life is in danger: her work as a journalist has led to repeated harassment and threats.

Lydia Cacho had arrived at Mexico City airport with several other journalists, on a flight from Ciudad Juarez. She was also accompanied by three agents of the Federal Investigation Agency (Agencia Federal de Investigación, AFI) who have been protecting her since she received death threats in 2005 and 2006 (see UA 37/05, AMR 41/004/2005, 16 February 2005, and follow-ups). The group was met by another AFI agent, who gave the keys of a Chevrolet Suburban 4x4 to one of the AFI agents protecting her, so they could drive her to the centre of Mexico City. The vehicle was the property of the Federal Attorney General’s Office (Procuraduría General de la República, PGR). Lydia Cacho offered the other journalists a lift. While the AFI agent was driving into Mexico City along one of the main highways, the car reportedly began to shake violently, almost causing the driver to lose control, so he pulled over and stopped.

At first the people in the car thought they had a puncture, but the AFI agent checked the car and noticed that the bolts of one of the wheels appeared to have been sawn down, causing the wheel to come lose. The driver reportedly said that if he had not stopped the wheel would have come off shortly after, potentially causing a serious accident.

Lydia Cacho has filed an official complaint with the PGR, indicating that she believes the car was intentionally sabotaged in order to kill her. In her complaint she noted a possible link with the publication of her book, Los Demonios del Edén, which documented allegations that powerful businessmen had been involved in child prostitution and trafficking. On 2 May she had given evidence at a hearing of the trial of one of the businessmen identified in her book. The hearing was reportedly extremely heated, with the defendant’s lawyers seeking to attack Lydia Cacho’s credibility. Since publicising the apparent attempt on her life, officials from Puebla state have sought to discredit her and question her human rights work.
Since receiving the Ginetta Sagan Award in 2003, Sonia Pierre has continued to challenge both gender discrimination and racism in the Dominican Republic (DR). As Executive Director of the NGO Movement for Dominican Women of Haitian Descent (MUDHA), she champions the human rights of Dominican nationals of Haitian descent while promoting greater awareness of the deep-rooted challenges facing women and children of Haitian descent. MUDHA works to empower women by providing access to basic social services, building schools and health clinics, establishing daycare and adult education programs, conducting trainings and community health education and services.

Although born in the Dominican Republic and by constitutional right a Dominican citizen, Sonia has faced repeated government threats to take away her nationality and has been targeted along with her family for expulsion from the country by the DR government because of her activism. She has also been threatened at gunpoint in her office.

In March 2004, Sonia took her struggle to the United Nations in Geneva when she participated in the "Thematic Discussion on Non-Citizens and Racial Discrimination" at the 64th Session of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the oversight body for the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms for Racial Discrimination. She spoke about the plight of children of Haitian descent who were denied citizenship rights in direct contravention of the law and were consequently deprived of access to education, health services, and subject to burdensome administrative requirements for birth registration. She said that these laws violated DR national law and constituted human rights violations.

In March 2005, MUDHA, along with the Center for Justice and International Law and the Human Rights Clinic of the UC Berkeley School of Law brought the first case against the DR before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. They argued on behalf of two Dominican girls, Dilcia Yean and Violeta Bosico, claiming violations of their rights to nationality, equality before the law and judicial protection, as well as rights to a name and protection of the family. In September 2005, the Inter-American Court handed down a landmark decision in this case, finding that the DR had violated their right to nationality, the right to judicial personality, the rights of the child, and the right to equal protection before the law. The Court ordered the DR government to change its discriminatory system of birth registration and implement the necessary procedures to guarantee birth certificates to all children born in the DR and to open the schools to all children.

Sonia has continued to win national and international attention and acclaim for her work. In 2006, she received the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award, which cited her for the following: "Under Sonia’s leadership, MUDHA has risen to protect the rights of the DR’s Haitian immigrants and their descendants and to empower women and children in the face of deep rooted discrimination and intolerance. Despite threats against her life, Sonia has been a driving force for change and a leader in the movement to end human rights violations against Haitians in the Dominican Republic.” Senator Edward Kennedy remarked that "Sonia has personally affected the lives of thousands of her people. She has given voice to their struggles, won landmark legal victories for them, and created new networks to meet their basic needs. Because of Sonia, this neglected, impoverished, downtrodden community has greater rights and greater hope for a future where equality and justice are not just ideas, but reality...Her courage gives us all hope.”

Today, Sonia Pierre has become one of the most outspoken and well-known grassroots activists in the DR. The Ginetta Sagan Fund is proud and honored to have been an early supporter of Sonia Pierre and her work.
Ljiljana Raicevic Fights to Include Women’s Rights in the Montenegrin Constitution

On March 8, 2007, a network of Montenegrin women’s NGOs launched a highly visible campaign with the stated goal of integrating women’s human rights into the Constitution. Their multiple-platform approach emphasizes the importance of including gender equality in the new Constitution of the Montenegrin state.

Ljiljana Raicevic, the 12th winner of the Ginetta Sagan Award for Women’s and Children’s Rights in 2006, was one of the first human rights defenders in her native Montenegro to raise the issue of human trafficking and to frame it as a human rights violation. In 1999, she founded the Women’s Safe House in Podgorica to provide comprehensive services including safe and secure accommodation as well as medical, legal, and psychological services to help women and girls fleeing gender-based violence and forced prostitution. The shelter, the first of its kind in Montenegro, serves as the focal point of service delivery and advocacy work for women who are victims of domestic violence and human trafficking.

Ljiljana recognizes that direct services for victims of trafficking are not enough without changes in the legal system. She is advocating to transform the legal system in Montenegro to advance women’s human rights. Inspired by countless stories of women twice victimized, first by traffickers and subsequently by a justice system that treated the women as criminals, Raicevic and the Women’s Safe House successfully lobbied for the adoption of the Witness Protection Law by the Montenegrin Parliament. And on May 3, 2007, the Government of Montenegro passed the draft Law on Gender Equality, which stipulates fundamental principles of gender equality and prohibits discrimination based on sex in accordance with international conventions.

March 8: Women’s Safe House and other NGOs launched a campaign to integrate women’s rights in the new Montenegrin Constitution.

After being a prominent participant in the regional conference “Gender Equality as a Part of Human Rights of the New Montenegrin Constitution,” Ljiljana Raicevic is leading the struggle to include women’s rights in the constitution of Montenegro. On March 8, 2007, a network of Montenegrin women’s NGOs launched a highly visible campaign with the stated goal of integrating women’s human rights into the Constitution. Their multiple-platform approach, including public performances, press conferences, street actions, letter-writing campaigns, and collaboration with international organizations, emphasizes the importance of including gender equality in the new Constitution of the Montenegrin state.

The Ginetta Sagan Fund is honored to support Ljiljana Raicevic and her organization to affect change for women and girls in Montenegro.
Connecticut High School Students Raised $2,000 for the Ginetta Sagan Fund to Support Courageous Women

Who says high school students are apathetic? Not at Wilton High School!! Members of the Amnesty International/Robert S. Jacobs Chapter at Wilton High School in Connecticut each year raises funds for the charity of their choice. In 2006, Chapter members voted to support the Ginetta Sagan Fund, after learning about how the Fund supports courageous women who fight for the dignity and rights of others. High school students donated their time and energy to raise $2000 for the Fund, and in the process, learned about human rights and the personal risks that rights defenders often take to protect victims of abuses.

This contribution to the Ginetta Sagan Fund helps make it possible for courageous women everywhere to continue the struggle for dignity, liberty and justice.

Catia Claburn, a student at the San Francisco public school Rooftop Alternative K-8, participated in a school-wide contest on an original essay and portrait when she was in 1st grade in 2006. She chose to write about Ginetta Sagan and won 1st Place. As a result of learning about Ginetta, Catia decided to donate the entire contents of her piggy bank to the Ginetta Sagan Fund. Her winning portrait and essay were on display at the San Francisco Public Library main branch.

Catia’s Award Winning Essay on Ginetta

Ginetta Sagan was born on June 1, 1925. She died on August 25, 2000. Ginetta was a co-founder of Amnesty International USA, which helps people who are in prison for their beliefs. I chose her because she helped to free innocent people. Everyone should learn about Ginetta Sagan because we should all stand up for others.
Philanthropist and long-time friend of Ginetta Sagan is devoted to building the Fund to ensure women’s leadership on human rights

“I’ll keep donating to the Ginetta Sagan Fund because I feel so fortunate to be able to do this. If there is one child, one mother, one family who has been helped by what I have given, then my contributions will have been well-placed.”

Jane Crocker remembers well the day more than a quarter-century ago that her then-husband came home very excited about a human rights advocate he had just met. “Justin told me about this amazing woman, Ginetta Sagan, and said I just had to meet her.” Within days, Jane and Ginetta were sitting down for coffee at Ginetta’s cozy kitchen table. It was the beginning of a relationship that would change Jane’s life.

“When I met Ginetta, I fell in love with her right away, as most people did. My connection with Ginetta was incredibly powerful. Ginetta lit something up in me that had not been lit before. I had never been really involved with anything. I had no idea the human rights work that was being done. I didn’t really even know what human rights were. But I learned very quickly.”

Jane rapidly became a part of Ginetta’s inner circle in Atherton, California where they both lived. She began donating both time and financial support to human rights organizations, including Amnesty International USA. “Ginetta was very, very strong and continually optimistic. She took me to meet all kinds of people from whom I learned so much.”

In 1994, when Ginetta was very ill with cancer, her husband Dr. Leonard Sagan came up with the idea of establishing the Ginetta Sagan Fund for Women and Children at Amnesty International USA as a way to honor Ginetta’s lifetime of service and to address the needs of the most vulnerable populations the world over. Jane was immediately, enthusiastically on board and became a founding donor to the GSF. She has given generously over the years and continues to be a major donor to this day.

“This work is vitally important to me,” says Jane. She believes the Ginetta Sagan Fund is a powerful agent of change and she has been moved, year after year, by the strength and courage of the Ginetta Sagan Award winners. “The only thing you can do is teach your children by example. And little by little they will understand what important principles are. This is what I do for my children.”

“The major reason I continue to support the Ginetta Sagan Fund is because I want my sons and their sons to respect women. I think it is so vitally important that young men know that they must respect the women in their lives. We need to take care of one another and say every single day, ’I will be there for you.’”

As for the future, Jane is resolute. “I will do whatever I can to help. I’ll keep donating to the Ginetta Sagan Fund because I feel so fortunate to be able to do this. If there is one child, one mother, one family who has been helped by what I have given, then my contribution will have been well-placed.”
“Corragio” to women risking their lives to defend others!

Please help support the Fund today.

In 1945, 20-year old Ginetta Sagan was imprisoned and tortured almost beyond endurance by Italian Fascist forces who discovered that she was working for the Resistance. But something happened that gave her hope and the will to persevere. One day, a guard handed her a loaf of bread. Inside the bread was a matchbox that contained a piece of paper with a single word written on it.

"Corragio! Courage!"

"I knew then that I would be all right," said Ginetta. "Someone knew what was happening to me. Someone cared."

The Ginetta Sagan Award for Women’s and Children’s Rights, given annually in honor of her human rights legacy, serves to pass on that message of courage to women fighting for human rights under dangerous conditions.

The award recognizes the exceptional bravery of women who stand up to tyranny. It shines a bright light on abuses being uncovered and exposes injustices on the world stage. And it pays tribute to the recipient and the work of all individuals defending human rights, often at great personal risk.

When you support the Ginetta Sagan Fund, you are supporting heroes. Each year the Ginetta Sagan Committee awards a cash grant of $10,000 to a courageous woman who risks her life in defense of human rights. It brings her work to the attention of the press and world leaders.

When you make a gift to the Ginetta Sagan Fund, you are saying “corragio” to human rights advocates everywhere. Thank you for your support.

The Ginetta Sagan Fund has no paid staff.
All Committee Members volunteer their time and services.

100% of your gift goes towards supporting women human rights defenders.

The Ginetta Sagan Committee is grateful for the financial support of individuals and to Amnesty International USA, which collaborates with us in recognizing the extraordinary work of human rights advocates year after year.

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