

Amnesty International USA
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Amnesty International USA Honors Zimbabwean Woman Who Fights to Empower Girls and Keep Them in School

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Betty Makoni Is 2008 Winner of Human Rights Organization's Ginetta Sagan Award For Women's and Children's Rights

(New York) -- On Saturday, April 26, Amnesty International USA will honor Betty Makoni, 37, a former high school teacher in Zimbabwe who has empowered hundreds of thousands of girls to stay in school, despite overwhelming violence and poverty in their homes and communities. Makoni, who herself was sexually abused at age six and saw her mother die from abuse at home, is changing attitudes in her country and helping girls resist exploitation by joining the Girl Child Network she formed a decade ago to support and uplift them. On the strength of Makoni's success -- 3,000 girls from her network have gone on to become doctors, lawyers, teachers and other professionals -- the program is being replicated elsewhere in Africa and in Canada, Europe and the United States.

Makoni, who has exposed alleged sexual crimes against girls and has been threatened and detained as a result, will receive the 2008 Ginetta Sagan Award for Women's and Children's Rights during Amnesty International's Annual General Meeting in Arlington, Va.

On the following Monday, April 28, Makoni will join hundreds of Amnesty International activists for a Lobby Day on Capitol Hill, which will focus on gaining new sponsors for the International Violence Against Women Act. The bipartisan legislation introduced in the U.S. Senate would for the first time leverage American diplomacy abroad and foreign aid to stop the epidemic of violence against girls and women worldwide.

From April 28-May 4, The Ginetta Sagan Fund of Amnesty International USA will sponsor Makoni on a speaking tour of major U.S. cities. She will meet with lawmakers, public officials, NGOs, foundations, journalists and women's organizations in New York, Washington DC and San Francisco.

The Ginetta Sagan Award, named for the late Presidential Medal of Freedom winner and longtime Amnesty International activist, recognizes women who devote their lives to ending human rights abuses against women and children. Makoni will receive \$10,000 from the Ginetta Sagan Fund to advance her work in Zimbabwe.

"Violence against women and girls is an outrage worldwide that costs girls their health, their childhoods, their education and their dignity," said Larry Cox, executive director of Amnesty International USA. "Betty Makoni's extraordinary commitment to help girls in Zimbabwe -- at considerable risk to her own life -- shows us that individuals can change the world and end suffering. Amnesty International USA is proud to honor this amazing woman as we campaign to prevent abuse and exploitation around the globe."

Makoni founded the network of girls' clubs and shelters in 1998 when, as a schoolteacher, she saw that two-thirds of her female students had left school because of rape and other violence,

extreme poverty or the HIV-AIDS infection. In a country where 25 percent of girls do not go to school at all, the network has spread to most of the country's rural districts, enrolling 35,000 girls today and 500,000 since it started. With support from international charities and foundations, the network provides scholarship money and other funds to help girls gain an education.

Makoni lost her own mother at age nine to violence in the home. She realized that unless attitudes changed in her country and women began to speak out against violence, the abuse would continue with impunity. Makoni has publicly exposed alleged sexual crimes by highly influential and powerful men and she has been threatened, detained, and arrested in retaliation.

Julianne Cartwright Traylor of San Francisco, co-chair of the Ginetta Sagan Fund, said: "Betty Makoni is following in the extraordinary footsteps of Ginetta Sagan, a woman who never flinched when it came to defending human rights. With an estimated one in three women worldwide being abused, raped or exploited, Betty Makoni is a powerful example of how one individual can make a difference to end the suffering through tireless advocacy."

Andrea Damesyn Claburn, co-chair of the Fund and a close friend of the late Mrs. Sagan, said: "Betty's leadership defending the rights of girls has been an inspiration to women all over the globe who are struggling against entrenched attitudes and norms."

Ginetta Sagan, who died in 2000, devoted her life to human rights advocacy. During World War II, she worked with the Italian resistance to escort fugitive Jews, anti-fascists and others across the Swiss border. A founder of the first West Coast chapter of Amnesty International USA, she is credited as an activist with helping to save the lives of hundreds of prisoners of conscience in Greece, Chile, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Vietnam.

President Clinton honored Sagan's work with the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1996.

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For more information on Betty Makoni and the Ginetta Sagan Fund, please visit:

www.amnestyusa.org/ginettasagan

A short biography of Betty Makoni is available. Please contact Suzanne Trimel, 212-633-4150, or strimel@aiusa.org to receive it.