

Medal of Freedom Honors

President Obama presented the 2009 Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor in the United States, to 16 recipients on August 12.

The honor recognizes individuals who make an especially meritorious contribution to the security or national interests of the US, world peace, cultural or other significant public or private endeavors.

On presenting the awards President Obama noted that despite their diversity of backgrounds and accomplishments in a wide variety of fields from sports to public policy, from art, to science, "Each has been an agent of change. Each saw an imperfect world and set about improving it, often overcoming great obstacles along the way."

Awardees are:

•**Nancy Goodman Brinker** the founder of Susan G. Komen for the Cure, the world's leading breast cancer grass roots organization.

•**Stephen Hawking** the theoretical physicist who overcame a severe motor neuron disability, which confines him to a wheelchair, to become an internationally-recognized expert in his field.

•**Rev. Joseph Lowery** a civil rights leader since the early 1950s to the present working on issues from the Montgomery bus boycott in the US to Apartheid in South Africa.

•**Harvey Milk** who became the first openly gay elected official in 1977. He was killed in 1978 but remains a national and global pioneer of the LGBT civil rights movement for his leadership and dedication to equal rights.

•**Sandra Day O'Connor** the first woman to sit on the US Supreme Court.

•**Muhammad Yunus** the Nobel Prize winning global leader in anti-poverty efforts who pioneered the use of "micro-loans" to provide credit to poor individuals without collateral to better their livelihood and communities. His bank Grameen founded in 1983 is sustainable and 98% of its loans are repaid (a higher percentage than other banks) despite its low interest rates and lending to poor individuals.

•**Mary Robinson** the first woman president of Ireland, and a former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. (see article at left for a Fullerton connection)

•**Desmond Tutu** the Anglican Archbishop emeritus who was a leading anti-apartheid activist in South Africa.

•**Janet Davison Rowley** internationally renowned scientist who was the first to identify a chromosomal translocation as the cause of leukemia and other cancers. She is professor of Medicine, Molecular Genetics & Cell Biology and Human Genetics at the University of Chicago.

•**Joe Medicine Crow-High Bird** the last living Plains Indian war chief and author of seminal works in Native American history and culture. He holds a master's degree in anthropology and is a lecturer at universities and institutions including the UN.

•**Pedro José Greer, Jr.** a physician and the Assistant Dean of Academic Affairs at the Florida International University School of Medicine is the founder of Camillus Health Concern. The agency provides medical care to over 10,000 homeless patients per year in the city of Miami. He is also the founder of the St. John Bosco Clinic which provides medical care to the disadvantaged in the Little Havana community.

•**Senator Edward Kennedy** has served in the US Senate for 46 years and has been a leader in reforming public schools to strengthening civil rights laws. He has called affordable health care the "cause of his life" and is widely respected on both sides of the aisle for his commitment to progress and his ability to legislate.

•**Jack Kemp** US Congressman, Secretary of HUD, and Republican Nominee for VP in 1996, passed away in May 2009. He was self-described as a "bleeding heart conservative." He worked to encourage development in underserved urban communities and sought solutions to the challenge of poverty in the US and worldwide.

•**Billie Jean King** the acclaimed professional tennis player who has helped champion gender equality issues in sports and all areas of public life.

•**Chita Rivera** the accomplished actress, singer and dancer who broke barriers and inspired a generation of women to follow in her footsteps.

•**Sidney Poitier** the groundbreaking actor and first African American to win an Academy Award.

Mary Robinson Stood Up Against Anti-Semitism

by Rusty Kennedy

In September of 2001, the week before the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States, I had the honor of leading a delegation of California organizations to participate in the United Nations World Conference Against Racism in Durban South Africa.

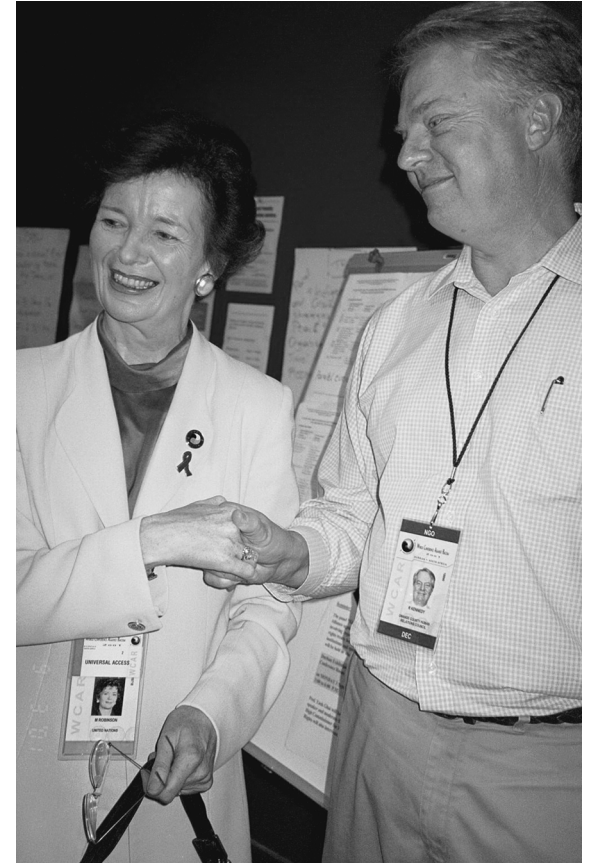
Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland, and current Medal of Freedom choice of President Obama, was the Chair of the UN Human Rights Commission and served as the convening authority. It was over that week that I came to know this patient and caring leader. She guided a nearly impossible process of building a consensus on a human rights declaration that all mankind could agree on.

You may remember that there were all sorts of international issues that threatened to overshadow this amazing process of setting a standard for humanity about how people should be treated as it related to human rights. There was a concerted effort by a small but organized group of Israel-haters who struggled to inject Anti-Semitic statements into various documents, the protests of the US and Israel that led to walk outs, as well as every conceivable issue from the Indian policies towards Dalits (formerly known as untouchables), to the European treatment of the Roma (formerly known as Gypsies), to the Muritanian government's system of slavery, to the persecution of Gays and Lesbians.

Through this chorus of voices there was raised a single minded direction from Mary Robinson that we must push forward to find common ground on human rights as it is the mission of the United Nations to embody civil discourse.

I witnessed one interaction that epitomized the strength of this fearless woman. The Non-Governmental Organizations, (NGO's) were incorporated into this process to help bring truth to the forefront when oppressive regimes were committing human rights violations and covering them up. The NGO's were there to tell another side of the story. The difficulty with the incorporation of the NGO input was that there so many of us, and

the process was so daunting. Unfortunately, a small group of Anti-Semitic activists were able to come into a late night final session of the NGO drafting committee, and inject Anti-Semitic language into the NGO statement that



Rusty Kennedy meeting Mary Robinson at the NGO session of the UN World Conference Against Racism in Durban South Africa on September 3, 2001.

was to be entered into the permanent record of the UN World Conference and Human Rights Commission.

Mary Robinson called a meeting of the NGO's the next morning, before the UN session was underway, and exposed the Anti-Semitic language injected into the statement to the many NGO's that did not stay till the bitter end of the process. And she concluded that she was, as Chair exercising her positional power to completely reject the NGO statement, based on its Anti-Semitic language from the entire record and UN process.

Mary Robinson stood up against Anti-Semitism as well as for human rights, and she is deserving of the Medal of Freedom being bestowed upon her by President Obama.

Rusty Kennedy is the executive director of the Orange County Human Relations Commission, which provides programs to foster understanding and respect between members of the diverse population of Orange County. He was born in Fullerton and he and his wife have raised their family here. He was also a founding member of the Fullerton Observer Community Newspaper. For more information on the work of the Orange County Human Relations go to www.ochumanrelations.org

ROK Takes Lead on Global Warming

The Republic of Korea (ROK, the official name of South Korea) is one of several countries taking the lead on the issue of climate change said UN Environment Program director Achim Steiner.

In Daejeon, 700 young people attending the largest ever UN-backed global youth gathering on global warming issued a call to take urgent action.

Ranging in age from 10 to 24, they issued a declaration entitled "Listen to Our Voices: The Future Needs Strong Vision and Leadership," emphasizing that "we need more actions and less talking."

"The young people's voices will and must be heard because they will inherit the outcomes of our actions," said UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

In January, the country launched a nearly \$40 billion stimulus plan, with more than 80% allocated to environmentally-friendly investment further expanding its "Green New Deal" into a five-year \$84 billion plan. The UNEP assessment notes that regulatory and fiscal reforms will drive sustainable growth.

Earlier this year, UNEP encouraged governments to seize the historic opportunity presented by the current financial and economic crises to increase public spending and private investment to promote green growth. ROK, China, Japan and Australia have seen the greatest share of economic stimulus packages channeled into environmental investment so far.

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