

“Duško Kondor“ Civil Courage Award, 2011.

Bosnian Cultural Center, Sarajevo.

22 February 2011.

Ambassador Jan Braathu

Royal Norwegian Embassy.

Ms. Broz, High Representative, Mayor Behmen, Dr. Kitzinger,
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour and a pleasure for me to participate again this year at the 2011 “Duško Kondor“ Civil Courage Award ceremony.

This is an important award. It commemorates the memory and legacy of an outstanding and courageous individual, Duško Kondor. It is even more important in that it preserves Duško Kondor’s legacy through the recognition of the civil courage of brave individuals, people who dared to take a stand, even though that put them at risk.

This recognition of civil courage serves as a reminder of the decency and courage found among our fellow citizens. It serves as an affirmation of human decency in the most difficult and trying of times. It reminds us that “good people” can indeed “save the world”.

These examples of civil courage are an encouragement and an inspiration. We need to reflect upon our role as citizens, indeed, on our responsibilities as citizens. Indeed, on the kind of human beings that we would like to be. It is up to us, difficult though it may be. The choice is ours: Do we follow the crowd, or do we “take the path less taken”?

Writing in 1937, when Fascism and Nazism were on the rise throughout our Europe, the Norwegian poet Arnulf Øverland penned the following lines in his poem, “You Must Not Sleep”:

*“You must not sit safely in your home
And say, It is sad, poor them!
You must not suffer so dearly well
The injustice that affects not yourself”*

Yet, while this may be easy to comprehend intellectually, it is much more difficult to put into action. There is a chasm between the thought and the act. In understanding this, and in overcoming it, we need the examples of others. It is not easy. It is always less dangerous to “sit safely” in our homes. It is much more challenging – indeed frightening – to take a stand, especially when that stands puts one on a lonely path. Nonetheless, this is what we as citizens and compassionate human beings, should aspire to. Indeed, we must, for our compassion and our sense of fairness and decency is what makes us human.

Some would say that it is up to the State of the Government to take responsibility. This is true, but it is not exclusively true. We *are* the State. We *are* the citizens of our countries and the institutions of government are our institutions. We *cannot* avoid responsibility, at the very least for our own sake and for the sake of our families, friends and communities.

As the United Nations resolution on the “Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to promote and protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms” from 1999 emphasizes: “*Everyone* has duties toward and within the community, in which alone the free and full development of his or her personality is possible.” The British philosopher Edmund Burke (1729 – 1797) is quoted as having said that “*All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing*”.

We as citizens also have responsibilities. We too must shoulder the burden of pushing for human rights and democratic processes. And this engagement necessitates that we all strive to act with civil courage. Civil courage among citizens is a prerequisite for all democratic societies. Citizens must be vigilant in their concern for the protection of human rights and democratic principles. It is a never-ending task. There is no country in which this job can be said to have been done once and for all.

The Duško Kondor Award sends the strong and clear message that citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina and neighbouring countries are willing and capable of defending their rights and those of their fellow citizens.

I am honoured to be present today, and to witness awards to five truly brave and remarkable people. They are an inspiration to us all.

Thank you.