



Current News

Goldman Prize Honors Environmental Crusaders

Eileen Wani Wingfield is a shy woman whose demeanor belies the ferocious anger she feels toward the Australian government.

After the government proposed to build a radioactive waste dump in southern Australia, Wingfield risked her life to stop it, lying in the path of bulldozers. She became the spokeswoman for an aboriginal group created to fight the dump.

Today, Wingfield and another aboriginal elder, Eileen Kampakuta Brown, will be honored in San Francisco with a Goldman Environmental Prize. The prize, established in 1990, is one of the world's most prestigious ecological awards.

Some in Australia see her as a terrorist, but for Wingfield, the nuclear waste dump was just the latest attempt to wipe out her people in the south Australian desert, where nuclear weapons tests and uranium mining, many believe, have caused high cancer rates among the indigenous population.

The radioactive dump in Australia would store waste from the country for up to 300 years. The government is moving forward on plans for the site.

"All I know is, I had to do something for my country and my children and everybody's children," Wingfield said. "We're trying our best, but we're not being listened to by anybody."

The Goldman prize honors grassroots environmental "heroes" from six geographic areas on the planet. Each receives a \$125,000 award. It was created by San Francisco philanthropist Richard Goldman and his late wife, Rhoda.

The other recipients this year are:

-- Von Hernandez, a Greenpeace activist who helped stop waste incineration - - and the pollution it created -- in the Philippines by making it an issue in the 1998 presidential race.

In the mid-1990s, there were many proposals to locate waste incinerators in poor urban areas. But after persuading the Catholic Church to oppose the incinerators, Hernandez also secured the backing of the opposition presidential candidate, Joseph Ejercito Estrada, who opposed the practice.

After Estrada won, a ban was enacted as part of the Clean Air Act of 1999. The ban faces continual challenges, but it has been reaffirmed in a subsequent act passed by the Philippine government that called for an increase in recycling.

-- Odigha Odigha, who has fought for the protection of Nigerian rain forests.

Odigha remembers that as a child, he walked six miles through the forest on his way to school. But today, those forests are one-tenth the size they

were 40 years ago. He said, "How do I relate my childhood experience to my children now? I felt a need to give all to what is left of the rain forest."

His life has been threatened because of his activism, and he even went underground and lived in communities in the forest for two years, until General Sani Abacha's death ended his regime's control over the country in 1998.

Odigha forced the country's first environmental assessment of forest land and led a successful campaign for a moratorium on logging in his state.

-- Pedro Arrojo-Agudo, a leading opponent of Spain's plan to build 120 new dams along the Mediterranean coast.

A physics and economics professor at the University of Zaragoza, he argues that the project is unnecessary pork legislation: "It's exploiting the aquifer in the area not for needs, but for deals."

The battleground is at the European Parliament. If activists convince European Union members that the project is wrong, the funding will dry up, he said. Arrojo has helped to organize protests that altogether have attracted more than one million people throughout Spain.

-- Julia Bonds, who has battled mining in West Virginia. Bonds worked as a waitress at Pizza Hut until 1997, when her 6-year-old grandson Andrew picked up a handful of dead fish in a West Virginia stream and asked, "What's wrong with these fish?"

Answering that question has put Bonds in the middle of the fight against mountaintop removal as a method for mining coal. "What we need to understand is, what we do today affects our children generations down the road," Bonds said.

Her fight now goes national, as she and other Appalachian people will tour the country this year to seek support for the Clean Water Protection Act, which would outlaw this type of mining.

-- Maria Elena Foronda Farro, who fought pollution caused by the fish-meal industry in Chimbote, Peru, the impoverished fishing port where she was raised.

Fish meal is used to make animal feed, fertilizers and preservatives, while untreated waste from production is often dumped in streams and sent through smokestacks.

Because of her activism, she and her soon-to-be husband were accused of being terrorists and sentenced to 20 years in prison by a secret jury in 1994. Her father, a union lawyer, appealed to the country's supreme court.

"The supreme court judge ordered the immediate liberation of both of them," said her father, Cupertino Foronda, who awaited his daughter's arrival in San Francisco as the old charges held up her visa application.

She spent 13 months in prison before the release was granted, however. Now, Farro and her husband continue to work with communities to educate them on monitoring the fish-meal industry.

By Wyatt Buchanan

©2003 San Francisco Chronicle



[Home](#) | [Features](#) | [News](#) | [Products](#) | [Employment](#) | [2003 Product Directory](#) | [Discussion](#)

[| Links](#)
[Card Deck](#) | [Search](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Free Newsletter](#) | [Reader Service](#) | [Advertising](#) |
[Contact](#)

© Copyright 2003 [Stevens Publishing Corporation](#)
5151 Beltline Road, 10th Floor, Dallas, Texas 75254
[Privacy Policy](#) | [Reprints](#)
Contact the [webmaster](#)