

## Corruption fighter, Afghan woman, rights group finalists for UBC integrity prize

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Sima Samar, president of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, looks on during a press conference at the end of the first day of the International Conference on Violence against Women, at the Italian Foreign Ministry headquarters in Rome, Wednesday, Sept. 9, 2009. Dr. Sima Samar is one of three finalists for the first-ever Allard Prize for International Integrity, from the UBC Law School. THE CANADIAN PRESS/AP-Riccardo De Luca

VANCOUVER - An international human rights group, an Indian corruption fighter and a campaigner for Afghan women's rights are the finalists for a \$100,000 human-rights prize to be handed out by the University of British Columbia's law school.

It is the inaugural Allard Prize for International Integrity, which will be one of the largest awards in the world given out for efforts to combat corruption and promote human rights.

Among the three finalists announced Monday is the group Global Witness.

Based in London and Washington, Global Witness has worked to raise awareness about conflict driven by natural resource exploitation, such as the blood diamond trade in Africa and the industries that fund the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia.

The group was co-nominated for the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize for its work on conflict diamonds.

The panel has also chosen Anna Hazare, founder of the group India Against Corruption. A former soldier, Hazare worked on environmental issues before taking on corrupt officials beginning in 1991.

He has been arrested leading public demonstrations demanding government accountability, and he has been credited with legal reforms to address official corruption in the nation.

The third finalist chosen from more than 100 nominees worldwide is Dr. Sima Samar, chairwoman of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission and a tireless campaigner for the rights of women in her war torn country.

A member of the minority Hazara people in Afghanistan, Samar fled to Pakistan as a refugee in 1979 during the Soviet invasion of the country.

From Pakistan, she helped open the first hospital for and staffed by women, and she founded the Shuhada Organization that at one time ran underground home school classes for girls. Today, the organization operates 118 schools in Afghanistan and for Afghan refugees in Pakistan, as well as four hospitals and 15 clinics in both countries.

Samar returned to Afghanistan after the Taliban government was toppled in 2002 and NATO forces, including Canada, launched a combat mission.

She served as deputy president and minister of women's affairs until she was forced to resign due to death threats she received following an interview with a Persian-language newspaper in Canada in which she questioned Islamic laws.

Samar told the prize committee the nomination was an honour.

"In fact, it is the recognition of my struggle in a country like Afghanistan; recognition of the women who survive watching the loss of their loved ones and the destruction of their property and country," she said in a statement from the university.

"It gives me courage to continue the struggle and also provides security, as my life is in danger daily."

The prize was established last October, with funding from UBC law school alumnus Peter Allard, in part to fill a gap in recognition for those who work to fight abuses of power and suppression of human rights.

"The focus of the prize is on trying to recognize individuals, movements or organizations that have demonstrated exceptional courage and leadership in combating corruption," said Mary Anne Bobinski, dean of the UBC law faculty that administers the prize.

It's an impressive list of nominees submitted from around the world, Bobinski said.

"It's a difficult task, obviously, choosing among these very inspiring individuals and organizations to select the prize winner."

The winner will be announced Sept. 25.