

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesman**

**For Immediate Release
2007/1092**

December 4, 2007

REMARKS

**Deputy Secretary of State John D. Negroponte
At the 2007 Associates of the American Foreign Service Worldwide
Secretary of State's Award for Outstanding Volunteerism Abroad**

**December 4, 2007
Benjamin Franklin Room
Washington, D.C.**

(10:30 a.m. EST)

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: Thank you very much, Faye [Barnes]. You mentioned my wife, Diana. I'm sorry she's not able to be here with us today, but she happens, as a matter of fact, Faye, to be back down in Mexico City. She went there last night for a conference which is where, as you point out, we first met.

I am delighted that you did invite me to participate in the Secretary of State Awards Ceremony. The Secretary wanted to be here herself but, as you know, she left for meetings in Africa and Europe this morning.

I'd like to extend a warm welcome to the family and friends of these Award winners and to other members of the State Department and DACOR Bacon who are present here today. I'm very pleased to have the opportunity this morning to recognize the work of five outstanding members of our State Department family who inspire us all: Neill Krost, Alison Padgett, Dennis Nice, Paul Sabatine and Maria Regina Pontes.

Secretary of State James Baker and Ambassador Steve Green have been the primary supporters of this Award and we thank them for their continued contribution. As you know, Secretary Rice has encouraged the State Department to practice and exemplify what she calls transformational diplomacy to support the growth of freedom and prosperity in every nation around the globe. We can draw our inspiration from the Award winners who are here today. Their volunteer efforts exemplify grassroots diplomacy at its best. Through their volunteer work in Benin, China, Croatia, Bangladesh and Nicaragua, these individuals have helped to make our world a safer, better and more caring place. And through their personal outreach, they have advanced the interests and ideals of our nation.

America is unique in its emphasis on volunteerism, both at home and abroad. This cultural norm is one of our highest attributes. The volunteer service performed by these five winners underscores the intent of the President's USA Freedom Corps in which he challenges all Americans to perform two years of volunteer service during their lives. Neill, Alison, Dennis,

Paul and Maria Regina have all answered that call. In addition to the exceptional work they have done to improve the quality of life for so many, they have inspired others in their communities to volunteer as well.

So it gives me great pleasure now to present the Secretary of State Award winners with their certificates signed by the Secretary along with checks for \$2,500 -- even though we're on a continuing resolution. (Laughter.)

MS. BARNES: We've got generous people (inaudible) -- we and the Secretary of State.

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: There we are.

MS. BARNES: Continuing resolution or not.

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: Does not count.

MS. BARNES: Obviously, we are not funded by the federal government, so we are not restricted by continuing resolutions. We have very generous donors.

The first Award is from the African Bureau and it is Neill Krost, Cotonu, Benin. And I'm going to read the citation -- I going to put my glasses on -- "In recognition of the lasting improvement he has made in the quality of life of orphans struggling to survive amidst the harsh realities of life in West Africa."

(The Award was presented.)

(Applause.)

MR. KROST: Well, thank you. It is certainly an honor to be here today. I would like to thank Ambassador Brown, the Ambassador to Cotonu, Benin for nominating me for this award. I do feel it is an honor. It is really the first time in my life I've ever volunteered for anything. I initially thought I was just going to visit the orphanage to say hello. But when I got there, I became overwhelmed by the situation with the children and just my heart opened up to them and it was hard not to do anything. And I made a commitment right then and there to follow through and try to make a difference in their lives. And what seemed to happen was that the more I got into it, the more other people also got into it and things just kind of spun up. And we were able to get one thing done, then another thing done. And before too long, we had a major program underway.

As I was doing research in trying to put together my thoughts to create a website and generate some revenue for the project, I came across a quote from Mother Teresa that really touched home for me and it said something like this: They don't need your money. What they need is your hearts to love them. And then once you -- their hearts love them, the money comes. And so no matter how tired I would get or busy with my other work that quote always came back to me and it was able to give me fortitude to keep going and to get the other people involved.

So I do accept this Award on behalf of all the people that were involved in the project in Benin. It wasn't just me. It was a lot of people. Special thanks go out to my wife who was very instrumental in every facet and kept pushing me, to one of my FSNs, (inaudible), who helped me design the dining room that we're going to build for the kids. And just to the whole community, it was a group effort.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

MS. BARNES: Thanks, Neill. I encourage you to take a look at the laptop on your way out, where we have Neill's particular project -- the PowerPoint going -- and some of the kids in the orphanage and some of the projects that he was working on. It really is pretty amazing what one committed American can do.

Our next winner is from the East Asia/Pacific Region, EAP, Allison Padget, from Beijing, China. The citation reads: "In recognition of the outstanding dedication she has shown in providing medical care and nutritional support and guidance to orphans in China."

(The Award was presented.)

(Applause.)

MS. PADGET: Thank you very much. This is an honor. It's an honor every day that I get to work with the children in China. As you know, there are many, many orphans in China and there's a lot of need there. I'd like to take the opportunity to point out people who've done so much more than I have because I do help with a formula and keeping track of the medical care for the children, but there are so many volunteers from all over the world that work there. There are people who run foster homes for these kids. There are people who specialize in certain diseases. There are medical foster homes that take in all kinds of children with disabilities and serious medical problems. There are volunteers from all over the world that go out to rural orphanages and live in places I'm happy, frankly, to go and leave. I do not want to live there.

And the way they go there and they live and they run hospices for infants who aren't going to survive the system. There are Chinese families now who are starting to foster children permanently. They can't adopt them, but they can foster, which is something that they're doing against their culture and it takes a lot of bravery and heart to do so that. So I'd like to take this opportunity to recognize all of them. You don't get much thanks in a rural Chinese orphanage. So this is an opportunity to point out what they have done and they inspire me and I hope that I can have that kind of heart someday. Thank you. (Applause.)

MS. BARNES: Thanks, Alison. Might point out that Alison has a background in nutrition and she uses this background in nutrition in her work with the orphanage, so it is a good example of how you use the skills that you have in the place that you land. And she's made I think some very good choices.

Our next winner is from the European Bureau, Dennis Nice from Zagreb, Croatia. The citation reads: "In recognition of his outstanding service to both the missions and international communities as chairman of the board of the American International School of Zagreb."

(The Award was presented.)

(Applause.)

MR. NICE: I'd first like to thank Ambassador Bradtke, the Ambassador of Croatia for nominating me for this award and to the European Bureau for funding my trip back here. (Laughter.)

It's been a privilege and an honor to volunteer my time and efforts to the American International School of Zagreb to make it a better school for the entire international community and the children who attend our school. I didn't volunteer expecting this. I did it because I saw a need and I had the expertise and education to help them. I couldn't have done it without the support of the community. This school has gone through some very trying and struggling times in the past three years. Financially we were in very poor shape. Now, we finally are in the black and we're looking at building a new school. Once again, it was my privilege and honor to help the school. And hopefully there's many more volunteers out there that will follow in my footsteps. Thanks.

(Applause.)

MS. BARNES: Thanks, Dennis. And for those of you who think that the last name "Nice" sounds a little familiar, his wife, Marlene is one of the three editors of our new *Realities of Foreign Service Life, Part 2*. And she was formerly in the newspaper business. So we're very happy that Dennis is here today and we send our greetings and thanks to Marlene as well.

Our next winner is from the NEA and South Central Asia Bureau. He is not able to be with us today, but his mother, Karen Sabatine is coming to accept his award. Paul Sabatine, Dhaka, Bangladesh is the recipient and of course, we know the cyclone in Bangladesh everybody's on duty, so he could not make it today. "In recognition of his compassion and leadership in furthering the education of street children and providing employment options for destitute women in Dhaka." (Applause.)

MS. SABATINE: I am Karen Sabatine, Paul Sabatine's mother. I live in Portland, Oregon and friends bought me this ticket in hopes that I could come to D.C., attend this ceremony, and spend a few days with my son who I haven't seen in a couple of years. But as all of you know, life doesn't always go as we planned. Bangladesh was hit by a Category 4 cyclone and Paul isn't able to leave. He needs to be in Bangladesh helping with recovery efforts. But I am so honored to receive this Award.

Paul has done a couple of things that he shared with me. He volunteers at a small school not far from the embassy that was actually started by the spouse of a USAID officer with the idea of educating street children. With Paul's help, the school's enrollment has risen and the school is thriving. He also volunteered to manage and promote sales of handicrafts created by a

cooperative of destitute women in Dhaka. With his help, through financial and management skills, he is now -- they're funding 50 women with support. I am honored to receive this on behalf of my son. I know he is honored because if and when he leaves Bangladesh, a piece of him will be left there. Thank you. (Applause.)

MS. BARNES: Thank you, Karen, and you obviously have some very good friends in Oregon to send you here. Thank you so much for coming.

Our last recipient today is from the Western Hemisphere area and is Maria Regina Pontes. She's receiving this Award for the work that she did in Managua, Nicaragua. She's currently in Brazil.

The citation reads, "In recognition of her exceptional work in igniting the personal initiative and self-reliance of the women of the impoverished rural community of Los Amadores."

(The Award was presented.)

(Applause.)

MS. PONTES: I'd like to thank you for recognizing this work. I believe that change only happens through education and attitudes. It is my opportunity (inaudible) persons who live in extreme poverty to discover their potential, overcoming limitations, and respecting these individual differences. Hands which were held out for alms now make art, the sustainability of using recycled newspaper allows for 20 persons and indirectly their family members to continue working. I heard just recently that they have made 200 pieces which will be sent to the United States.

Daniel, thank you for motivation, patience, and support, whose work gave me this opportunity. I also thank my mother, Yolanda, for teaching me the technique and the Asociacion de Damas Diplomaticas y Misiones Internacionales of Nicaragua for letting me into the community and my great friend (inaudible). I hope to be an example to my daughter, Claudine, and to other people. Thank you. (Applause.)

(The Award was presented.)

(Applause.)

MS. BARNES: We're going to take a few minutes here to do a group photograph, but I'd like to read something that was in, actually, Maria Regina's nomination and I think it applies to every one of these individuals, these winners today, and to volunteer efforts around the world, particularly in developing countries. And this says, "Maria is a family member who believes that poverty and ignorance can be overcome by motivation, education, self-reliance, and most of all, opportunity." And I think that just kind of sums up what all of these people have done in their respective countries. (Applause.)

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: Today's Awards ceremony also pays tribute to the 2007 recipients of the Dorman Award and the Tragen Award. The Dorman Award is an internal

honor given by the Association of American Foreign Service worldwide, which recognizes a member who has modeled Ms. Dorman's many contributions to the organization. The Tragen Award honors the memory of Eleanor Dodson Tragen and recognizes a family member who has advocated effectively for Foreign Service spouse and family benefits.

Unfortunately, I won't be able to stay for the presentations, but I do want to congratulate the winners of these prestigious Awards as well. All of these awards today exemplify the power of volunteer service and how the actions of one person can positively impact the lives of so many. So again, I thank all of you for your continued service and the example that you set. You are an inspiration to all of us and it has been a great pleasure and an honor for me to participate in this Awards ceremony. Thank you very, very much. (Applause.)

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