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FRONT LINE AWARD 2009
Martin Sheen Presents Front Line Award 2009 to Dr Yuri Melini of Guatemala

The Annual Front Line Award for human rights defenders is given to a human rights defender who has made an outstanding contribution to defending the rights of others. at great personal risk to themselves.

Today in Dublin ,Front Line, honoured two outstanding people in Dublin's historic City Hall.

Dr Yuri Melini was awarded the Front Line Award because of his work to uphold the rights indigenous people of Guatemala against the ruthless interests of the logging and mining companies who put the profits of their companies before the interests of the community.

On 4 September Yuri Melini was shot 7 times as he was leaving his home and as a result spent 22 days in intensive care. He was shot because his human rights work challenged the interests of powerful people.

Yuri Melini in the last two years has documented 128 attacks on environmental activists and has the led the campaign to bring the assassins of environmental campaigners lawyer Erwin Ochoa López and Julio Armando Vásquez (CONAP - Guatemalan National Council of Protected Areas - workers) to justice. They were murdered because of the work they were carrying out in relation to the legal defence of protected areas on Guatemala's Atlantic Coast.

In accepting the Award Dr Melini said “I accept this award on behalf of the people of Guatemala because the environment belongs to everyone, not just to one small group. In Guatemala there should be room for everyone irrespective of their point of view. This is why I dedicate myself to continue the struggle for human rights in Guatemala”

The Award was presented by actor and activist Martin Sheen.

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Presenting the Award Martin Sheen said “As a strong supporter of the work of Front Line I am proud to be here today to lend my support to Dr Yuri Melini, a courageous man who has chosen to dedicate his life to defending the rights of others. His work to protect the environment will have a lasting benefit for the whole community”.

For the first time Front Line presented an Exceptional Award which went to Irishman John Ging who is head of the United Nation Relief works in Gaza.

According to John Ging “I am very grateful for this Award but for me the true heroes of this dark chapter of Gaza’s history are the people of Gaza and the refugees whom the United Nations Relief and Works Agency serves”

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