

## ***2/27/2016 Memorial for Concepcion Picciotto***

*Remarks by Concepcion Picciotto's attorney, First Amendment Lawyer*

**Mark Goldstone** <[mqlaw@comcast.net](mailto:mqlaw@comcast.net)>, cell 301-346-9414

Thank you to Kathy, Helen, Cynde, Ellen, Ann, Jack and Luther Place Church and others here who have tirelessly worked with and for Connie, vigiled with her, sat with her, argued with her, got screamed at by her.

I have 2 minutes to sum up the life and work of Concepcion. I was honored to serve as her attorney. I described her as a living monument to the First Amendment to our Constitution. She was a 35 year tribute to freedom of speech, the most important right that we all enjoy. Connie stood for the right of all Americans to gather, to speak, to speak out, to communicate, to petition the Government for redress of grievances. She was the Cal Ripken of protest. She was the Iron Woman. She did this 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for 35 years. 35 years.

When I would go down to Lafayette Park to speak with her, every time I would meet someone who would exclaim, "Oh my, I can't believe she is still out here protesting. I remember her from 25 years ago when I visited the White House in high school, and now I am visiting again with my kids and she is still here!"

She dealt with the awful DC weather -- the rain, the snow (I love the photo on the program), the heat, the g-d awful (can I say that here?) humidity, the cold, wind, and the National Park Service who on occasion would either arrest her or attempt to dismantle her vigil site. But Connie persevered. Yes, Connie persevered. In fact she became known more for her perseverance than any tangible impact on policy. But she was an important symbol of our free society -- this protest was the longest running protest in American history and people feeling free to speak out.

Her steadfast vigil for peace and for a nuclear weapons free world led many to believe that she was crazy. No, what is crazy is the idea that back in 1981 when the Peace and anti nuclear vigil started the US and the Soviet Union had a combined 53 thousand nuclear warheads pointed at each other. This was an official US doctrine called mutual assured destruction or MAD, and it surely was MAD, to think that thousands of nuclear warheads, each substantially more powerful than the bombs which destroyed thousands of people and leveled the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, would somehow keep us safe. The concept sounds crazy -- the full-scale use of nuclear weapons by opposing sides would cause the complete annihilation of both the attacker and the defender, so neither side would use the weapons...

So thank you Connie for pointing out the madness of Mutual Assured Destruction. Thank you Connie for your tireless vigil to reduce nuclear weapons.

Did she and the vigil have any impact? Well, we recently negotiated a treaty with Russia called New Start that reduced the numbers down to a total of 3050 active nuclear warheads each, total of 6100, down from 53,000

This costs \$348 billion over the next 10 years, to maintain, upgrade and operate the US nuclear arsenal. The United States had a military and defense budget of \$601 Billion in 2015; more than the next seven highest spending countries combined, and yet 48 million Americans struggle with hunger -- 15% of our population. Everyone here understands what I am saying.

So, Connie, once described by Washington Post as a “diminutive woman perpetually clad in a helmet and headscarf, dismissed by many as foolish, perhaps unwell,” ... thank you for pointing out by your vigil -- your life work -- exactly who and what is crazy? So rest in peace, Connie, vigil in peace Connie...Thank you very much.

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*I am honored to read remarks by **Chris Hedges, a journalist, writer, activist, and Presbyterian Minister:***

All forms of resistance are moral acts. These acts sustain another narrative. They are a physical manifestation of hope. Hope must be seen and felt to be real. It entails sacrifice. It is not for the fainthearted or the easily discouraged. It requires faith, a belief that your act of resistance draws the good to the good, even if all the empirical evidence around you says otherwise. You do not know, and you may never know, whose conscience you have prodded, whose soul you have touched, who you have sustained in times of trial.

There are survivors from perhaps the greatest war crime in human history -- the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki -- who know who Concepcion Picciotto was, who understood that there were and are Americans ready to repent for the crimes of empire and fight for a world where this could never happen again. There are grieving mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, whose lives will always be filled with loss and despair who know who Concepcion was. There are men and women, returned from war crippled by physical and emotional wounds, who know who Concepcion was. Concepcion's singular and sustained act of protest gave to those who carry this pain inside of them some solace.

The lives of resisters, to the practical, are dismissed as futile. The elites do not speak the language of hope. They speak in the cold, dead words of power, profits, national security, violence and fear. If the language of hope is to endure it requires those who, like Concepcion, are willing to hold fast to the virtues and ideals that alone can heal the world. May the light she carried endure within each of us. May we stand up to evil when we should stand up. May we speak truth when we should speak truth. May we always resist. This light, the light Concepcion held up, is called love. If we trust in this light we will discover that it is the most powerful force on earth.

*Thank you to Chris Hedges for these powerful statements.*

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*I am also honored to read the remarks of **Ralph Nader -- political activist, author, lecturer, peoples attorney, and former Presidential candidate:***

Remarks by Ralph Nader at the memorial service for Concepcion Picciotto (1945-2016)

For nearly 35 years - Concepcion Picciotto conducted her amazing, utterly amazing, day and night anti-nuclear peace vigil, the longest continual civic-political protest in US history. Her moral achievement affirming a belief in strength through peace; her physical endurance surviving snowstorms, hurricanes,

subzero temperatures and summer heat; her strong survival capacities and resilience under physical and verbal abuse; "the Little Giant", as she was described, an immigrant from Spain as a young woman, set the highest standards for testing the authenticity of free speech protection under the Constitution. What a persistent fierceness propelled her peace mission.

The encampment of Concepcion Picciotto and William Thomas (whose vigil she joined in 1981 and who died in 2009) in front of Lafayette Park on the sidewalk across from the White House evidences a persistence and "permanence" to this extraordinary vigil with its creative signage of provocative messages. Their robust commanding presence created what the Northern Ireland Times dubbed a moral "Maginot line" and its occupants "Watchers at the Gate," a daily reminder to presidents that nuclear weapons of mass destruction will doom all of humanity. Not one president deigned to speak with these staunch peace activists either directly or through emissaries. The National Park Service Police continued to watch for opportunities to evict her, should any one of numerous regulations be broken, such as stretching out for some sleep. Concepcion had to perch on a wooden crate for catnaps through the night or pace back and forth to keep from freezing.

Still, Concepcion Picciotto did not succumb to despair. She presided over her project with an iron determination and courage. Her instructive signs included President Eisenhower's prescient warnings against the power of the military-industrial complex. She and William Thomas prevailed in court to keep the signs in front of the White House, including the succinctly powerful message: "Live by the Bomb, Die by the Bomb."

Her supportive friends were astonished by her resiliency. Undaunted by the vagaries and unimaginable hardships of her 24 hours-per-day sidewalk life of protest, Concepcion Picciotto forged ahead. She was a champion in the great marathon for a peaceful world, unfailingly challenging the many tourists from all over the world who daily passed by her headquarters - to choose peace over war, violence, and nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. All were touched by this uncommon expression of civic stamina. "If the people have what they need," she argued, "there would be no need to fight." When asked why she persisted, she replied "for the children" who must be taught to "respect and value LIFE, not material things." Her message was both simple and powerful.

Concepcion Picciotto - we applaud your extraordinary journey, your deep caring for a peaceful future and we thank you for maintaining the ramparts at your White House Protest site - Peace Park Anti-Nuclear Vigil - so long a visible reminder that the ultimate insanity is war and militarism. We thank you for urging in imaginative ways that we choose sane policies shaped by the philosophy that enduring national strength comes through waging peace.

*Thank you to the great Ralph Nader for these amazing remarks.*

*And now I am honored to introduce DC Councilman **David Grosso, David is chair of the Education Commmittee for DC Council**, first elected in 2012. In addition to education issues, David is focusing on addressing inequities within the criminal justice system, improving health care, promoting transparency and open governmanet. Council man Grosso...*