



ABRAHAM LINCOLN BRIGADE ARCHIVES

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In response to the refugee crisis worldwide, migrant rescue operation receives major human rights award

New York — On April 16, 2017, the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives (ALBA) will present the **ALBA/Puffin Award for Human Rights Activism** to the Spanish non-governmental organization **Proactiva Open Arms** in support of their ongoing efforts to rescue migrants crossing the Mediterranean Sea. One of the largest monetary awards for human rights in the world, this **\$100,000 cash prize** is granted annually by ALBA and the Puffin Foundation to honor the nearly 3,000 Americans who volunteered in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) to fight fascism under the banner of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade.

“The past two years have seen the largest migration crisis since World War II,” says ALBA’s executive director Marina Garde. “The failure of world leaders to address this crisis and the growing intolerance in the United States will only push more refugees to undertake dangerous journeys to find safety. The work of Proactiva Open Arms in protecting refugees and highlighting the injustices they face, has never been more important. ALBA is proud to honor this group.”

Originally Proactiva was a maritime service company, specializing in commercial lifeguard and rescue services. In September 2015, after seeing media coverage of drowned children in the Aegean Sea, Proactiva’s director Oscar Camps travelled to the island of Lesbos with one member of the company to see if they could help. As they witnessed refugees landing on the beaches, they decided to stay in Lesbos and rescue people coming ashore. “We started out using our own money and our arms and fins as the only resources but have greatly expanded our operation since then, thanks to donations from civil society,” explains Oscar Camps. Proactiva Open Arms now has rescue teams on the beaches of Lesbos and a ship patrolling off the Libyan coast. Over 17,000 people have been rescued by Proactiva Open Arms since July 2016 in the Mediterranean Sea.

This cause is important to Spanish history and to ALBA. The Spanish Civil War led to one of the first large-scale refugee disasters of the twentieth century. When the fascist forces triumphed, five hundred thousand Spaniards fled the dictatorship. In a haunting echo of today, most of the world refused to take in any of these refugees—with the exception of Mexico—and many were sent back to suffer under Franco’s regime or turned over to the Nazis.

The ALBA/Puffin Award for Human Rights Activism is an initiative to sustain the legacy of the experiences, aspirations, and idealism of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. It supports contemporary international activists and human rights causes. The Award was created by visionary and philanthropist Perry Rosenstein, President of the Puffin Foundation, which established an endowed fund for this human rights award in 2010.

Award Ceremony – Sunday April 16th at 4:45 pm. Reception to follow.
Museum of the City of New York
1220 5th Avenue
New York, NY 10029

BACKGROUND

The Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives: www.alba-valb.org

The Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives (ALBA) is an educational non-profit dedicated to promoting social activism and the defense of human rights. ALBA's work is inspired by the American volunteers of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade who fought fascism in the Spanish Civil War (1936-39). Drawing on the ALBA collections in New York University's Tamiment Library, and working to expand such collections, ALBA works to preserve the legacy of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade as an inspiration for present and future generations.

Other recipients of the ALBA/ Puffin Award for Human Rights Activism include investigative journalists Lydia Cacho and Jeremy Scahill; Judge Baltasar Garzón; Kate Doyle and Fredy Peccerelli, who work to expose human rights violations in Guatemala; United We Dream, a national network of youth-led immigrant activist organizations that fight for the rights of millions of undocumented immigrants in the United States, and public-interest lawyer Bryan Stevenson.

The Puffin Foundation: www.puffinfoundation.org

Since it was founded in 1983, the Puffin Foundation Ltd. has sought to open the doors of artistic expression by providing grants to artists and art organizations who are often excluded from mainstream opportunities due to their race, gender, or social philosophy. The Puffin, a species whose nesting sites were endangered by encroaching civilization, were encouraged to return to their native habitats through the constructive efforts of a concerned citizenry. The Foundation has adopted the name Puffin as a metaphor for how it perceives its mission, which is to ensure that the arts continue to grow and enrich our lives. In so doing it has joined with other concerned groups and individuals toward achieving that goal. The Puffin Foundation is also a long-standing supporter of ALBA's educational mission.

Proactiva Open Arms: www.proactivaopenarms.org

Proactiva Open Arms is a NGO whose mission is to rescue refugees crossing to Europe to escape wars, persecution, or poverty. Born from a commercial lifeguard service, they specialize in aiding and rescuing migrants and refugees who need help in the Aegean and central Mediterranean Sea, as well as raising awareness about mass migration and injustices those migrants face.