



*Woman of Courage Award  
Jessica Ernst*

Today UNANIMA International is extremely pleased to present its fourth annual award for a woman of courage - one who embodies those qualities which we believe essential for the advancement of women everywhere - solidarity, a passion for human rights, commitment, and courage in the face of power which threatens life.

UNANIMA International is a nongovernmental organization working for systemic change at the international level at the United Nations. It is made up of 17 congregations of women religious with more than 17,000 members working in 72 countries. UNANIMA International has three priorities in its work for systemic change: women and children living in conditions of poverty, immigrants and refugees and the welfare of the planet.

Currently, UNANIMA International has two major international campaigns. The longest going and most developed is the campaign to "Stop the Demand for Trafficking in Women and Children". We consider the buying and selling of persons, especially women and children for sexual exploitation to be driven by the buyers of sex and fuelled by pornography and profit. The sexual exploitation of prostitution and sex tourism using women and children is rooted in poverty and in the structural inequalities between women and men. They are the violation of the human rights of trafficked women and children and are inherently violent and demeaning.

Our second campaign, however, is our Water = Life campaign and it is because of this campaign that we have chosen to give this year's WOMAN OF COURAGE award to Jessica Ernst, a scientist with 30 years petroleum industry experience. Ms. Ernst is suing the Alberta government, Energy Resources Conservation Board (ERCB) and EnCana for negligence and unlawful activities.

Nearly a decade ago EnCana, one of the world's largest natural gas producers, began a risky and experimental drilling program that applied intense hydraulic fracturing for shallow coalbed methane throughout central Alberta. Ms. Ernst's statement of claim alleges that EnCana broke multiple provincial laws and regulations and contaminated a shallow aquifer that supplied drinking water to the Rosebud community with natural gas and toxic industry-related chemicals. The claim methodically reports how Alberta's two key groundwater regulators, Alberta Environment and the ERCB, "failed to follow the investigation and enforcement processes that they had established and publicized." The allegations have yet to be proven in court. UNANIMA applauds Ms. Ernst's courage to stand up for her rights in the face of the powerful entities who the

cause of the degradation of fresh water supplies for herself, her neighbors and the flora and fauna of the region.

The UNANIMA International WOMAN OF COURAGE award is symbolized by this flame, which captures the passion, energy and commitment that Jessica demonstrates in trying to protect our environment and especially the natural resource of water. The flame is mounted on a piece of oak from the mighty oak tree known for its strength and endurance. The oak tree is one that is deeply anchored and steadfast amidst buffeting by winds and storms. It also symbolizes a perennial birthing of new life and hope. The copper plate on which her name is engraved is also a symbol of the deeply spiritual values which underlie the passion she has in her struggle to overcome the injustices brought about by the predatory search for profits at whatever cost to present and future generations. Her voice has become a source of hope and empowerment for all of us engaged in this same struggle.

Jessica Ernst embodies these values and generates life and hope. It is with immense pleasure that we award the fourth annual UNANIMA International Woman of Courage to Jessica Ernst.