

The International Labor Rights Forum's 2019 Labor Rights Defender Awardees

Gaspar Matalaev - a journalist for Alternative Turkmenistan News (ATN), was tortured, denied legal counsel, and imprisoned over two years ago after publishing a story documenting state-sponsored forced labor in the Turkmen cotton sector. Matalaev was arrested the night of October 4, 2016, two days after his report on state-orchestrated forced labor of children and adults in Turkmenistan's cotton harvest was posted on ATN's website. Matalaev was one of the few independent monitors working undercover to reveal the state-run nature of forced and child labor during cotton harvests in one of the world's most authoritarian countries, where the government treats refusal to contribute to the cotton harvest as insubordination, incitement to sabotage, and even 'contempt of the homeland.' ILRF's campaign to free Gaspar is ongoing.

Justice for Port Drivers Campaign – The Justice for Port Drivers campaign is an inspiration for thousands of US workers who are being misclassified and abused by the gig economy. The campaign has exposed cases of debt bondage among port truck drivers who, in becoming independent contractors, were trapped in a cycle of debt, unable to leave their jobs without also losing the money they had invested in financing their own trucks. *USA Today's* investigation found that port trucking companies in Southern California have spent the past decade forcing drivers to work against their will – up to 20 hours a day – by requiring them to finance their own trucks. Among the retail giants these drivers are hauling goods for are Amazon, Walmart, Target, and Lowe's. In 2018, more than 50 human rights and social justice organizations signed a public letter denouncing these abuses and voicing their support for Port Drivers.

Rep. Jackie Speier (D-CA) – Representative Speier is a longtime advocate of and fearless fighter for women's equality and leadership at work. She co-sponsored a bi-cameral resolution on women's rights at work, which she developed in consultation with the ILRF, AFL-CIO, and others. She also sponsored the more recent ME TOO Congress Act and supports the new ILO Convention on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work, which is being negotiated this year. Representative Speier is dedicated not only to her constituents in San Francisco and San Mateo counties, but to workers' rights globally. She was named to Newsweek's list of 150 "Fearless Women" in the world and was named one of "Politico's 50" most influential people in American politics for bringing the 'Me Too' reckoning to Congress.

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Each year, the ILRF Awards ceremony brings together policy leaders, labor activists, and an increasingly diverse group of internationalists who know that human rights and economic justice depend on the ability of workers and their advocates to speak out and defend human rights at work.

ILRF honors trailblazers, both nationally and internationally, for their innovation and visionary leadership in labor rights advocacy, from fighting for safe and just working conditions to demanding corporate accountability.

Each honoree is a courageous domestic or international worker rights leader who is a) amplifying the voices of workers b) standing against worker rights abuses wherever they occur c) driving labor or corporate accountability policies to improve workers' lives. These impressive individuals are leading labor rights defenders in their own respective community, region, and/or country.

Previous Labor Rights Defenders Awardees include Rep. Marcy Kaptur, Senator Tom Harkin, State Enterprises Workers' Relations Confederation, Familias Unidas por la Justicia, Eve Ensler, Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC) United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW), Sindicato de Trabajadores la Agroindustria Y Similares (STAS), Migrant Workers Rights Network (MWRN), Communication Workers of America, Congressman George Miller, Maquila Worker Organizing Project of the CGT Honduras, the U.S. Steel Workers, and the Tobacco and Allied Workers Union of Malawi.

Date: May 22, 2019

Location: Studio Theatre, 1501 14th St NW, Washington, DC 20005