

## BLUEPRINT ENDURING IMPACT WHISTLEBLOWING PRIZE



**CHELSEA MANNING (USA)**

Chelsea Manning is the recipient of the 2016 Blueprint Enduring Impact Whistleblowing Prize.

Chelsea Manning is a United States Army soldier, currently imprisoned in military prison after being convicted of offenses under the Espionage Act in July 2013.

Chelsea Manning was sentenced to 35 years imprisonment for her role in blowing the whistle on US wartime abuses and suspected war crimes during its military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, together with the disclosure of confidential diplomatic cables. During her subsequent arrest, detention, trial and imprisonment, Chelsea Manning came out as transgender and began the transitioning process to living as a woman while in prison.

After initially making contact with WikiLeaks in November 2009, Chelsea Manning's first disclosures were published on the WikiLeaks website on 18 February 2010. In April 2010, WikiLeaks disclosed the now infamous *Collateral Murder* video — which exposed war crimes and the killing of Reuters' journalist Namir Noor-Eldeen and driver Saeed Chmagh in Iraq, as well as other innocent civilians. As part of this extended incident, an unarmed Good Samaritan who stopped to help the dying men was fired on and killed. His children were also fired on and seriously wounded. The official incident statement attempted to cover all this up, stating that all the adults were insurgents, when they were clearly not.

After exposing herself as the leak to an ex-hacker, who subsequently turned her over to the US Department of Defence, Manning was detained by military police and placed in pre-trial confinement at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait. Following her formal arrest on 29 May

2010, Manning was charged under the Espionage Act for leaking classified information on 5 June 2010.

Despite her arrest, the masses of information that Manning had downloaded during her deployment continued to be published by various media organisations, including *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*. Publications included the *Iraq War Logs*, detailing civilian deaths, torture, summary executions, suspected war crimes (22 October 2010) and the US Embassy Cables, revealing confidential diplomatic cables detailing the views of US diplomats around the globe (28 November 2010).

In January 2011, Manning was moved to the Marine Corps-controlled brig at Quantico (normally used for post-trial confinement), and held under Prevention of Injury watch for months. During this time, she was subject to abusive practices, where she was unable to interact with other inmates and prevented from sleeping between the hours of 5:00am and 8:00pm, as well as subjected to degradation, stripping and surrendering her clothes.

Manning was tried in military court. The court processes put in place for this trial made proper public scrutiny unnecessarily difficult. She pled guilty to 10 charges filed under the Espionage Act, including possessing and willfully communicating information to unauthorised persons. At the same time, Manning pled not guilty to 12 more serious charges, including aiding the enemy.

Manning was acquitted by an Army judge of the most serious of the charges against her, that being aiding the enemy by disclosing information in July 2013. Despite the acquittal, Manning was found guilty of violating the Espionage Act, and sentenced to 35 years — the longest sentence ever dispensed in relation to the public disclosure of US government information.

As of 2016, Chelsea Manning remains imprisoned at a United States Disciplinary Barracks at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. She is currently preparing for an appeal to the US Army Court of Criminal Appeals, which has the power to overturn her conviction and sentence.

The enduring impact of this disclosure is the heightened community understanding of the blatant disregard for the safety of innocent civilians – especially children – that was shown during these times of war. This was demonstrated in the War Logs and the *Collateral Murder* video. Further, the *War Logs* revealed that contrary to elected officials' portrayals, the wars were not progressing successfully, but rather were floundering in a fog of non-progress, with no endpoint in sight.

Manning's revelations have directly provided vital data to support the analytic and advocacy work of NGOs such as *Iraq Body Count*, the most often cited source on civilian deaths in Iraq. As a direct result of these revelations, the public is now aware of 15,000 previously unknown civilian deaths in the Iraq War. The public was also able to learn the accurate truth that the violent death toll from the war was more than 150,000 people with more than 80% of these civilian deaths. This information has allowed civil society

groups worldwide to reveal the truth about two international wars, in stark contrast to the narratives political leaders had previously told the public. The flow-on effect of Manning's disclosures has been an increase in public pressure to end these wars.

Another enduring impact of this disclosure is enhanced public understanding of the secretive world of international diplomacy – thanks to the release of the embassy cables. A great deal of time, money and important decisions are made behind close doors — for example the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) or the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP). The cables revealed pressure from the US embassy to prevent garment workers in Haiti from receiving a universal wage rise to 62 cents an hour. Haiti was the poorest country in the hemisphere. This pressure, exerted behind closed diplomatic doors, was at the behest of contractors for major US clothing brands such as Levi Strauss and Hanes. The diplomatic pressure directly opposed a law passed by Haiti to raise the wages, and it was in part successful at preventing the increase in these wages which had been unanimously voted on by the Parliament of Haiti. Insight into governmental decision-making processes is vital in holding decision-makers accountable as representatives of the public interest.

The historical significance of Manning's disclosures continues to endure, particularly considering the controversy of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. The revelation of criminal conduct, manipulation and secrecy continues to demonstrate the shaky foundations on which those wars were waged.

The poor treatment of Chelsea Manning in prison has highlighted problems with the mistreatment of prisoners more generally. The US military's ongoing refusal to treat Chelsea Manning's gender dysphoria in accordance with the recommendations of the military's own medical providers has highlighted the many barriers and prejudices faced by those in the transgender community – particularly those who are incarcerated. This has become particularly topical given that Manning was threatened with punishment of *indefinite solitary confinement* for trivial rule infringements, such as having an expired tube of toothpaste.