

Nov 04, 2016 by *Alvin Snyder*

Award-Winning Humanitarian TV and Radio Reports are Off-Limits to Americans ^[1]

Washington, DC - July 28, 2005 - There are several interesting stories behind the recent award ceremony that took place at the Washington, D.C., headquarters of the Voice of America.

The ceremony honored exceptional VOA journalists whose reports excelled in a most critical area -- humanitarian issues. The subject itself generates scant news coverage in the United States. If VOA programs were permitted to be shown in the United States, and not only abroad as restricted by Congress, this would all change. That's because the VOA provides some of the world's finest humanitarian news reporting that exists, anywhere.

At the Voice of America award ceremony, the 2004 annual Cowan Award for Humanitarian Reporting, which comes with a \$2,500 prize, went to the VOA's William Chien and Patricia Nunan.

Mr. Chien, from the VOA's Mandarin Service, was cited for his TV documentary "China's AIDS Villages." He reported on poor villagers in Hunan Province who were encouraged to sell their blood, but collection agencies did not sterilize donations properly, so that almost one-third of the Province's population was infected with the HIV virus. William Chien was the first Western television reporter to document this tragedy and expose it to audiences in China, on VOA television, after withstanding pressure by Chinese government officials not to report the story.

Co-winner Patricia Nunan, the VOA's New Delhi correspondent, worked for three months to produce her radio report "India/Migrant Workers," which related first-hand experiences of Indian migrants who were misled into performing dangerous jobs in Iraq. The report was judged as having persuasively conveyed the problem of international migrant worker abuse in wartime.

Geoffrey Cowan, Dean of the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California, remarked prior to naming the winners that 60 years ago his father was VOA Director, and ten years ago, he, Geoffrey Cowan, was VOA director. The privately endowed Cowan Award was established in 1995 in honor of Louis and Geoffrey Cowan.

It was propitious that on the same day of this award ceremony, as Geoffrey Cowan noted in his remarks, New York Times Op-Ed columnist Nicholas Kristoff chastised the media for its "shameful passivity" in covering the genocide in Darfur, in Western Sudan. Mr. Kristoff cited data in the Tyndall Report, which examined the nightly TV news content of CBS, NBC, and ABC. It showed that U.S. network TV news broadcasts had paid little attention to Darfur, especially CBS News, which over the span of one year spent only three minutes on Darfur genocide coverage on its nightly news broadcast.

Keynote speaker David Smith, who is Acting Director of the United Nations Information Centre and a former foreign correspondent covering Africa, said reporters working from the "heart of darkness" 25 years ago carried their "little film cameras and had colossal impact." But today, he said, "with the constant flow of news by satellite from all over the world in real time, the danger is that what is happening in Western Sudan, or Uganda, or Niger, somehow looks like last year's story." Smith said that today's TV satellites bring fresh news hourly from all parts of the globe, with the result that viewers have become "inured" to tragedies such as Darfur.

William Chien, in his brief but prescient remarks upon receiving his reporting award, said at the VOA he experiences "no political pressure" and there are "no commercial restraints" to follow any story. He said his journalistic instincts led him to the HIV virus blood donation scandal in Hunan Province. One of the Cowan Award judges, Michael Friedman of George Washington University, said the report was so dramatic and impressive that it "needs to be shown in America."

VOA Director David Jackson said he regrets "that the Voice of America is prohibited by law from broadcasting to Americans because they would be impressed with the kinds of stories that we cover that have made us so popular in places like Africa, where 40% of our worldwide audience resides."

Patricia Nunan, the VOA's New Delhi correspondent who won the Cowan award for her radio reports on Indian migrant workers in wartime Iraq, spent three months putting her story together. There are few modern-day newsrooms that will put a reporter on one story for a couple of weeks, hardly ever for months at a time. Ms. Nunan said modestly on accepting her humanitarian reporting award that hers was simply "a story of ordinary Indian truck drivers taking extraordinary risks."

Too bad that Americans can't hear or see reports by the VOA's Patricia Nunan and William Chien, and so many others who report the globe on America's network.
