

# The unknown peacemaker: Susan Jennifer Gilbey

Eulogy by Klaus Körber



Today, the Threshold Foundation awards the Bremen Peace Award 2009 in the category of the Unknown Peace Worker to Susan Jennifer Gilbey. Awarding the Peace Prize to unknown peace workers is very important to the Threshold Foundation. Through this, we would like to draw public attention to the fact that so many people work tirelessly to achieve peace, social justice and the integrity of Creation – efforts that otherwise receive little public attention. We would also like to encourage others to engage in peace work. Most of all, we would like to thank

and express our appreciation as well as respect to those committed to peace work. At least some of them can be brought to the public's eye today. Only one of them, namely Sue, can be awarded for her dedicated work. However, she is being awarded here on behalf of all the unmentioned and unknown peace workers.

This is so important to us because in the last few years there have been ongoing derogatory public discussions about the so-called Gutmenschen or "good persons". This discourse or rather cynical talk aims at ridiculing people who are committed to the well-being of others without looking for their own benefits, neither for money or power, nor prestige or prominence – not even to get fame. Whoever talks so contemptuously, in fact rejects humane standards. Standards, he should follow himself and against which his deeds could otherwise be measured. But unfortunately, this kind of attitude towards Gutmenschen is broadly accepted.

We however talk appreciatively about "good people" or do-gooders. We talk about Susan Jennifer Gilbey and many other people from around the world being nominated for this year's award. It is striking that many women are among the nominated. And this is definitely not a

coincidence. The choice was not easy at all. Many deserve this award. We finally decided in favor of Sue. Her dedicated work is the epitome of the Bremen Peace Award.

Through the award the Threshold Foundation honours people committed to creating and preserving peace through the realization of human rights, or through seeking non-violent solutions to conflicts as well as attend to and dedicate themselves to victims of physical and psychological violence. Peace work, in our understanding, also means: efforts towards reducing structural violence globally. The Bremen Peace Award (therefore) honours people, who are committed to social justice and to a "good life" for all, everywhere. Equitable living conditions are however impossible without caring for nature and protecting livelihoods. Therefore, efforts to protect the integrity of Creation are also peace work in the understanding of the Bremen Peace Award.



Susan Jennifer Gilbey is active in all the areas of peace work I mentioned before. She was proposed by the Australian Peace Committee for this award, firstly because she has been working for the rights of those seeking asylum in Australia for many years. Not only do we know little about Susan Jennifer Gilbey, we know equally little about her country, Australia. Touristy clichés about Australia are common: "It is always sunny Down Under and everybody is happy there". In contrast, we hardly get any information through German media about the inhumane and often brutal treatment of asylum seekers by Australian authorities – many of them fled from countries like Iraq and Afghanistan, where Australian troops are at war. Asylum seekers were and still are regarded as people who have no rights. The majority of the Australian population supports the Government in this matter. Furthermore, we did not know that consequently a mass movement arose, supporting these asylum seekers to obtain their rights. This also is Australia, the other side of the coin, so to say.

And Sue is part of this. Initially, she used to quietly work at home for people without rights. Thereafter she worked as a legal advisor in court and helped many to get a stay permit, the first person being an Afghan. She provided refuge to a family from Sudan at her home. She even co-founded the Human Rights Coalition advocating for a human rights convention, an

Australian Bill of Rights. This is based on the conviction that the first and foremost human right is the "right to have rights" (Hannah Arendt).

Sue is aware that such an institutional change is only possible through persistent and tenacious efforts at the local and global level. In Adelaide, South Australia, Sue and other teammates regularly present a local weekly radio programme on issues related to peace, justice and environment. At the global level, Sue is a member of international women's groups and participates in international peace conferences – often being the only Australian representative.

As a member of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom she contributed to the success of a project in Peru. This project aims at improving the living conditions of poor families, who live on garbage dumps in Lima, through support from Australian funds and micro credit. Furthermore, Sue is an active member of Australian environmental groups such as CLEAN, which stands for Climate Emergency Action Network.



And... that's not all. Sue continues to passionately work for the rights of the indigenous people of Australia, the Aboriginal people. Australia's racist colonial history has not come to an end yet. The Aboriginal culture is one of the most ancient in the world –if not the most ancient culture– which survives till today. With the 1967-referendum, Australian Aboriginal people were recognized as citizens with equal rights. Until then, however, they were not officially regarded as human beings – their lives were determined by the Flora and Fauna Act. Just forty years later, in 2007, Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory were invaded by military forces of the Australian government and deprived of their rights they were once granted. In a few moments, Sue will tell us a little more about the current situation – better than I can.

I just want to highlight one more aspect: Sue's commitment to the Aboriginal peoples "completes the picture" of her manifold peace- and human rights work. It's once again about people with no rights and about the "right to have rights". People, who have been deprived of

their rights for hundreds of years and are once again being deprived of their rights today, are not recognized as human beings with equal rights. They were practically excluded from the "world of human beings". It does not mean that we Europeans should therefore arrogantly look down upon the Australians. Such fundamental human rights violations also took place here in Germany. And still continue to exist within the European Union (EU), especially on the external borders of the EU. Just one remark: People trying to reach Europe in small fishing boats, are blocked by naval ships on the open sea of the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean and left to starve, to dehydrate and to drown. They are not entitled to any right, not even to the right to survive.

Dear Sue, I admire your all-encompassing commitment. I do not know how you cope with all these strenuous and time-consuming activities, having a family and despite physical challenges. We wish you all the courage and power needed to carry on. And I would like to thank you for making us aware of and sensitizing us about challenges related to peace and human rights work – not only in your country, Australia, but also in our European countries. We live in one world and share the same or at least similar problems. We can and should talk to each other about them so that we can learn from each other and work together towards our common goal. The Bremen Peace Award and this ceremony are steps in this direction.

Thank you!