

RM PREMIO
RAFFAELE
MASTO
A FAVORE DELL'ATTIVISMO CIVICO IN AFRICA

Winners of the second edition of the Raffaele Masto Award

Michael Ozo Osahon (43, from Nigeria) and **Cecilia Gregoria Cassapi** (50, from Angola) are the winners of the second edition of the Raffaele Masto Award in favour of civic activism in Africa and named after the well-known journalist and writer, who passed away on 28 March 2020.



Michael Ozo Osahon is a gay activist in a nation where homosexuality is punished with 14 years in prison. In addition to spreading information and promoting AIDS awareness and prevention, he runs a shelter for LGBT people. The shelter operates in secret, as the Nigerian government does not know of its existence. It does not even know that Michael is in charge of it, and only knows him for his HIV prevention activities. Defiant of repressive laws and up against discrimination and widespread prejudice, Michael wages a courageous battle that has cost him numerous intimidations and threats.

Cecilia Gregoria Cassapi, a human right activist living in the South of Angola, the least developed region of the country, she has been involved - from a very young age - in the safeguard of labour rights in rural communities, the emancipation of women and land rights. She is very much engaged in exposing the impacts of minerals mining: from environmental damage (land destruction, groundwater contamination) to the eviction from their land of rural communities' residents, who are also subjected to abuse and torture by authorities and landlords.

Both winners will receive EUR 2,500 raised through a crowdfunding campaign and the invitation from the jury to come to Italy to make their struggles public, during the Award ceremony, which will be held in the upcoming months (date to be determined). "It wasn't easy to choose the Award winners, among the 25 entries that arrived from all over Africa", pointed out the President of the jury, Gisele Ahou Kra, Raffaele Mastro's wife. "So many of them would have deserved to win the Award, which demonstrates the vigour of civil society in the African continent, and which is all too little reported and upheld".

The Award Secretariat disclosed the names of five other activists who each received a **special mention**: nominees who, although they did not win the Award, nevertheless distinguished themselves and were greatly praised by the members of the jury. Women and men 'of Goodwill' that Raffaele Mastro would have featured in his enthralling reportages.

- **Grégoire Ahongbonon**, 71 years old, from Benin, called 'the Basaglia of Africa', provides care for thousands of people with mental health problems out of the health clinics run by the St. Camillo Association, which he himself founded, while also standing up to local religious authorities who carry out exorcisms on people with mental disorders or epilepsy. Over thirty years of service, the association has given dignity back to 130,000 people.

- **Jacqueline Moudeina**, a 66-year-old woman from Chad, is both a lawyer (one of the first women to practice law in her country) and an activist, former leader of the Chadian Association for the Promotion and Defence of Human Rights (ATPDH). She is well known for her commitment to fight against child trafficking, her campaign against impunity, and her support for vulnerable people: in particular the victims of the Habré regime's repression, and women victims of violence.

- **Didi Stanley Kiaviha**, 44 years old, Kenyan, former ragged child, promotes community and environment related initiatives (waterway maintenance, street cleaning, planting of new trees) through his association Nairobi Recyclers, which advocates for the dignity and employment of young scavengers in Dandora, the largest landfill in Sub-Saharan Africa.

- **Latifa Walhazi**, a 44-year-old from Tunisia, is an activist and the vice-president of the Association of Mothers of Missing Migrants. Since 2016, she is actively involved in helping families who have lost their loved ones - either drowned or declared missing - while crossing the Mediterranean, and through her association she provides psychological support as well as practical help (aid for health and legal protection) and works to create connections with other similar associations in other African countries.

- **Ben Kamuntu**, age 30, from Congo, is a young human rights activist who has been detained in 2018 for his civic activism. Out of this experience, his art was born: his poetry and music became a medium to respond to inequalities and break the cycle of violence. His art has been featured in several activities with girls who have been victims of violence and have found a way to process their stories through poetry.

Thanking you for your contribution, we would like to note that you may apply again for the next edition of the Raffaele Mastro Prize to be held in 2024, details of which will be announced on the website www.amicidiraffa.it.