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Rolando Alvarado and Victoria Sandoval

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SPEAKER

BILL BROWDER - B

VICTORIA SANDOVAL: V

ROLANDO ALVARADO: R

B: In the last two years before this when we had The Magnitsky Awards I actually never presented an award because there were so many good people to present the awards and so many good recipients, but this particular award I didn't want to leave to anybody else because I feel so strongly about it and I feel so strongly about the recipients and this award started from an email that I got. I published my book, 'Red Notice', in 2015 and I set up an email account so people could write to me and I got various people wrote to me writing nice notes and a few people wrote to me with mean notes and very once in a while someone would come to me with a story. And I received a note from a woman, a Russian woman in Guatemala names Arina Vitkov and Arina Vitkov wrote to me a story that was so shocking that I couldn't help, but pay attention. She and her husband and her daughter lived in St Petersburg, they owned a pulp and paper mill in St Petersburg and one day the Russian FSB came to them and said, "We want you to hand over your pulp and paper mill." And they refused and their daughter who was 16 at the time was subsequently kidnapped, raped for three days and then returned to the family completely destroyed.

They came back, the FSB to the family and said, "Okay, now hand over your pulp and paper mill," and eventually the FSB got their pulp and paper mill and threatened the family with death and they fled first to Latvia then to Turkey and then they discovered that Guatemala didn't have an extradition treaty with Russia and there was a law firm in Guatemala offering to emigrate there. So they bought or they paid this law firm some money immigrated to Guatemala, got their papers and settled into a quiet life in Guatemala. Their father became a math teacher, the mother became a drawing teacher and their daughter who was severely psychologically traumatised slowly started to recover. In Guatemala they had another child, a little boy named Igor and their life pretty much seemed perfect or as perfect as it can be in exile and in five years later the Russians tracked them down. The Russians tracked them down and they got an international organisation that was supposed to be fighting impunity in Guatemala to arrest the family, put them in prison and they sentenced the father to 19 years in prison for passport violations and the mother and daughter to 14 and then they put the three year old child into a Guatemalan orphanage.

The Vitkov's were lucky enough to have two lawyers, one of them, Victoria Sandoval, was their neighbour in their area and the other, Rolando Alvarado, was their media lawyer and these two lawyers who weren't experts in criminal law, they weren't experts in human rights took on their case and not only took on their case Rolando took their son, Igor, the three-year-old son into his own family to take care of him while they were in jail. They took on their case fighting the most evil, I would say, corrupt group of government officials. They were threatened, they are threatened and they slowly and slowly fought for the justice of this family and I joined their fight for this justice and I'm proud to say that through their incredible hard work giving up almost everything, travelling the world, testifying in Washington, not being paid, looking after their child the family was let out of jail a few months ago. And I have seen lawyers and I have seen lawyers and I have never seen the kind of commitment and the kind of sacrifice that these two

lawyers have made for this family and it touches me dearly and I want them to be recognised and honoured and please come up to collect your award.

V: Thank you very much for this incredible honour. Your words, Bill, are so touching. It's an honour to be present, to have been invited to this important ceremony and I will like to share with you a few words of what we have with the experience that I have had with the Vitkov's. I met the Vitkov's because, in fact, yes we were neighbours and also because we have kids the same age. So Arina and I took our babies to the same kindergarten and that's how we started the friendship. One morning on January 2015 their house was being raided by 150 officials from CC and FESI, which is like the prosecutors of high risk cases and after almost 24-hours of raid, they have not eaten, they have not slept in all that time, they were arrested and they were driven to the courthouse where they were locked in cages in the basement of the courthouse at the view of every person that entered the courthouse. They were humiliated, they were stripped of all hope and dignity; they were tortured.

They were lock alongside rapists, killers, murderers, gang members and because of the inhuman treatment that Anastasia had suffered before as Bill Browder said and the inhuman treatment, the torture that she had suffered during the rape under arrest she suffered a terrible breakdown and Arina had no other option, but lay her down at the dirty floor of the basement of the courthouse with no medical treatment whatsoever for more than five days. Their son, Vladimir, he was three years old at the time, he was taken from them and I cannot imagine the terrible pain it meant for him and for his parents. The Vitkov's were alone in Guatemala, they have no family resource over there and they were surrendered by opportunistic lawyers that only saw them as CC praise because they thought that they were going to be soon deported to Russia. Thankfully it didn't happen. The press exposed the case as picturing them as the leaders of a smugglers structure that was very dangerous and that had the effect that many of the people, neighbours, friends left them alone thinking they were terrible people like the Russian mafia or something.

This case has led me to know how far can human evilness and the ambition that fits it can go. It is almost impossible not to feel powerless facing the power of all these villains and how it goes over the law, but it is also impossible not to fight for justice for this family to see them free again. This award, which I am very honoured to receive today is a great incentive to continue this fight and I appreciate the support we have received from Bill Brown, from Ivan Jerkasov, from John Love with whom we have spent hours and hours trying to find the solution for all this. Thank you very much.

R: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Vladimir Vitkov was only three years' old when he came to my home in January 2015. At such a young age and with every member of his family in prison he said to me, "I am worried." On February 2015 I took him to the prison where his father was being held so they could see each other. They were having breakfast together when Vladimir stopped eating, looked into his father's eyes and again said, "I am worried." Two days after that a judge took him away off my custody and sent him to an orphanage outside the city. This

judge also forbade having any contact with him. His family was in great suffering during this time and I can't even imagine what Vladimir felt being separated from everyone he knew. When he was released after 42 days in the orphanage he was sick and visibly hurt. One night Vladimir told me, "Rolando, a red wolf comes to my bed every night and tries to take me away, but an angel comes and rescues me." Everything that has happened to the Vitkov family has been a human tragedy and it didn't take me long to realise that our struggle was not only Guatemala's corrupt justice system, but also against the biggest criminal organisation in the world.

If you ask me at that time if I was scared I will say I was terrified, concerned and even hopeless, but the angel from Vladimir's dreams did come to help us in the end. This angel was sent by God and he is called Bill Browder. Bill Browder with help from his amazing team, Ivan Jekasova, John Love, among others worked very hard on this case and was willing to fight for justice no matter what. That gave me hope and today it is a great privilege to be here and receive this award in honour of Sergei Magnitsky whose fight for the rule of law persists and has spread globally. On behalf of my country, my family, the members of the Vitkov family I am thankful to every person in the world who fights in defence of the human rights. Thank you very much.

END OF TRANSCRIPT