



**Examining the State Department's Claims
about the International Women of
Courage Award and Jessikka Aro**

Prepared for Ranking Member Robert Menendez

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INTRODUCTION

According to public reports, the Department of State rescinded a prestigious award to a foreign journalist because of social media posts she made that were perceived as critical of President Trump's attacks on the media and rule of law. Senate Foreign Relations Committee Democratic staff conducted a preliminary review and obtained documents and communications that appear to contradict the Department's public justification for rescinding the award. If the Department cancelled the award because of public criticism of the President, it would be an affront to U.S. values and our tradition of promoting and defending freedom of speech around the world. Such action would be particularly troubling against the backdrop of President Trump's frequent, well-documented, and corrosive attacks on the media.

SUMMARY

Finnish journalist Jessikka Aro is a leader in exposing Kremlin disinformation techniques and teaching governments, the media, and civil society organizations how to protect themselves against this threat. As a result of her work, pro-Kremlin trolls and criminals have targeted Aro in an intense campaign of harassment and intimidation, ultimately leading a Finnish court to convict three of her harassers.¹ One was sent to prison and the other two received conditional prison sentences—the first time a European country has taken such action against pro-Kremlin disinformation efforts.² Aro's work has won her recognition at home and abroad: she received the Finnish Grand Prize for Journalism in 2016 and, in October 2018, U.S. Embassy Helsinki nominated her for the Department of State's 2019 International Women of Courage Award (IWOC).

Per routine practice, Embassy Helsinki sent the nomination to the Department's Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs (EUR), which approved and forwarded it to the Secretary of State's Office of Global Women's Issues (S/GWI). Out of 55 nominations from 53 different embassies, S/GWI selected ten finalists, including Aro, in early January. According to an internal document circulated among 15 Department bureaus and offices, S/GWI described Aro as someone who "works tirelessly to combat the Russian disinformation and intimidation of journalists, a significant threat to European security, stability, and cohesion" (see Appendix B).

On January 25, U.S. Embassy Helsinki notified Aro that S/GWI had selected her as an IWOC finalist, and began coordinating event details and logistics with bureaus and offices at the Department. Eight different officials from four different offices at the State Department edited and approved an updated biography of Aro before sending it to Embassy Helsinki (see Appendix C).

¹ Andrew Higgins, "Effort to Expose Russia's 'Troll Army' Draws Vicious Retaliation," *The New York Times*, May 30, 2016.

² Andrew Higgins, "Three Internet Trolls Convicted of Systematic Defamation Against Journalist in Finland," *The New York Times*, Oct. 19, 2018.

On February 6, the Department's Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs (ECA) issued a visa form to facilitate Aro's travel to the United States (see Appendix D). The form included an attestation, required by U.S. law and signed by an ECA official, stating that Aro "is eligible and qualified for, *and accepted into*, the program in which he or she will participate" (emphasis added). On February 8, an embassy official asked for her social media handles as "the last step for us, then Washington will have everything they need" (see Appendix E).

Four days later, Aro received a formal invitation from the Department's Office of the Chief of Protocol, and S/GWI sent Embassy Helsinki an email copying seven other officials in Washington regarding Aro's travel and event details (see Appendices F and G). Aro was presented with flight options and asked to fill out a form to receive a \$5,000 grant that accompanied the award. ECA also proposed that Aro speak on the themes of combatting disinformation and freedom of the press while visiting the U.S. (see Appendix H). In late February, the Embassy in Helsinki arranged a consular interview for Aro to obtain her exchange program visa.

On February 22, three days before her scheduled visa interview and two weeks after requesting her social media handles, a U.S. embassy official in Helsinki told Aro that she would not receive the IWOC award and that her trip to the United States had been cancelled. Of the list of ten finalists promulgated by S/GWI in January, all but Aro received the IWOC award from Secretary Pompeo on March 7.

On March 7, *Foreign Policy* reported that the Department of State rescinded the award because it was displeased with social media posts Aro made criticizing President Trump's assaults on the media and rule of law. In response, the Department insisted that Aro had been "incorrectly notified" of her selection for the award due to "a lack of coordination in communications with candidates and our embassies."³ At a press briefing on the day that the article was published, a Department spokesperson was asked whether Aro had ever been selected as a finalist. He replied that "[s]he had not" (see Appendix I).

The Department's statements are not borne out by, and appear to be in direct contradiction with, the communications and documents reviewed by Democratic Committee staff. Because of this, Senator Menendez and other Senators have referred the matter to the State Department's Inspector General for investigation (see Appendix J).

³ Reid Standish and Robbie Gramer, "U.S. Cancels Journalist's Award Over Her Criticism of Trump," *Foreign Policy*, Mar. 7, 2019.

TIMELINE OF COMMUNICATIONS AND EVENTS

- October 29, 2018
 - An Embassy employee from U.S. Embassy Helsinki (hereafter EE) sent Jessikka Aro an email [Subject: *International Women of Courage*] to ask whether she would accept the Embassy's nomination as an International Women of Courage Award (IWOC) candidate, noting that "given the issues you deal with, and the timeliness of the trials [against individuals who had harassed Aro for her work], I think we have a good case to make if you don't mind the Embassy nominating you." Aro responded on the same day that it would be an honor and she would be happy to be nominated.

- November 26, 2018
 - EE sent Aro an email [Subject: *Award Nomination – Info Request*] to request information (full legal name, date of birth, citizenship, address, etc.) to complete the Embassy's nomination which was "in its final stages" at the time.

- January 9, 2019
 - A document approved by the Secretary of State's Office of Global Women's Issues (S/GWI) [*2019 IWOC Awardee Biographies*] listed biographies for the finalists for the IWOC award (see Appendix B). S/GWI wrote that it "has chosen the following 10 women as finalists for the 13th annual IWOC Award. An initial field of 55 nominations from 53 posts was sorted and culled into regional shortlists by S/GWI and then ranked by the regional bureaus The proposed awardees have demonstrated remarkable courage in diverse fields. They include an advocate for peace against Rohingya discrimination, [an] Anti-Terrorism Investigator combatting al-Shabaab, and [an] *investigative journalist countering Russian disinformation*" (emphasis added).
 - The S/GWI document, which was approved by the office's Acting Director (as well as two other S/GWI officials), included a short biography for Aro. The biography stated that Aro "works tirelessly to combat Russian disinformation and intimidation of journalists, a significant threat to European security, stability, and cohesion Her work has triggered continued death threats and [she] has been stalked and harassed, forcing her to leave Finland. Despite these threats, Ms. Aro refuses to cease her work and continues raising awareness through journalism, speaking engagements, a social media campaign and a novel to release in 2019 titled 'Vladimir Putin's Troll Empire.' She has been a pioneer on this issue for several years and remains a testament to the effort against Russian disinformation."
 - The document was sent to offices and bureaus throughout the Department, including the Deputy Secretary of State's office; the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs' office; the Secretary of State's Office of Policy Planning; the Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights'

office; the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs' office; the Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs; the Bureau of Public Affairs; the Secretary of State's Office of the Chief of Protocol; the Bureau of African Affairs; the Bureau of East Asia and Pacific Affairs; the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs; the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs; the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs; and the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs.

- January 25, 2019
 - EE texted Aro and told her that the Embassy received word overnight that she was selected as a 2019 IWOC awardee and asked whether she could accept the award and travel to the United States. Aro replied in the affirmative.
- January 28, 2019
 - EE sent Aro an email [Subject: *IWOC info - ASAP*] requesting her to send a scanned copy of her passport, describe her official title, list any dietary restrictions, and review a provided biography drafted by the Embassy. The email also requested Aro fill out a S/GWI questionnaire and a Participant Consent Release Form from the State Department's Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs (ECA). Aro completed and returned all forms as well as a requested high-resolution official photo for use at the IWOC ceremony and promotional material.
- February 4, 2019
 - Department officials sent EE information, which was forwarded to Aro in an email [Subject: *FW: Selection: 2019 IWOC Finalist (Finland)*] and contained the confirmed IWOC ceremony date, international arrival and departure dates, and a notional calendar for the 17-day program. EE's email noted that "we will be in touch about ticketing, etc. . . . we have a call with Washington today to discuss more details."
 - Based on the confirmation of her selection for the award and the preliminary travel itinerary, Aro cancelled several previously-booked speaking engagements in Brussels and around Finland. The events included:
 - Three different lectures about countering the security threats posed by Russian trolls and fake news to be held at a Finnish training institute, a private Finnish company, and a Finnish university, and
 - A speaking engagement on "Bots, Trolls, and Free Expression" in Brussels, Belgium, organized by the Atlantic Council (as well as the U.S. Mission to the EU, U.S. Mission to NATO, and U.S. Embassy in Belgium).
- February 6, 2019
 - The public diplomacy office of the State Department's Bureau for European and Eurasian affairs (EUR/PD) sent EE an updated biography (see Appendix

C) of Aro to use for the IWOC event, which EE forwarded to Aro in an email [Subject: *IWOC Aro Bio*] to request her approval. The updated bio was approved by eight State Department officials in Washington: four from EUR/PD (including the office director and the StratComm desk officer); two from EUR/NB (EUR's Nordic and Baltic desk); one from EUR/RUS (EUR's Russia desk), and one from R/GEC (the Global Engagement Center, based in the office of the Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs).

- In the bio, Aro was described as “at the forefront in pushing back against disinformation and intimidation of journalists. A brave and tenacious investigative reporter [who] has fought over the past five years to expose pro-Russian troll factories” and “a testament to the courageous effort it will take to counter Russia’s malicious activities in the information space.”
- February 8, 2019
 - EE sent Aro an email [Subject: *Social Media Handles*] asking for all of her social media handles, noting “that’s the last step for us, then Washington will have everything they need.” Aro replied on the same day with her Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram handles (see Appendix E).
- February 11, 2019
 - S/GWI sent EE and seven DC-based State Department officials an email [Subject: *Selection: 2019 IWOC Finalist (Finland)*] responding to Aro’s questions about guest travel and press coverage of her events (see Appendix G).
- February 12, 2019
 - The State Department’s Office of the Chief of Protocol sent EE an email [Subject: *INVITATION: 2019 International Women of Courage Awards 3/7/19*] that EE forwarded to Aro, and which included an attached invitation on official letterhead stating that “The Secretary of State of the United States requests the pleasure of your company at the 2019 International Women of Courage Awards” and included time and place details (see Appendix F). EE also wrote Aro that “Some things came in overnight that I will share soon.”
 - EE sent Aro an email [Subject: *RE: FW: INVITATION: 2019 International Women of Courage Awards 3/7/19*] informing her that she would need a special visa for the exchange program, and that his colleague at the Embassy (hereafter EE2) would get in touch about the paperwork, noting that “we just received some documents via DHL yesterday.”
 - EE2 sent Aro an email [Subject: *Viisuminhakuohjeet, IWOC & IVLP*] with information about obtaining a J-1 non-immigrant visa for exchange program participants. Attached to the email was a completed form DS-2019 “Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor Status (J-Nonimmigrant).” The

form listed the purpose of the visit as "Begin new program", covered the period of March 03 to March 23, 2019, and estimated that the U.S. government's total financial support to Aro would be \$10,500 (see Appendix D).

- The form included an attestation, which was signed by an officer from the program sponsor, the State Department's Office of International Visitors (ECA/E/VCP), stating that "I attest that prior to issuing this Form DS-2019, the Program Sponsor organization identified above, for which I serve as the Responsible Officer or Alternate Responsible Officer, has verified, in accordance with the requirements of 22 CFR 62.12(b), that each prospective exchange visitor: (i) is eligible and qualified for, *and accepted into*, the program in which he or she will participate" (emphasis added).
- EE2 also sent Aro a second email [Subject: *IWOC: Lentovaihtoehdot*] with different flight options departing March 03 and returning March 20 or 21.
- February 14, 2019
 - EE sent Aro an email [Subject: *IVLP Pre-Departure Materials & AWIU Grant Form -- 2019 IWOC Finalist (Finland)*] stating that "Washington sent the attached materials and information below about your upcoming program." One of the attachments [*IWOC Background and IVLP Outline_Finland*] from the ECA bureau detailed the IWOC group events in Washington (briefings, trainings, tours, awards ceremony, media engagements, etc.) as well as the customized itinerary for Aro's individual program travel, stating that "The awardees will travel for accompanied individualized programming focused on their specific areas of work and themes of interest. Ms. Jessikka Aro will travel with an International Visitor Liaison to Chicago, Illinois" and listed the themes for her events as "*The Role of Journalists in Combatting Disinformation*" and "*Freedom of the Press*" (see Appendix H).
 - ECA proposed an itinerary for Aro in Chicago, and requested of EE to "Please let us know if Jessikka or post have any feedback or requests for adjustment to the personalized program." Proposed events included:
 - Medill Justice Project (Northwestern University)
 - The Association for Women Journalists
 - Chicago Tribune
 - BallotReady
 - Speaking opportunity in an academic or professional environment
 - Home Hospitality dinner with an American family
 - The other attachment [*2019 WIRE INFO FILLABLE FORM*] was from the American Women for International Understanding (AWIU) and requested name and bank account information to transfer \$5,000 in grant money. As the money was to be transferred upon completion of the program, Aro never received the funds.

- February 20, 2019
 - EE texted Aro to request a meeting, which was arranged for February 22.
- February 21, 2019
 - Embassy Helsinki's Consular Section sent Aro an email [Subject: *Viisumihaastattelu/Visa Interview*] confirming that her J-1 visa interview was scheduled for the morning of February 25.
- February 22, 2019
 - EE told Aro in person that she would not receive the award. EE did not provide any official or documented explanation.
- February 25, 2019
 - Aro went to the Embassy on the day of her visa interview and delivered to EE in person a letter from her lawyer. The letter requested answers to the following questions:
 - Who withdrew the already confirmed award, the related program and the related award money and based on what or whose authorization?
 - On what ground(s) was the award, the program and the award money withdrawn only 8 days before Ms. Aro's departure to the award ceremony?
 - When was the withdrawal decision made?
 - Is the withdrawal decision official or has the decision been registered?
 - Why was this not communicated to Ms. Aro officially?
 - As of the publication of this report, the Department of State had not responded to the letter.
- March 7, 2019
 - *Foreign Policy* published an article about Aro and the IWOC award, which cited internal sources claiming that the Department "revoked her award after U.S. officials went through Aro's social media posts and found she had also frequently criticized President Donald Trump."⁴ A State Department spokesperson told the reporter that the award was rescinded due to a "regrettable error," that Aro was "incorrectly notified" she had been chosen for the award, and it was a mistake that resulted from "a lack of coordination in communications with candidates and our embassies." The article noted that the Department spokesperson did not respond to questions on who made the decision or why.

⁴ Reid Standish and Robbie Gramer, "U.S. Cancels Journalist's Award Over Her Criticism of Trump," *Foreign Policy*, Mar. 7, 2019.

- At a press briefing, State Department deputy spokesperson Robert Palladino was asked about Aro and replied that, “We incorrectly notified this individual that she had been selected as a finalist. This was an error. This was a mistake.” When asked whether Aro had been selected as an IWOC finalist, Palladino replied that “[s]he had not” (see Appendix I).
- Democratic staff from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee requested a briefing call from the State Department to explain the issue.
- March 21, 2019
 - In response to the March 7 request, S/GWI, the EUR Bureau, and the U.S. Ambassador to Finland briefed Committee staff by phone. The explanations presented by the Department were not consistent with communications and documents reviewed by Democratic Committee staff.
- March 28, 2019
 - Senators Menendez, Leahy, Durbin, Cardin, Shaheen, Coons, Markey, and Booker sent a letter to the State Department Inspector General requesting an investigation to determine why the State Department rescinded IWOC award finalist status from Aro (see Appendix J).

APPENDIX A

List of Referenced Communications and Documents

1. U.S Embassy Helsinki email to Jessikka Aro, Subject: *International Women of Courage Award* (October 29, 2018).
2. Embassy email to Aro, Subject: *Award Nomination – Info Request* (November 26, 2018).
3. Secretary of State's Office of Global Women's Issues (S/GWI) memo to Deputy Secretary of State's office; the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs' office; the Secretary of State's Office of Policy Planning; the Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights' office; the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs' office; the Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs; the Bureau of Public Affairs; the Secretary of State's Office of the Chief of Protocol; the Bureau of African Affairs; the Bureau of East Asia and Pacific Affairs; the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs; the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs; the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs; and the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, attaching *Tab 1 – Finalists for the 2019 International Women of Courage (IWOC) Awards* (January 09, 2019).
4. Embassy employee text to Aro (January 25, 2018).
5. Embassy email to Aro, Subject: *IWOC info – ASAP*, attaching *Award Recipient Questionnaire – 2019.docx*; *Media Guidelines Attachment D Participant Consent Form.pdf*; *Jessica Aro Text.docx* (January 28, 2019).
6. S/GWI and/or ECA email to Embassy and forwarded to Aro, Subject: *Selection: 2019 IWOC Finalist (Finland)* (February 04, 2019).
7. Bureau for European and Eurasian Affairs, Office of Public Diplomacy (EUR/PD) email to Embassy and forwarded to Aro, attaching *Jessikka Aro IWOC Bio* (February 05-06, 2019).
8. Embassy email to Aro, Subject: *Social Media Handles* (February 08, 2019).
9. Office of the Chief of Protocol email to Embassy and forwarded to Aro, Subject: *INVITATION: 2019 International Women of Courage Awards 3/7/19* (February 12, 2019).
10. S/GWI email to Embassy and forwarded to Aro, Subject: *Selection: 2019 IWOC Finalist (Finland)* (February 12, 2019).
11. Embassy email to Aro, Subject: *RE: FW: INVITATION: 2019 International Women of Courage Awards 3/7/19* (February 12, 2019).
12. Embassy email to Aro, Subject: *Viisuminhakuohjeet, IWOC & IVLP* (February 12, 2019).
13. Embassy email to Aro, Subject: *IWOC: Lentovaihtoetoja* (February 12, 2019).

14. ECA email to Embassy and forwarded to Aro, Subject: *IVLP Pre-Departure Materials & AWIU Grant Form -- 2019 IWOC Finalist (Finland)*, attaching *IWOC Background and IVLP Outline_Finland.docx*; *2019 Wire INFO FILLABLE FORM.pdf* (February 14, 2019).
15. Text from Embassy employee to Aro (February 20, 2019).
16. Email from Embassy to Aro, Subject: *Viisumihaastattelu/Visa Interview* (February 21, 2019).
17. Letter from Aro's attorney to Embassy (February 25, 2019).

APPENDIX B

**State Department Document:
"2019 IWOC Awardee Biographies"**

(SBU) Tab 1 – Finalists for the 2019 International Women of Courage (IWOC) Awards

(SBU) The Secretary's Office of Global Women's Issues (S/GWI) has chosen the following 10 women as finalists for the 13th annual IWOC Award. An initial field of 55 nominations from 53 posts was sorted and culled into regional shortlists by S/GWI and then ranked by the regional bureaus. The finalists are listed below, organized regionally and alphabetically by country. The proposed awardees have demonstrated remarkable courage in diverse fields. They include an advocate for peace against Rohingya discrimination, Anti-Terrorism Investigator combatting al-Shabaab, and investigative journalist countering Russian disinformation.

African Affairs (AF)

1. (SBU) **Moumina Houssein Darar (Djibouti)** – Born, educated and raised in Djibouti, Moumina Houssein Darar is the first and currently the only female Anti-Terrorism Investigator for the Djibouti National Police (DNP). Through passion and competency in her work, she became a lead investigator after the La Chaumiere bombing in Djibouti in 2014. Maturing into consistent leadership roles on high-profile investigations, Ms. Darar became acutely aware of the local threat of al-Shabaab terrorists. Her work led to the conviction and/or deportation of at least 10 al-Shabaab terrorist as well as uncover and dismantle an international terrorist network. She routinely works with the Federal Bureau of Investigation on these joint efforts and her investigative skills enabled DNP to thwart five attempted terrorist attacks since the 2014 bombing, in a city which hosts thousands of U.S. government personnel. Ms. Darar faces numerous challenges in her work, including threats to her personal safety that compelled her to avoid wearing her uniform outside of work. In addition to her professional work, Ms. Darar developed a charitable neighborhood organization to provide assistance to children in need, pay for funerals and hopes to expand services to the elderly and handicapped in Djibouti.
2. (SBU) **Anna Aloys Henga (Tanzania)** – Anna Henga is a Tanzanian lawyer, advocate of the High Court of Tanzania, and the Executive Director of the Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHRC). She is an activist who has dedicated her entire professional career to advancing human rights in Tanzania with a particular focus on women. Since Ms. Henga joined LHRC in February 2006 as an intern, she has served in roles of increasing responsibility. Highlights of her career include coordinating Tanzania's Anti Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Coalition, tackling land and economic rights for Tanzanian women, empowering women during the 2015 general election cycle, and publicly voicing concern over the direction of democratic governance in the country. During the 2015 general elections, Ms. Henga coordinated LHRC's efforts to inform women of their rights to vote. She also proactively encouraged female candidates to run for office and several are now serving in local council-level positions.

East Asian and Pacific Affairs (EAP)

3. (SBU) **Naw K'nyaw Paw (Myanmar)** – Naw K'nyaw Paw currently serves as the General Secretary of the Karen Women's Organization (KWO), an ethnic community-based organization – now in its 33rd year – in Myanmar that began by providing direct

support for displaced communities along the Thai-Myanmar border and in Karen State. The KWO was the first of only three courageous women's civil society organizations in Myanmar to condemn the violence against the Rohingya people in Rakhine State that began in August 2017, part of a larger pattern of military violence against ethnic groups in Myanmar. This public position continues to risk the personal safety of Ms. Kaw and other individuals, leading to her inability to travel to Myanmar for recent years and continued fear that she may not be able to return if chosen for the award. Ms. Kaw works tirelessly for the rights of the Karen people and has traveled extensively to participate in the United Nations peace and security trainings. Under her leadership, the KWO has flourished and continues to engage in the peace process, while working daily to improve the lives of women and children in conflict-affected communities in Karen State.

European and Eurasian Affairs (EUR)

4. (SBU) **Jessikka Aro (Finland)** – Jessikka Aro works tirelessly to combat the Russian disinformation and intimidation of journalists, a significant threat to European security, stability, and cohesion. As a journalist herself, Ms. Aro is at the forefront in pushing back against the malign influence through her tenacious investigative reporting and campaign “#StopKremlinTrolls” which aims to advance global awareness of Russia’s propaganda and deter contributors through journalism, social media activism and litigation. Her work has triggered continued death threats and has been stalked and harassed, forcing her to leave Finland. Despite these threats, Ms. Aro refuses to cease her work and continues raising awareness through journalism, speaking engagements, a social media campaign and a novel to release in 2019 titled “Vladimir Putin’s Troll Empire.” She has been pioneer on this issue for several years and remains a testament to the effort against Russian disinformation.
5. (SBU) **Olivera Lakic (Montenegro)** – As an investigative journalist for the independent Montenegrin daily *Vijesti* on matters of corruption and organized crime, Olivera Lakic remains a target of violent, organized crime. Following her profound series on the black cigarette trade in Montenegro, a masked gunman shot Ms. Lakic outside of her home in May 2018 near the location in which she was beaten in 2012. Chargé Judy Kuo and EU Ambassador Aivo Orav visited Lakic in the hospital and Prime Minister Markovic pledged to bring her attacker to justice, but it appears that they have made little progress. From the hospital, the embattled reporter said the attack was clearly a warning to all reporters to avoid stories about organized crime and “this is an attack on freedom and democracy in Montenegro.” Ms. Lakic remains a courageous symbol in the desire to cultivate a culture that values journalism and to reject violence against them.
6. (SBU) **Sister Orla Treacy (Vatican)** – Sister Orla Treacy is a champion and defender of female education, empowerment, and community resilience, in an area besieged by civil war and violent inter-clan conflict. Through the last 13 years, Sister Orla has educated young women in Rumbek, South Sudan through primary school, secondary school, and a medical center. Beyond the unthinkable devastation war has wrought on the local population in Rumbek, education has plummeted, children are at risk of being recruited as child soldiers, females are often sold into slavery and forced into marriages,

and the threat of starvation is constant. To respond to the 2017 starvation through South Sudan, Sister Orla mobilized the medical clinic to serve meals and conduct physical examinations and treatment for various ailments. Her commitment to the people of Rumbek, South Sudan is a mark of her unique courage, immense strength, and fierce dedication to female empowerment and justice.

Near Eastern Affairs (NEA)

7. (SBU) **Col. Khalida Khalaf Hanna al-Twal (Jordan)** – Col. al-Twal is the Chief of the Public Security Directorate’s (PSD) Women’s Police Department, currently serving as one of the highest-ranking women in Jordan’s security services. Through her work, she has inspired and paved the way for generations of young Jordanian women professionals. Until July 2018, women at risk of “honor crimes” in Jordan were placed in “protective detention” in prison to keep them safe from those who intended to harm or kill them ostensibly in order to protect a family’s honor. After years of advocacy by Col. al-Twal, including working in partnership with Embassy Amman and the Ministry of Social Development (MOSD), the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) finally put a stop to this practice and instead now refers victims directly to an MOSD shelter. Col. al-Twal also oversees the unit within the Women’s Police Department that deploys women to United Nations peacekeeping missions and serves as a key ally of the Jordanian National Commission for Women in implementing their National Action Plan on women, peace, and security in Jordan. As Jordanians struggle with high living costs, taxes, rising unemployment, and corruption, Col. al-Twal uses her example and accomplishments to encourage more women to join the workforce (Jordan has the second lowest women’s workforce participation in the world) and publicly participate in previously taboo fields – both vital to Jordan’s long-term stability.

South and Central Affairs (SCA)

8. (SBU) **Razia Sultana (Bangladesh)** – Since 2014, Razia has been a prominent advocate for the rights of the Rohingya population. Born in Burma and raised in Bangladesh, she has led the charge to document the stories of those victimized by waves of Burmese government and military violence. She is a volunteer researcher for the *Kaladan Press*, a member of the *Free Rohingya Coalition*, Director of the Women’s Section at the *Arakan Rohingya National Organization*, and founder of the *Rohingya Women Welfare Society*. Ms. Sultana interviewed Rohingya refugees in 2016 to publish *Witness to Horror*, highlighting violence against the Rohingya in Burma, and *Rape by Command* in 2017, which details the Burmese army’s use of rape as a weapon. Beyond the publications, Razia founded the *Rohingya Women Welfare Society* (RWWS). RWWS’ goal is to support Rohingya women in the refugee camps. RWWS conducts programming highlighting domestic violence and human trafficking, and provides health care for Rohingya women in Bangladesh.
9. (SBU) **Marini de Livera (Sri Lanka)** – As chairperson of the National Child Protection Authority (NCPA), Ms. de Livera utilized the legal authority of her office to aggressively investigate allegations of abuse, leading to a cascade of threats against her own life.

After launching an investigation in early 2018 of a prominent public hospital allegedly operating a “baby farm” by selling newborns stolen from underage or unwed mothers, Ms. de Livera was publicly ridiculed. Ultimately, her detractors succeeded in ousting her from the NCPA in April 2018. Invited to address a session of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva, as an official representative of the Government of Sri Lanka, Ms. de Livera described in detail the widely underreported nature of child sexual abuse and trafficking in Sri Lanka. After less than five minutes of speaking, the secretary to the Sri Lankan Minister for Women and Child Affairs cut off Ms. de Livera’s microphone. Sri Lankan officials later excoriated her for embarrassing her country. Ms. De Livera also fought and won an inter-ministerial battle for funding to set-up the NCPA’s only emergency shelter for child victims of exploitation, but her successor immediately shut it down. Despite these setbacks, Ms. de Livera started her own NGO called Sisters at Law, which, although under-resourced and over-worked, valiantly attempts to fill-in the gaps in the government’s child protection scheme as pro-bono legal advocates.

Western Hemisphere Affairs (WHA)

10. (U) **Flor de Maria Vega Zapata (Peru)** – As Peru’s former National Coordinator for the Specialized Prosecutor’s Office on Environmental Matters, Ms. Vega combatted the transnational criminal organizations operating behind the multi-billion dollar criminal enterprises of illegal mining and illegal logging. Her tireless and courageous efforts have helped to protect Peru’s environmental resources and the communities that depend on them. She is responsible for coordinating the efforts of hundreds of prosecutors combatting environmental crimes and succeeded in obtaining key convictions of criminal elements involved in illegal mining and logging throughout her tenure. Against threats from transnational criminal organizations, widespread corruption, entrenched political and economic interests, and varying levels of support from her own government, Ms. Vega epitomizes the courage needed to carry out the challenging sought in her work to address the precarious situation facing Peru’s forest sector.

Approved: S/GWI: [REDACTED], Acting Director [REDACTED]

Drafted: S/GWI – [REDACTED], ext. 7-[REDACTED] and cell: [REDACTED]

Cleared: D: [REDACTED]
P: [REDACTED]
S/P: [REDACTED]
J: [REDACTED]
R: [REDACTED]
ECA/PE: [REDACTED]
PA: [REDACTED]
S/CP: [REDACTED]
AF: [REDACTED]
EAP: [REDACTED]
EUR: [REDACTED]
NEA: [REDACTED]
SCA: [REDACTED]
WHA: [REDACTED]
S/GWI: [REDACTED]

OK

OK

APPENDIX C

**State Department Document:
"Jessikka Aro IWOC Bio"**

Jessikka Aro

Finnish journalist Jessikka Aro is at the forefront in pushing back against disinformation and intimidation of journalists. A brave and tenacious investigative reporter, Jessikka has fought over the past five years to expose pro-Russian troll factories and continues to campaign to “#StopKremlinTrolls” through journalism, social media activism, legislation, and litigation.

Jessikka launched an investigation into the impact of pro-Russia trolls in Finland in 2014 with a series of crowdsourced stories. Her series for the Finnish National Broadcaster (YLE), “Have You Become the Target of the Russian Troll Army – Share Your Experience,” included interviews with journalists and previous employees, recruiters, and employees of the Internet Research Agency, a troll factory in St. Petersburg, Russia. The articles exposed the Kremlin’s various techniques at international social media disinformation, as well as its impact on general audience, public debates and freedom of speech in Finland. In 2016, she received the Bonnier Grand Journalist Prize “Story of the Year” award for her work.

Jessikka’s relentless campaign will continue in 2019 with the release of her book “Putin’s Trolls,” as will her tours to train people to tackle the spread of Russia’s disinformation. She also is pushing for stricter legislation and regulation of social media companies to better protect people and democracies against the dangers of disinformation, which is the coordinated dissemination of intentionally false information.

Notably, she also filed a lawsuit in Finnish courts to counter the systematic campaign of harassment she faced. In October 2018, a Finnish court convicted two of her highest-profile tormenters in a case *The New York Times* identified as the first taken by a European country against Russian disinformation. The judgment, which included a prison sentence for one of the convicted, attracted widespread international attention.

As an early exposé of the Kremlin’s troll army, Jessikka continues to face harassment from pro-Russian networks. She is a testament to the courageous effort it will take to counter Russia’s malicious activities in the information space.

Approved: EUR/PD Director [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Drafted: [REDACTED], US Embassy Helsinki
Cleared in WashDC through EUR/PD Desk [REDACTED] x7-[REDACTED], cell [REDACTED]

Clearances:

| | | |
|---------------------|------------|----|
| EUR/PD: | [REDACTED] | OK |
| R/GEC: | [REDACTED] | OK |
| EUR/PD – StratComm: | [REDACTED] | OK |
| EUR/RUS | [REDACTED] | OK |
| NB – Finland: | [REDACTED] | OK |
| NB: | [REDACTED] | OK |

APPENDIX D:

Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor Status



U.S. Department of State

CERTIFICATE OF ELIGIBILITY FOR EXCHANGE VISITOR STATUS (J-NONIMMIGRANT)

OMB APPROVAL NO.1405-0119
EXPIRES: 10/31/2020
ESTIMATED BURDEN TIME: 45 min
*See Page 2

Form DS-2019 containing fields for: 1. Surname/Primary Name (Aro), Given Name (Jessikka Henni Maria), Gender (FEMALE), N0030248407; Date of Birth, City of Birth (Hyvinkaa), Country of Birth (FINLAND), Citizenship Country Code (FI), Citizenship Country (FINLAND); Legal Permanent Residence Country Code (FI), Legal Permanent Residence Country (FINLAND), Position Code (900), Position (CATEGORY - OTHER); Primary Site of Activity (Office of International Visitors, 2201 C ST NW, WASHINGTON, DC 20522-0099); 2. Program Sponsor (U.S. Department of State), Program Number (G-1-00014); Purpose of this form (Begin new program); 3. Form Covers Period (03-03-2019 to 03-23-2019); 4. Exchange Visitor Category (INTERNATIONAL VISITOR), Subject/Field Code (05.0207), Subject/Field Code Remarks (ECA provides interpretation services for non-English speakers when required. Participants); 5. Financial support information; 6. Responsible Officer or Alternate Responsible Officer information; 7. Signature of Responsible Officer or Alternate Responsible Officer; 8. Statement of Responsible Officer for Releasing Sponsor; Preliminary Endorsement of Consular or Immigration Officer; Travel Validation by Responsible Officer; Exchange Visitor Certification.

APPENDIX E:

February 08 Email Requesting Social Media Handles

From: **Jessikka Aro** <[REDACTED]@yle.fi>
Date: pe 8. helmik. 2019 klo 10.20
Subject: Re: Social Media Handles?
To: [REDACTED] (Helsinki) <[REDACTED]@state.gov>

Moi,

Twitter @JessikkaAro
Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/TrollEmpireTheBook/>
Instagram eijejee

Great!

pe 8. helmik. 2019 klo 9.38 [REDACTED] (Helsinki) [REDACTED]@state.gov kirjoitti:

Hei!

Could you provide a list of all your social media handles? I could guess, but I don't want to leave anything out!

That's the last step for us, then Washington will have everything they need 😊

Best,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

U.S. Embassy Helsinki

Itäinen Puistotie 14 | 00140 Helsinki, Finland



Tel: +358- [REDACTED]

Mob: +358- [REDACTED]

Web: <http://fi.usembassy.gov>

Twitter: [@usembfinland](https://twitter.com/usembfinland)

Facebook: finland.usembassy

Official

UNCLASSIFIED

APPENDIX F

**Invitation sent to Jessikka Aro by
Office of the Chief of Protocol**



THE SECRETARY OF STATE
OF THE UNITED STATES

requests the pleasure of your company at the

2019 INTERNATIONAL WOMEN OF COURAGE AWARDS

on Thursday, the seventh of March

Two thousand nineteen

at ten o'clock

With Special Remarks by

MRS. MELANIA TRUMP



The Dean Acheson Auditorium

United States Department of State

23rd Street entrance between C and D Streets, Northwest

Washington, District of Columbia

This invitation is non-transferable.

APPENDIX G:

February 11 Email from S/GWI

From: [REDACTED] (S/GWI) <[REDACTED]@state.gov>
Sent: Monday, February 11, 2019 7:30 PM
To: [REDACTED] (Helsinki) <[REDACTED]@state.gov>; [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@state.gov>; [REDACTED] (Helsinki) <[REDACTED]@state.gov>
Cc: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@state.gov>; [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@state.gov>; [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@state.gov>; [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@state.gov>; [REDACTED] (S/GWI) <[REDACTED]@state.gov>; [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@state.gov>
Subject: RE: Selection: 2019 IWOC Finalist (Finland)

Hi,

Thank you for the information. As a reminder, neither ECA nor S/GWI is able to fund the travel or accommodations for guests. With the exception of invitations to the IWOC Award Ceremony from 10:00-11:15am on March 7th and a public panel event at a local university on the 8th, the IVLP schedule is comprised of professional appointments and events that are private and not open to the public or outside guests. Awardees will have free time outside of business hours for personal appointments or socializing with friends and family. Additionally, the Awardees will have the weekend in Washington, DC on March 9-10 for self-guided tourism. A private city tour has been arranged for the Awardees on Saturday the 9th from 10-1.

With regards to the L.A. event – we will need to confirm availability since this is an American Women for International Understanding (AWIU) event. I will get back to you as soon as possible on this.

Best,

APPENDIX H

State Department Travel Program for Jessikka Aro



Background on the IVLP On Demand Project for the Secretary's International Women of Courage Award

Now in its 13th year, the Secretary of State's International Women of Courage Award (IWOC) annually recognizes women around the globe who have demonstrated exceptional courage and leadership in advocating for peace, justice, human rights, gender equality, and women's empowerment, often at great personal risk and sacrifice. The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) partners annually with the Secretary's Office of Global Women's Issues (S/GWI) on IWOC to offer an [International Visitor Leadership Program](#) (IVLP) following the award ceremony.

This year, ten IWOC awardees will travel to U.S. cities through the IVLP. American organizations and businesses will host awardees and collaborate with them on strategies and ideas to empower women both in the United States and abroad. The awardees will reconvene in Los Angeles for a closing celebration before returning to their home countries.

Since the inception of this award and concurrent IVLP exchange in 2007, the State Department has honored more than 120 women from more than 65 different countries.

The names, countries, and bios of the 2019 IWOC award recipients will be announced the week of the ceremony.

Overview of the International Visitor Leadership Program

Washington, DC: March 3 – March 12, 2019

- Women, Peace, and Security Briefing
- Federalism Briefing
- Media Training
- Visit to the Supreme Court and/or Capitol Hill
- Awards Ceremony and Reception with the Secretary of State and First Lady of the United States
- Media Engagements
- U.S. Foreign Policy briefings at the U.S. Department of State
- Public Forum
- White House Tour

Individual City Stops: March 12 – March 16, 2019

The awardees will travel for accompanied individualized programming focused on their specific areas of work and themes of interest.

Ms. Jessikka Aro will travel with an International Visitor Liaison to **Chicago, Illinois.**

Themes:

The Role of Journalists in Combatting Disinformation
Freedom of the Press

Proposed Appointments:

- Medill Justice Project (Northwestern University): an investigative journalist group at Medill School of Journalism, one of the top journalism schools in the country.
- The Association for Women Journalists: supports women in journalism and promotes the respectful treatment of women by the news media.
- *Chicago Tribune*: reporters will discuss the responsibilities of journalists, the merits of print media, the Tribune's digital presence, and the importance of quality journalism to maintaining democracy.
- BallotReady: works to ensure election transparency and combat disinformation by publishing clear and non-partisan information on all candidates before major elections.
- Speaking opportunity in an academic or professional environment.
- Home Hospitality dinner with an American family.

Awardees Reunite in Los Angeles, California: March 16 – March 20, 2019

- Dinner hosted by the American Women for International Understanding
- Public Speaking Opportunity
- IVLP Closing Session and Evaluation

APPENDIX I:

March 7 Statement by Spokesperson Palladino

CQ NEWSMAKER TRANSCRIPTS

Federal Agency

March 7, 2019 - Final

State Department Holds News Briefing, as Released by the State Department

.....

QUESTION:

And secondly, can you explain why exactly this Finnish journalist was - her - the award, International Women of Courage Award, was rescinded? Why did that happen?

PALLADINO:

On the first one, I am not familiar with the report, I haven't heard anything about that, and I don't want to speculate.

On the second one, yeah, I've seen that report.

QUESTION:

Oh, I'm sure you have.

PALLADINO:

What I would say is we made a mistake. This was a regrettable error.

QUESTION:

In rescinding it?

PALLADINO:

In rescinding, we --

QUESTION:

You should not have rescinded?

PALLADINO:

No, no, no, no.

QUESTION:

Oh.

PALLADINO:

We incorrectly notified this individual that she had been selected as a finalist. This was an error. This was a mistake.

QUESTION:

So she hadn't been selected as a finalist?

PALLADINO:

She had not. We regret the error. And to be clear, we admire this journalist's achievements as a journalist, and that was the basis of her nomination by Embassy Helsinki.

QUESTION:

Okay. So the process here is that the embassy, wherever the person is - various embassies nominate people, it comes back here, these - the nominations are looked at and then you guys make a decision. Somehow, someone screwed up here and notified her that she had won, but she hadn't?

PALLADINO:

Yes, yes.

QUESTION:

Is that - that's the short? So it has --

PALLADINO:

Yes.

QUESTION:

-- nothing to do with any social media commentary that is critical of the President or this administration?

PALLADINO:

I've seen that speculation. I'm not going to be able to go further into weighing the merits of who was selected, whether one person had more merit versus the other. That's internal. But I can say we regret the error and we've got to do better in that regard. I'll leave it at that.

APPENDIX J:

**Letter from U.S. Senators to
State Department Inspector General**

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 28, 2019

The Honorable Steve A. Linick
Inspector General
U.S. Department of State
Office of the Inspector General
SA-39
1700 North Moore Street
Arlington, VA 22209

Dear Mr. Inspector General:

We request that your office conduct an investigation to determine why the State Department rescinded 2019 International Women of Courage (IWOC) award finalist status from Jessikka Aro, a Finnish journalist and campaigner against Kremlin disinformation and malign influence.

The Department has made claims to the media and to Congress that Ms. Aro “had not” been selected as a finalist and that the Department “incorrectly notified” Ms. Aro due to “a lack of coordination in communications with candidates and our embassies.” But a report (see attached) by the Democratic staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee calls those claims into question.

Democratic Committee staff reviewed State Department emails and documents which demonstrate that officials in Washington selected Ms. Aro as a finalist and communicated within the Department for months about her visit. Then, nearly one week prior to her trip to Washington to attend the IWOC award ceremony, the State Department told her she would not receive the award.

Many of the documents and emails Democratic Committee staff reviewed are included in the attached report, “Examining the State Department’s Claims about the International Women of Courage Award and Jessikka Aro.” Of particular note, Democratic Committee staff reviewed the following:

- A document drafted and approved in early January 2019 by officials in the Secretary of State’s Office of Global Women’s Issues (S/GWI), and distributed among 15 Department bureaus and offices, with the biographies of the ten finalists selected to receive the IWOC award. Of the ten finalists in that memo, all but Ms. Aro received the award from Secretary Pompeo on March 7.
- A form DS-2019 or "Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor (J-1) Status" issued by the Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs (ECA) which includes an attestation signed by an ECA official in early February stating that, in accordance with the


requirements of 22 CFR 62.12(b), Ms. Aro was “eligible and qualified for, and accepted into, the program in which he or she will participate” (emphasis added).

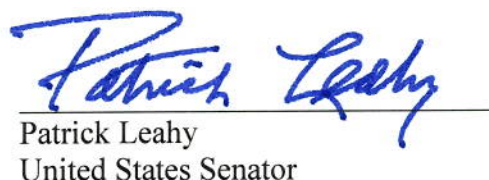
- An International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) agenda drafted by ECA officials in mid-February, which includes a customized individual travel program for Ms. Aro and proposes several private events for her participation in Chicago, centered on the themes of combatting disinformation and freedom of the press.

Furthermore, in early March, an article in Foreign Policy cited sources inside the Department who claimed that Ms. Aro’s award was rescinded because officials disagreed with social media posts she made criticizing President Trump’s attacks on the media and the rule of law. As we have seen evidence that State Department officials requested Ms. Aro to provide her social media handles after she had been accepted for the award program and prior to the Department’s revocation of her participation in the award ceremony, we find this allegation both potentially credible and disturbing.

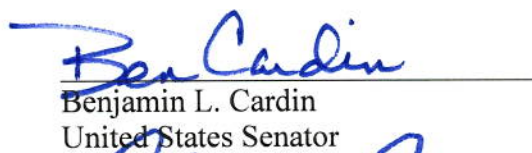
Please do not hesitate to contact our offices if you would like more information regarding this request, including the underlying evidence that informed the attached document. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

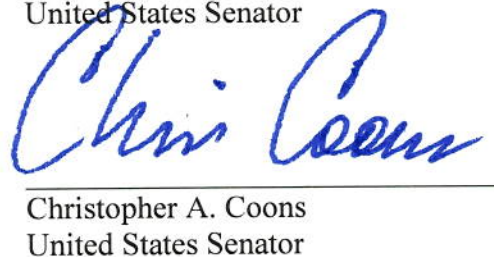

Robert Menendez
United States Senator

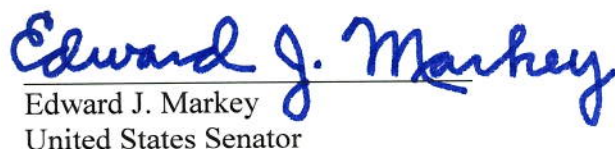

Patrick Leahy
United States Senator

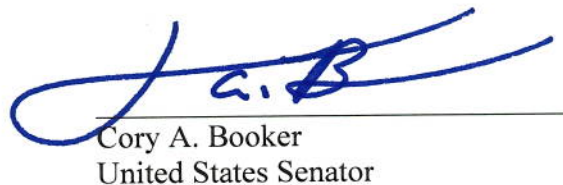

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator


Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator


Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator


Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator


Edward J. Markey
United States Senator


Cory A. Booker
United States Senator