

KURT SCHORK AWARDS – 2006

Winners:

Local reporter category – **Massoud Ansari** (Pakistan)

Freelance category – **Steven Vincent** (USA) (awarded posthumously)

Ceremony held at the Frontline Club in London on 16th November.

Massoud Ansari

Karachi-based Massoud Ansari is Senior Reporter with Newsline, one of Pakistan's leading newsmagazines. He also strings for the London Sunday Telegraph and contributes to the US-based New Republic magazine, Jane's Defense weekly digest and the New Delhi-based Women Feature Service. Since 1998, he has been reporting widely across Pakistan and Afghanistan covering stories about Al-Qaeda and the network of the militant organization, politics, political crimes, rise of religious fundamentalism, environment or poppy cultivation, ethnic and sectarian violence or human rights including slavery of peasants under feudal landlords, ritual killings of the women in the name of honor or about religious and sexual minorities.

Ansari began his career in journalism at the age of 19 in the highly political Sindh town of Larkana, home of slain premier Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and his daughter Benazir. In spite of its international significance, Ansari maintains people in Larkana look down upon journalists as blackmailers, racketeers and sycophants in the service of the local administration. Chased out of the town for his exposes on rape, religious zealotry and abuses of power, he re-settled in Karachi –one of the world's most dangerous cities for an investigative reporter. It was here that Ansari wrote his series of stories which won him the Kurt Schork Award for International Journalism 2006. These included his investigation into the facts behind the murder of journalist Daniel Pearl and the Pakistan connection to the 7/7 bombings in London last year.

Says Ansari 'After I joined Newsline I adopted investigative journalism as my main forte. Each investigative story that I do gives me the pleasure of coming closer to my goal: unravelling the intricacies of human society. Living away from home and facing professional challenges as they come, give me greater confidence to do something meaningful for both my community and society in general.'

Steven Vincent

was a New York art journalist who turned war reporter after witnessing 9/11 first hand from his apartment rooftop. He went to Iraq as a freelance and had been living for several months in Basra, wanting to report on stories that no-one else was covering. While there, he began to uncover an increasingly dark side to the 'Serene South', as The New York Times referred to the British-controlled sector of Iraq. A steadily-growing tide of violent Islamic fundamentalism, fueled by followers of the radical cleric Moqtada al-Sadr and Iranian infiltrators was beginning to overwhelm Basra and its environs.

On July 31 2005, Steven had an op-ed piece published by the New York Times regarding the infiltration of the Basra police force by Iranian-backed Shia fundamentalists. In it, he exposed the fact that rogue elements on the force had formed assassination squads and were driving through the city, snatching and killing their victims with impunity. Two days later, he and his translator were kidnapped off the street by men in police uniforms, driving a police vehicle, taken to an undisclosed location, beaten and then shot. His translator Nour al-Khal survived: Steven died.

While the infiltration of the Basra police force is now common knowledge and the British Army moved in to cull extremists from the force, Steven was the first to expose it as the only long-term Western journalist working in the area. Initially he wrote on his blog In the Red Zone (www.redzoneblog.com), in several articles in the Christian Science Monitor and finally in The New York Times. He well knew the risks he was running, as a July 9th quote from his blog shows:

"The Christian Science Monitor has been kind enough to run another of my articles, this one on the religious parties which now dominate Basra. When you read this, keep in mind that for various reasons –not the least of which are safety concerns – the piece only scratches the surface of what is happening here."

Says his widow, Lisa Ramaci: "My husband was not a foolhardy man, but considered the information he was disseminating to be extremely vital and worth pursuing as far as he could take it. He lived courageously, and died courageously in an attempt to bring what he was seeing and learning to a larger audience. There is not much more we can ask of journalists and Steven truly gave his all in the pursuit of truth and moral clarity." Steven Vincent's book In the Red Zone – a Journey Into the Soul of Iraq (Spence Publishing), describes a tormented society whose inhabitants survived the ghoulish dictatorship of Saddam Hussein only to face the death cult of radical Islam.