

This shouldn't be happening in the United States

(Excerpt from 9/9/2004 Sam Adams Associates Award speech)

Thank you. I want to thank Sam Adams Associates for honoring me with this award, and thank them for bringing the two words, Intelligence & Integrity, together. I want to thank Dan Ellsberg, my mentor, my supporter, and my friend. It is an honor to know you Dan. I also want to thank Ray McGovern for his friendship & support, for his relentless efforts to promote and bring out the truth, and for being such an eloquent advocate.

When I was a child, at the age of 11, living in a country thousands of miles from here, I witnessed my father's career as a surgeon in charge of a large division of a hospital in a state university crumble into pieces. He became a witness to a case in which law enforcement/intelligence authorities coerced the forensic examiner and the morgue administrators into changing the bullets recovered from a corpse with the one provided by them. My father blew the whistle, he refused to go along with a criminal act that would result in a guilty man going free and an innocent one being sent to jail. As a result, he suffered drastic consequences, the least of which was losing his job. Consequences that are not unusual where I came from. My father never regretted his action, and I knew despite the consequences he suffered he would do it all over again. I remember him telling me: "Things like this do not happen in truly democratic civil societies like America."

When I was a teenager, during my second year in high school, I decided to take part in a National High-School Writing Competition, and I submitted an essay titled: Democracy & Freedom of the Press. At the time I was very interested in Freedom of the Press; and the torture and imprisonment of many thousands of authors and journalists, simply for criticizing the establishment. These writers were being arrested under Treason Laws, prosecuted in closed military/intelligence tribunals, and were being sent to jails by the thousands. Actions that are not unusual where I came from. My high school principal called my father and asked him to stop by the school. When my father got there, the

principal told him how much he liked and admired me, and that he wanted to save my family and me from police harassment and retaliation. So he asked my father to convince me to remove my name and essay from the upcoming competition; to do this for our own good. My father refused, told him to submit my essay, and left. The principal did not give up and summoned my mother. My mother, a cautious and a rule-abiding citizen, complied. She told me sternly: "In this country, you should never ever rock the boat." My disappointed father said: "Sibel, things like this separate us from democratic societies. Things like this do not happen in truly democratic civil societies like America."

I came to the United States in 1988, right after high school. I pursued my university education, during which I took courses in American Government, the U.S. Constitution, and U.S. History, and became mesmerized by the emphasis on the Separation of Powers, System of Checks & Balances, Transparency, Accountability, Civil Liberties, and Freedom of the Press. Remember where I came from, countries where you will be arrested for just dreaming about having these laws and rights. Many of you were privileged to be born here and to have your U.S. citizenship and your rights guaranteed under the Constitution granted to you at birth. I, on the other hand, chose to become a citizen of this country, and took an oath to defend its Constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic. I know it sometimes annoys my husband to hear it, but my citizenship oath became more important to me than even my marriage oath.

I took a job with the FBI as a language specialist right after 9/11. During my short tenure with the Bureau I became aware of cases and problems involving criminal conduct against our national interests, serious security breaches threatening our intelligence, intentional mistranslation of intelligence with severe consequences, and intentional blocking of certain terrorism and criminal cases from being investigated by our government officials. I was asked, and later ordered, to refrain from reporting these cases. I refused, because I considered it my duty and my obligation to fulfill as a citizen, as a civil servant. I reported these serious misconducts, together with evidence, to higher management within the bureau. They refused to take any action, and again, they asked me not to pursue them. I refused again. I took these issues and evidence to the DOJ-IG

and to the appropriate Senate Committees with oversight authority, because I believed that according to our laws and regulations these were the appropriate steps to take in this situation. As a result, I was retaliated against and fired.

For two years after my termination from the FBI, I patiently and optimistically sat back and waited for appropriate investigations, decisions and actions to be taken by the three separate branches of our government. I provided testimony to the Congress, our legislative branch with oversight authority. I provided testimony and evidence to the Inspector General's Office, our executive investigative authority. And I filed motions with the federal courts, our judicial authority. I believed I had done all I could. I believed I had pursued all I should. I went by the book. I went by the rules. I went by the system.

During these two years the Attorney General, John Ashcroft, attempted to illegally gag the United States Congress in their investigations of my case and issues. And, he succeeded. How could that be? I went to my textbooks; Civics 101, American Government, and others, and reread the principles upon which our government and its separation of powers were established. And I kept telling myself, silently: 'This shouldn't be happening in the United States!'

I rushed to the offices of my professors and instructors, experts and lecturers on our Government and Laws, and asked them how could this be taking place, how could it be allowed to take place, in the United States? They shook their heads and said 'it shouldn't. This is because our system, principles, and laws did not take into consideration a deviation called John Ashcroft.'

During these two years the Attorney General, John Ashcroft, attempted to block my court proceedings by invoking a rarely invoked 'State Secrets Privilege.' And, he succeeded. Now, how could that happen? I referred to my textbooks again, and sure enough, according to our laws and rights this action by Ashcroft defied our system and its laws. I kept telling myself and those close to me: 'This shouldn't be happening in the United States!'

I banged on the doors of those experts on our judicial system and government again, and asked them how could this be allowed by our courts? They said it was very troubling, but that our system didn't take into account events and catastrophes such as 9/11. Then, I asked them whether this meant that our Constitution and Civil Liberties were circumstantial? They did not answer that question, but looked very confused.

At the end of these two years, and after more than a year of delay, the Inspector General's Office completed its report. Attorney General Ashcroft demanded that the entire report be classified and that its findings be kept from the public. And, he succeeded. At this point I was telling everyone I could, and as loud as I could: 'This shouldn't be happening in our democracy, in our country.' And this time around, when I approached those experts, they completely agreed that our system was broken and badly in need of a fix.

I was a good girl for over two years. I complied with the rules, rules that were against what our system intended; rules that defied our notions of transparency, accountability, and Justice; and rules that were made to accommodate this administration's intent to cover up criminal acts, negligence, and incompetence. I believed in our system, a system established to prevent abuse of power by any of the branches of our government; a system intent upon prosecuting criminals and upholding accountability; a system geared to protect our civil liberty; in short, the American System of Democracy. It took me over two years to believe and understand that that system was no longer intact. Our system was badly broken.

Coming to this realization made me decide that there was only one channel left. A channel not yet pursued, the court of public opinion. I realized that fixing and addressing these cases and issues could only be possible through public awareness, through public demand, and through public action. I know that this government uses intimidation, gagging and over-classification to cover up and prevent exactly that, public awareness. But I also know that our Constitution and our rights most definitely override their self-

imposed and anti-democratic rules and laws. I know that this government imposes severe punishment on truth tellers and whistleblowers, and they have been doing so simply because they can. But I also know that they will continue only so long as our people allow them. And, I know that our people will not tolerate these actions if they get to know, if they get to hear, and if they get to see the truth brought to them by courageous truth tellers.