

Freedom From Fear

On this, the tenth day of October 2017, the Franklin D. Roosevelt

Freedom From Fear Medal is awarded to:

Cristina Jiménez Moreta

A few miles south of here in New York Harbor, a 131-year old, 151-foot copper statue proclaims this country's heritage as a nation of immigrants. For the millions of immigrants who came to the U.S. through Ellis Island, the Statue of Liberty was the beacon of their arrival, a gesture from this vast, new country that told them they had left the violence and despair of the Old World behind.

Immigrant labor helped build every part of the United States. Immigrant genius pushed us to new heights of innovation in medicine, technology, and creative expression. Immigrants still do. Immigrant culture has enriched our entire culture, is our culture.

But American society has, at times, been cruel to immigrants. We gather in such a time. The undocumented immigrant community has known a special kind of dread as they worked hard to get ahead while remaining in the shadows. Denied legal status and the protections that come with it, these immigrants sustain our economy and pay American taxes, but do not fully enjoy the benefits of membership. At any time, a government raid can turn their lives upside down.

Cristina Jiménez Moreta, you have long known these struggles, and have shown the courage to fight for an America where immigrant youth and their families could envision a life free from fear.

You know these truths because you have lived them, arriving in this country with your family from Ecuador as a 13-year-old. You excelled in high school and college despite the challenges of being undocumented, completing a Master's degree in Public Policy and Public Administration from CUNY-Baruch College and a Bachelor's in Political Science and Business from CUNY-Queens College.

For more than a decade, you have dedicated your life to organizing the immigrant community. You co-founded United We Dream, the largest immigrant youth-led organization in the country. Under your leadership, United We Dream has grown and now has more than 300,000 members in 26 states. For years, United We Dream has led the fight to demand dignity and security for undocumented families.

During the Obama years, you stood at the forefront of the battle against youth deportations, which culminated in the 2012 Deferred Action for Child Arrivals (DACA) program. Because of DACA, more than 1 million undocumented young people were protected from deportation, empowered to work and learn in the communities they call home.

Today, the entire immigrant community is under threat. The challenges facing undocumented immigrants did not begin last year, but in 2017 they took on a new intensity, as voters across the country appeared to accept and even encourage bigoted, dishonest political rhetoric directed at immigrants.

And now, as deportations escalate and DACA appears to be at risk, you and United We Dream are refusing to back down. You are making it clear to the Americans who have forgotten that their ancestors were once strangers in this land, that you are not going anywhere—that you and your immigrant sisters and brothers are here to stay and here to make America great.

Throughout our history, fear and hatred of the immigrants in this country has been more intense at some times than others. But the courage to lift up young people, especially young people on the margins, is always needed. You have shown that courage is real and that it can win—that immigrants have their own part to play in building an America free from fear. It is an honor and pleasure to present you with the 2017 Franklin D. Roosevelt **Freedom From Fear Award** tonight.

Citation read by Maria Hinojosa, Founder, Futuro Media Group.