

Freedom From Want

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

Freedom From Want Medal is awarded to:

Ai-jen Poo

Every so often, people of consequence come along who manage to both embody the enduring stories that define their society and confront the unique challenges of their time. You, Ai-jen Poo, are such a person.

The child of pro-democracy immigrants from Taiwan, you were born in Pittsburgh, a city long associated with the grit and aspirations of America's working people. Your parents worked to provide you with the best opportunities, and you were educated at some of our nation's most prestigious institutions. But these opportunities did not lull you into a sense of complacency or blindness to social ills.

Instead, you witnessed the daily challenges of domestic workers across the country. This community—largely composed of immigrant women of color—labored for long hours and little pay. Prevailing narratives about the U.S. economy erased these people, the more than 2 million individuals who care for our nation's homes and families. But you saw their true value. You saw them. What you saw made you angry, and you channeled that anger into a movement.

In 2007, you helped found the National Domestic Workers Alliance, which is now America's leading voice in demanding respect and equality for millions of domestic workers. You have won real victories. Here in New York, it was the passage of the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights, which guarantees overtime pay, paid leave, and the assurance of a day of rest for nannies, housekeepers, and home care aides.

With the Baby Boomer generation aging, you helped found Caring Across Generations, a movement seeking to make sure that the caretakers and the cared-for can live their lives with dignity. You did this by leading with stories, including the story of your own grandmother and

her caregiver, Mrs. Son, who have worked together so your grandmother can live life on her own terms.

Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt fought for "freedom from want," the belief that every human being is entitled to a decent standard of living. In the near-century since the New Deal was first enacted, all too often the gains made in our national standards of living have left women and people of color behind. At times, this abandonment was deliberate. But even when unintentional, those actions represented both an economic and a moral failure.

Today, the rights and interests of working people are at even more risk. The right to organize and bargain as a union is under sustained assault. And the social programs that help people on the margins of our society to make ends meet are often the first to be threatened by budget debates or political arguments.

Many are outraged by this. But few have done as much as you to address it, to tackle its root causes, and to empower the people most impacted by it.

You are determined, and you are savvy. But what truly sets you apart is compassion. You have said, "I believe love is the most powerful force for change in the world. I often compare great campaigns to great love affairs because they're an incredible container for transformation. You can change policy, but you can also change relationships and people in the process."

You are motivated by a deep love for the people you seek to lift up. And in devoting your life to working people, you have also celebrated the hopes they have for themselves and their own children. Tonight, we celebrate you. It is our great honor to award you the 2017 Franklin D. Roosevelt [Freedom From Want Medal](#).

Citation read by Sister Simone Campbell, SSS, Executive Director, NETWORK.