



THE *Isabel Allende*

FOUNDATION

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Isabel Allende Foundation Announces 2008 Espiritu Awards**

*Four international nonprofits fighting on behalf of exploited children receive grants of \$20,000 each*

SAUSALITO, CA, August 25 — Internationally acclaimed author Isabel Allende today announced the recipients of her foundation's 2008 Espiritu Awards, dedicated to supporting organizations that protect and empower women and children. This year's beneficiaries are:

- **Development and Education Programme for Daughters and Communities**, Thailand
- **Freedom Firm USA**, India
- **Friends-International**, Cambodia
- **Nepalese Youth Opportunity Foundation**, Nepal

These organizations aid and defend children throughout Asia who have been victimized or are at risk of being victimized by human trafficking. Each nonprofit receives an award of \$20,000.

"Sexual and economic exploitation of children are betrayals of the worst kind," says Allende. "Every child deserves a safe, healthy and happy childhood, and each of the award winners moves us closer toward achieving that ideal."

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## About the 2008 Espiritu Award Recipients

**The Development and Education Programme for Daughters and Communities (DEPDC)** sees education as essential to impede the sex trafficking of young women and children. Throughout areas of northern Thailand, where DEPDC operates, as many as ninety percent of village girls—some as young as ten years old—have been lured or forced into brothels in Bangkok and other cities, many overseas.

“What I most appreciate about DEPDC is its emphasis on education as a means of preventing children from being trafficked in the first place,” says Allende. “Through education we have an opportunity to intervene before damage is done. A child who is taken in by DEPDC is both less likely to be deceived by traffickers and better equipped to find other work.”

In addition to providing housing, schooling, clothing and medical care—as well as rehabilitation for those who escape the sex trade—DEPDC works to identify those most vulnerable to traffickers, including orphans and children whose parents are so poor that they see no option to selling them into labor. It enlists village leaders, police and others to point out at-risk children, and educates families and community leaders (who often act as middlemen for traffickers) about children’s rights and the dangers of the sex industry.

CONTACT: [www.depdc.org](http://www.depdc.org)

**Freedom Firm USA**, works in Tamil Nadu, India, to rescue young victims of sex trafficking and help them rebuild their lives. “The cruelty and abuse that sexually enslaved young girls endure is devastating,” says Allende. “Freedom Firm USA is often their only hope of escape.”

Posing as customers, Freedom Firm USA operatives use hidden cameras to locate minors held in brothels and to collect evidence. Freedom Firm USA lawyers and female social workers accompany police on their raids; whenever possible, former prostitutes who were rescued themselves go along, too—both to motivate police with proof that the girls can be successfully liberated and because the women can more easily detect where children might be hidden.

Freedom Firm USA places rescued girls in rehabilitation homes where they receive medical care, therapy and education. “These terribly abused girls get a second chance at life,” says Allende. “And it gives them a badly needed sense of justice.”

CONTACT: [www.freedom.firm.in](http://www.freedom.firm.in)

**Friends-International** seeks to reduce the number of street children in Southeast Asia. Working in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, the organization provides transitional housing, offers education and vocational training for children, places them with extended families or in foster care, and assists available family members with finding jobs. It also supports trafficking prevention programs, trains professionals to work with street children and offers medical care for those with AIDS.

“Shelter is basic to human survival,” says Allende. “No child can thrive while living on the street. It is imperative that we move street children into healthy, stable environments and give them a chance at normal childhood.”

There are an estimated 150 million street children worldwide. Experts say that number could climb to 800 million by 2020, fueled by increasing urbanization and poverty, the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS, and the spread of civil unrest and war. Friends-International comes to the aid of children living on the streets, either alone or with their families, who are in danger of being sexually abused and exploited, and are vulnerable to drug addiction and disease. As a result, these children are more likely to attend school and become independent and productive members of their communities.

CONTACT: [www.friends-international.org](http://www.friends-international.org)

**The Nepalese Youth Opportunity Foundation (NYOF)** liberates and cares for girls throughout Nepal, some as young as six, who have been sold into bonded labor by their destitute families. Aiming to end the practice in the Dang district, in western Nepal, the Sausalito, California-based organization came up with an ingenious solution. Keep your daughters at home and in school, NYOF told poor parents, and we'll give you a pig or a goat. Both animals are highly prized in Nepalese society and, when sold, are worth the equivalent of the girl's labor. NYOF also agreed to pay for the girls' education and school supplies, a key element to breaking the cycle of poverty.

“It is heartbreaking to imagine the poverty and desperation that lead parents to sell their own children,” says Allende. “My dream is that one day no girl will have to endure the horror of being sold into servitude and that no parent will face the miserable choice between selling a child and watching the rest of the family starve.”

In addition to its efforts to end indentured servitude, NYOF also provides for destitute children throughout Nepal, offering housing, education, medical care and a supportive environment. Other programs include nutritional rehabilitation homes for malnourished infants and children and scholarships for girls.

CONTACT: [www.nyof.org](http://www.nyof.org)

### About the Isabel Allende Foundation

The Isabel Allende Foundation honors the author's daughter, Paula, who died in 1992 at age twenty-eight. During her too-short life, Paula worked as a volunteer in poor communities in Venezuela and Spain, offering her time, dedication and skills as an educator and psychologist. Established in 1996, the foundation pays tribute to Paula's work, her ideals and her compassion.

For more information, visit [www.isabelallendefoundation.org](http://www.isabelallendefoundation.org). Additional information about the author can be found at [www.isabelallende.com](http://www.isabelallende.com).