

**For Immediate Release**

**IMMIGRATION'S GIFT TO AMERICA:  
PAUL AND DAISY SOROS PROGRAM ANNOUNCES 30 NEW  
GRADUATE FELLOWSHIPS FOR NEW AMERICANS**

**NEW YORK, NY, March 1, 2010**

The Board of Trustees of the Paul & Daisy Soros Fellowships for New Americans today announced the appointment of 30 extraordinarily creative and accomplished young immigrants or children of immigrants as recipients in the 2010 competition for Soros New American Fellowships.

Dr. Warren Ilchman, the Director of the Program, noted that, "The achievements of these new fellows place them among the very best graduate students in this country. They are even more remarkable in light of the great challenges that many of them faced as they struggled to reach, and then adapt to, the language, traditions, and expectations of this country. Americans can truly be proud not only of these new Americans, but also of the opportunities we as a people – and our educational system – have afforded them."

Now clearly established in the academic world as an extremely prestigious honor – comparable in competitiveness to the Rhodes and Marshall Scholarships – the Soros Fellowships specifically recognize the contributions and promise of young people who are recent additions to the ranks of Americans. Truly national in scope, the fellowships may be used at any degree-granting graduate program in any field in the United States. The two-year awards provide cash grants of up to \$50,000 and tuition support of up to \$40,000.

The thirty 2010 Soros Fellows were chosen from 890 applicants from 297 undergraduate and 140 graduate institutions.

Among this year's awardees are:

- A young man who was 10 when, in 1998, his parents brought him to the United States from Pakistan, quickly adapts to life in New Jersey and excels in math and science. He is admitted to the Newark campus of Rutgers University, where he graduates *summa cum laude* and then works in the labs of professors until his immigration status makes it possible for him to enter medical school. He is now a second-year candidate for the MD degree at Stanford Medical School where he has special interests in Neglected Tropical Diseases.
- A child of survivors of the Cambodian "killing fields" who was born in a refugee camp in Thailand to parents who the Khmer Rouge had forced, as

strangers, to marry each other. This young woman was resettled with her family in Texas when she was two, won admission to Smith College, from which she graduated *cum laude*. She then documents, in her film, *New Year Baby*, her return to Cambodia with her parents and her gradual uncovering of the family history that had previously been hidden from her. She will study business management to further her film-making career.

- A 23-year-old who spent the first ten years of his life with his grandparents in extreme poverty in China, arrives in the US with virtually no English, attends high school and eventually Stanford University, and is now training to be a neurosurgeon at Stanford Medical School. He and a Stanford classmate organized and led a nonprofit organization that has facilitated the transfer of \$2 million worth of medical resources to Ethiopia
- A young man who was born in the Dominican Republic came to a poor area of Boston when he was three. He did extremely well academically, gained admission to Boston Latin School and then Amherst College, where he acquired spoken fluency in five languages including Mandarin. After having served as a White House intern, he will begin work on a master's degree in public policy in the fall.
- A child of a single mother from Antigua who grew up in poverty in the Bronx. Her academic promise won her scholarship support to attend a Connecticut prep school and subsequently to Middlebury College. She won Truman and Fulbright scholarships and, after returning to the South Bronx as a teacher with Teach for America, is now pursuing a PhD in health policy and education from Columbia Teachers College.

Dr. Ilchman, the Director of the program, added: "We expect that these new products of American immigration, like their 356 predecessors from 12 previous years of Soros awards, will make extraordinary contributions to the richness of American life."

Among alumni, there are authors of 48 books, holders of 42 patents (several in commercial development), four composers whose work was premiered this year by leading orchestras, four instrumentalists who had their debuts this past year, and 61 clerkships for Federal judges, including nine at the US Supreme Court. There are also young and promising academics, doctors, artists, lawyers, and individuals in business: Among Soros alumni:

- The CEO of the Chicago Public School system;
- A Special Envoy from the White House to the Muslim Community worldwide;

- The State Department's special representative to Latin America (currently coordinating aid to Haiti), and
- The Executive Vice President and COO of Planned Parenthood Federation of the US.

**The 2010 Paul & Daisy Soros Fellows are:**

**AbdulRasheed Alabi**, the child of immigrants from Nigeria who grew up in that country and then returned to the United States to attend Johns Hopkins University. Excelling in biomedical research, his work has been published in *Nature*, among other peer-reviewed journals. He is now pursuing an MD degree and a PhD in neuroscience at Stanford Medical School.

**Shah Ali**, who came to this country from Pakistan when he was 10, attended the Newark campus of Rutgers University while awaiting clarification of his immigration status. Graduating *summa cum laude* and *Phi Beta Kappa*, he now is conducting research on stem cells while in his second year of an MD program at Stanford Medical School.

**Oscar Baez** came to Boston from the Dominican Republic when he was three. He gained admission to Boston Latin School and subsequently Amherst College, where he developed his fluency in Latin, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Mandarin. Recipient of a Thomas J Watson fellowship, he did research in seven countries on efforts to strengthen recognition of minority linguistic communities. He will study public affairs to prepare for a career in government service.

**Isra Bhatti**, whose family emigrated from Pakistan to England and subsequently, when she was a baby, to Illinois. Isra attended the University of Chicago and then Yale Law School. While there she won a Rhodes Scholarship. She will return to Yale from Oxford in the fall of 2010. She has organized and led efforts to promote understanding and inclusion of disabled children among Muslim families in the United States.

**Andy Chen** is the son of immigrants to Los Angeles from Taiwan. As an undergraduate at Princeton, he founded and led a graphic design agency that produced more than 400 pieces of print and web design for faculty, students, and organizations. Beginning with a focus on sexual identity, the themes of his design work expanded into a variety of areas. Now a Fulbright fellow in England, he has produced advertisements that expand awareness of sexuality among seniors. He will begin graduate work at the Rhode Island School of Design in the Fall.

**Sean Chen** is a senior at the college division of Juilliard. Raised in the Los Angeles area, he is the son of immigrants from Taiwan. His piano performances

have won the Juilliard Concerto Competition, 2<sup>nd</sup> prize at the Sydney International Piano Competition, and the prize for the Best Performance of an American Work at the Cleveland International Piano Competition. He will begin work on a master's in piano performance in the fall.

**Zahir Dossa** was born in Texas to parents of Indian heritage who had settled in, and then fled -- during a nationalization frenzy -- from, Tanzania. Zahir gained admission to MIT where he and a fellow student founded an organization to distribute low-tech and very inexpensive irrigation pumps to low-income farmers in Sudan. He has remained at MIT, where he is now pursuing both an MS in electrical engineering and a PhD in urban studies, preparing for a career in social entrepreneurship.

**Tarek Ghani** was born in the United States to parents who met in graduate school here. His mother was from Lebanon and his father from Afghanistan. As an undergraduate at Stanford, he took a year off to serve as special assistant to his father who had returned to Afghanistan to serve as the country's Finance Minister. Tarek subsequently returned to Stanford where he graduated with a symbolic system major. He served as student representative on the finance committee of the university's board of trustees, was commencement speaker for his class, and won a Truman Scholarship. He then oversaw a \$15 million grant budget designed to promote transparency and accountability in Liberia's government programs.

**Reshmaan Hussam** is the daughter of Bangladeshi immigrants to this country. She was born in Virginia and graduated from MIT with a major in economics in 2009. As a young Muslim woman doing a field assignment in Bangladesh, she used focus groups to discover the "back stories" of the impact of micro credit programs on the finances, husband-wife relationships, and status of village women. Beginning in the Fall of 2010 she will pursue a PhD in developmental economics.

**Amit Jain** was 11 when he left India to come with his parents to Sacramento, CA. He entered the University of California, Berkeley, graduated *magna cum laude* in bioengineering when he was 19 and now -- he just turned 22 -- is in his second year of an MD program at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine.

**Bowen Jiang** is a first-year medical student at Stanford. His plan is to train as a neurosurgeon. Bowen was 10 when he left China, where he was living in poverty with his grandparents, to join his father in Maryland. He excelled academically and gained admission to and fellowship support at Stanford, from which he received a BS in biological sciences in 2008.

**Jonah Lalas** is the son of Filipino immigrants to the United States. Raised in California, he graduated *summa cum laude* from UCLA, where he was the student speaker at his commencement ceremony. He became a union organizer while still

at UCLA and has subsequently begun to build an impressive career – both in Texas and in California – in that field. He is now pursuing a law degree at the University of California, Berkeley.

**Laurel Yong-Hwa Lee** was born on a small island off the coast of South Korea. Her parents nurtured her academic and scientific interests, but only when she was 17 did she immigrate with them to this country, settling in the Seattle area. She gained admission to MIT, graduated with a double major in brain and cognitive science and in biology, and won a Rhodes Scholarship. At Oxford she earned a DPhil degree in clinical medicine. She is now in her second year of MD studies at the Harvard/MIT Health Sciences and Technology program.

**Margaret Lee** was born in Glendale, CA to parents who had emigrated the previous year from South Korea. Following her *summa cum laude* graduation from UCLA, where she had a double major in sociology and Asian American studies, Margaret earned a master's degree in social work and served as a community leader in the Asian American community, focusing on mental health issues. She is now in the second year of a doctoral program in social work at UCLA and continues to specialize in managing mental health issues.

**Emily Martin** came to this country from Switzerland six years ago for undergraduate work at Columbia University. Four years later she graduated in literature and writing, with election to *Phi Beta Kappa*. The child of a Swiss father and English mother, Emily grew up fully bilingual in French and English and began writing poetry – now widely published -- in both languages. In addition, she has published English translations of French poetry. She is currently pursuing an MFA degree in Poetry and Translation at Columbia.

**Helen O'Reilly**, a child of Irish immigrants, grew up in a very diverse neighborhood in Queens, where she was exposed to the influences of strong unions, domestic labor, and poverty. The product of Catholic schools, she graduated, *magna cum laude*, from Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service. After working at Advocates for Children in New York, Helen won a Luce Foundation Scholarship to spend two years studying informal sector employment in the Philippines and Hong Kong. She is now a second-year JD degree candidate at Yale Law School, where she is student co-director of the renowned Yale Rebellious Lawyering Conference.

**Tony Pan** grew up in Kaoshiung, Taiwan. When he was a high school senior, the family's green card application was finally approved and Tony was able to accept an offer of admission and financial aid from Stanford University. He graduated four years later with a BS in Physics, winning awards for scholastic achievement and outstanding performance in physics. He is now pursuing a PhD in theoretical astrophysics at Harvard.

**Socheata Poeuv** and her family were resettled in this country when she was two. Her family escaped the “killing fields” of Cambodia and were interned as refugees in Thailand, where Socheata was born. She attended Smith College, graduating in 2002 with a degree in English literature. Her first film, *New Year Baby*, documents her uncovering of many unspoken aspects of her family’s experiences in Khmer Rouge-controlled Cambodia. It won significant awards and was shown nation-wide on PBS. She subsequently founded Khmer Legacies to help other Cambodian families begin to share with younger generations the traumas of their experiences in Cambodia. Socheata has applied for MBA programs in order to acquire business skills relevant to her organizing goals.

**Hari Prabhakar** was born in Dallas, TX to south Indian parents who had come to this country three years earlier. While pursuing an undergraduate degree at The Johns Hopkins University, he became aware of, and committed to alleviating, the grossly inadequate health care provided to tribal populations in south India. He was awarded a British Marshall Scholarship, which he used to earn advanced degrees in tropical medicine and international health management. He is now in his first year at Harvard Medical School.

**Camilo Romero** was born in Costa Mesa, CA, to a mother who had emigrated from Colombia five years earlier. After graduating with a degree in sociology from the University of California, Berkeley, -- he was a Gates Millennium Scholar -- Camilo worked in a human rights firm and as a union organizer in Colombia. He is now pursuing a JD degree at New York University Law School. His goal is to work as a lawyer on union and immigration issues.

**Katarina Ruscic** was born in Zagreb and escaped from the violence of post-Yugoslavian conflicts when she was 12. She attended the University of Chicago where she received Howard Hughes and Goldwater scholarships and had three majors: in biology, chemistry and biochemistry. Two patents are pending for her work on batteries for hybrid electric cars, but her career goals focus on medicine: She is pursuing both an MD and a PhD in computational neuroscience at the University of Chicago.

**Elina Sarkisova’s** family were members of the minority Armenian community that had long been resident in Azerbaijan. When she was five, the family fled to Moscow in the face of anti-Armenian violence and two years later were resettled in Connecticut under the US Refugee Admissions program. Elina attended Georgetown University, graduating with a degree in international politics. She now oversees and coordinates refugee resettlement for the program in the State Department that facilitated her own admission to the United States. She plans to begin graduate work in international policy in the fall of 2010.

**Deep Shah** was born in Atlanta, GA eight years after his parents emigrated to this country from India. He was named “Georgia’s Outstanding Scholar” and was selected as a Rhodes Scholar when he graduated from the University of Georgia.

He has held numerous public policy internships and earned a master's degree in comparative social policy while at Oxford. He is currently a first-year student at Harvard Medical School, and aspires to be an active leader on health policy issues as well as a practicing physician.

**Naman Shah** was born in Charlotte, NC to parents who had met in this country after emigrating from India. He graduated with highest honors and distinction in public service from the University of North Carolina, where he is now a second-year candidate for the MD and PhD degrees in the Medical Scientist Training Program. Committed to health policy field work, Naman has conducted work in India on a polio vaccination project and more recently on combating malaria infection.

**Aarti Shahani** was born in Casablanca, Morocco to parents of Pakistani heritage. They continued on to settle in this country when she was a baby. She attended the University of Chicago and was an honors graduate in anthropology in 2002. Her father and uncle ran afoul of immigration requirements and she spent the better part of nine years in an effort – eventually successful – to prevent her father's deportation. She drew on that experience to establish and lead Families for Freedom, which assists families who have members under threat of deportation. Aarti is currently a first-year student in public policy at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government.

**Shirag Shemmassian** is of Armenian descent and was born in Santa Monica, CA to parents who had fled to this country from Beirut during the Lebanese Civil War. An undergraduate at Cornell, he graduated with a degree in human development. Afflicted with Tourette's Syndrome, Shirag has focused his work experience and his scholarship on treatment of anxiety and behavioral disorders. He is now pursuing a PhD in clinical psychology at UCLA.

**Dena Simmons** grew up in the Bronx, the daughter of a single mother who had come to this country from Antigua as a very young woman, alone and without significant resources. Showing great academic promise, Dena obtained support to attend a Connecticut prep school and subsequently won a Truman Scholarship and graduated *magna cum laude* from Middlebury College. She was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to the Dominican Republic, where she studied teen pregnancy prevention. Having taught for several years in the South Bronx with Teach for America, Dena is now pursuing a doctorate in health policy and education at Columbia's Teachers College.

**Vanara Taing** was born in a Thai refugee camp for Cambodians who had escaped during the Vietnamese invasion of their country. Soon thereafter the family was resettled in Washington State. Vanara attended Scripps College and, at graduation, won the award for the best thesis in the English Department. She subsequently received a master's degree from Harvard's School of Education and has worked for several years at StoryCorps, an oral history project of National

Public Radio. She recently produced a film, *Beyond the Music*, which has been shown at New York's Museum of Modern Art and Anthology Film Archive. Vanara has applications pending at several MFA programs in film production and editing.

**Philip Tanedo** was born in Los Angeles to parents who had emigrated from the Philippines. As an undergraduate at Stanford he won a Goldwater scholarship, graduated with majors in physics and mathematics, and was awarded a British Marshall Scholarship to pursue graduate study at Durham and Cambridge Universities. He has been an active role model for Filipino-American youth who are interested in science and mathematics. Now at Cornell University, Philip is pursuing a PhD in physics.

**Yifan Xu** was born in Beijing. Her parents left her with grandparents for two years while they established themselves in the United States. Yifan joined them when she was six. She was admitted to Duke University, where she won undergraduate scholarships from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute and the National Science Foundation. She founded and served as editor and graphic designer for an undergraduate journal that published work on mind, brain and behavioral research. Yifan is now pursuing MD and PhD degrees at the Cornell/Rockefeller University/Sloan-Kettering Tri-Institutional program.

The Fellowship Program is funded by income from a charitable trust of \$75 million created by philanthropists Paul and Daisy Soros, of New York City and New Canaan, Connecticut. Since its inception, over \$33 million dollars have been spent in support of graduate education of New Americans.

“We founded the Fellowship program to encourage young people with demonstrated leadership qualities, much like the Rhodes scholarships.” Mr. Soros comments. “Our criteria are designed to identify people who will make a success of their lives and who will contribute something to this country, in whatever area of endeavor they choose.”

Over the years Soros Fellows have attended 125 undergraduate institutions and have pursued their graduate studies at 50 different universities. The Soros program has helped, among other degree recipients, 88 MDs, 83 JDs, 46 PhDs, 27 MBAs, 23 MFAs and 50 other Master's complete their academic programs, for a total of 317 completed degrees. The Fellows and their families represent seventy-one countries, further diversified by representation of oppressed minorities in those countries. .

The program's selection process emphasizes three criteria:

- *creativity, originality, and initiative*, demonstrated in any area of an applicant's life;



- commitment to and capacity for *accomplishment*, demonstrated through activity that has required drive and sustained effort; and
- *commitment to the values expressed in the US Constitution and the Bill of Rights*. The third criterion includes activity in support of human rights and the rule of law, in opposition to unwarranted encroachment on personal liberty, and in advancing the responsibilities of citizenship in a free society.

The selection panels, which are made up of prominent New Americans,\*\* also assess the relevance of a candidate's choice of graduate program for continued creativity and accomplishment.

The finalists were interviewed in Los Angeles and New York. Ranging in age from 21 to 30, these new Fellows intend to pursue careers in music, medicine, law, business, economics, creative writing, film, public policy, global health, graphic design, health education, physics, psychology, social welfare, international relations, and engineering. They are enrolled in graduate programs at Harvard, Johns Hopkins, Stanford, MIT, Columbia, the Universities of California at Berkeley and Los Angeles, Teachers College, Cornell, Tri-Institutional MD-PhD program (Weill Cornell /Rockefeller University/Sloan-Kettering ), University of North Carolina, New York University, University of Chicago, and Yale.

13 are women, and 17 are men. Their average age is 25. 76% attended private undergraduate colleges and universities, while among those already in graduate school, 86% are in private universities. 43% are in or planning to attend medical and law school. Fourteen members of the Class of 2010 were born in the US; the others (16) came as adults or as children, often as refugees from oppression. In terms of national origins: Africa (2); East Asia (7); South Asia (5); Southeast Asia (4); Middle East (3); Latin America and the Caribbean (3), Eastern Europe (3), and Western Europe (3). Many of the parents are professionals, though often practicing in underserved areas in the US; others are children of migrant farm workers, small businesspeople, household workers, and factory workers. Several were at various times among the ranks of the undocumented. Some were orphaned and effectively raised themselves. About half have parents who went to college; indeed immigration was a vehicle for them to do so. In many cases, the Soros Fellows are not only the first in their families to complete college but also the first to have completed high school.

Several Fellows had received previous recognition of their promise with such scholarships as Rhodes, Marshall, Truman, Fulbright, Howard Hughes, Merage, Luce, Watson, McNair, Gates Millennium, and Goldwater scholarships. There are several Intel science competition finalists, and members of the All-USA College Academic First Team. Several awardees have worked with major consulting

firms, national and international nonprofit and governmental organizations, and in such places as the White House, the US Senate, and the Omidyar foundation.

The deadline for applications for the next round of Paul & Daisy Soros Fellowships for New Americans is **Monday, November 1, 2010**. Prospective applicants may obtain information at the website at [www.pdsoros.org](http://www.pdsoros.org).

**For further press information, please contact:**

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- \* Photos of any or all candidates will be sent upon request.
- \*\*Names and affiliations of panelists will be sent on request.