

OC Women Lawyers Name Sungaila Attorney of the Year

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PRACTICES Appellate, Litigation

M.C. Sungaila, a partner in the Haynes Boone Orange County office, was named Attorney of the Year by the Orange County Women Lawyers Association. She received the award Sept. 14 at the 42nd Annual OCWLA Gala.

The award recognizes Sungaila's professional accomplishments, lifelong dedication to securing important rights for women and girls nationally and internationally, and commitment to community service and pro bono work.

At age 29, Sungaila helped win a case before the U.S. Supreme Court, which reinstated a criminal civil rights verdict against a state court judge who had abused his power by raping and sexually assaulting female court employees and litigants. She has provided free representation in at least one appellate case annually since 1996, resulting in significant victories at the international, national and state levels. One case resulted in an Inter-American Court of Human Rights decision against Mexico for the disappearances and killings of women and girls in Ciudad Juarez that has been lauded as one of the most important women's rights decisions in decades and the first to interpret a women's rights treaty.

Sungaila was introduced at the event by past honorees Orange County Superior Court Judge Franz Miller and former OCWLA President Pearl Mann, both of whom had nominated her for the award. Mann also read a statement from former California Women Lawyers President Neda Mansoorian, who said of Sungaila, "we are grateful for your dedication and service to this great profession and to those who need you the most. On your watch, we shall rest much easier and look to a brighter future for our profession and our state."

Sungaila said her parents taught her to work for justice and fairness even before she attended law school. She also recognized Haynes Boone Partner Mark Erickson and the pro bono impact litigation team he leads at the firm in an affordable-housing case, for which the Orange County office received the Public Law Center's Law Firm of the Year Award earlier this year.

"I would like to encourage each of you to make a difference, to stand up for what you feel is just, fair and humane," Sungaila told attendees in accepting the award. "Individual courage is integral to creating change."

She cited as one example where individuals can make a difference the ongoing genocide against religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq and Syria by ISIS.

Earlier in 2017, Sungaila was awarded the Ellis Island Medal of Honor, whose recipients include seven U.S. presidents, Nobel Prize winners, athletes, leaders of industry, artists and others whose work has made a lasting impact on humanity, recognizing her combined professional achievements and humanitarian and pro bono work. A litigator in Haynes Boone's Appellate Practice Group, she also recently was appointed to a three-year term on the American Bar Association's Standing Committee on the American Judicial System's Subcommittee on Federal Courts, which focuses on improving the fair and effective administration of justice in the federal judicial system.