

UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador
Marianna V. Vardinoyannis

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RFK Justice & Human Rights Center to Honor Marianna V. Vardinoyannis



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Marianna V. Vardinoyannis: “Let’s leave a trace of humanitarianism in the world”

By Yannis Sofianos
TNH Staff Writer

“So that we can leave a trace of peace and humanitarianism in the world” is the reason UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador Marianna V. Vardinoyannis continues to work as hard, she tells TNH in an extensive interview. The president of the “Marianna V. Vardinoyannis Foundation” will be honored in New York City on December 8 with the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights & Justice Center’s Ripple of Hope Award.

Mrs. Vardinoyannis relayed to TNH the responsibilities of a civilized community with regards to the current refugee crisis, the importance of the ideals of democracy, and of justice and equality, which she believes endure in present-day Greece, and also the courage and strength she receives to carry on her work from the parents of the patients at The First Oncology Hospital for Children in Greece-ELPIDA (HOPE).

She discussed the assistance and solidarity of Greek-Americans vis-à-vis the Foundation, her fond memories of the teachings of her own parents, and the years of exile on Amorgos endured by her husband, Vardis. She elaborates on the lessons of humanitarianism she learned there, refers tenderly to her family, and discloses which of her dreams remain unfulfilled.

The interview follows:
TNH: What does it mean for

sense of solidarity to those that need it more than themselves, with such an outpour of soul and self-sacrifice that is being talked about all over the world.

During our long history, we the Greeks have always demonstrated that when the circumstances demand it we can use our fighting spirit as our weapon in solidarity, by being all of one soul, we put our disagreements aside, join our hands and win the battle. It is not the size of a people that is important but the courage, our pride and our soul. And all of these are in surplus in Greece.

Just because of this, I disagree that the ideals of democracy, justice, equality and all of the rest are forgotten in Greece. Simple people in our homeland express these in their daily lives, within their families, and in all of their human relations.

At the same time, every award increases the sense of responsibility and multiplies the obligations of the recipient, because they are obligated to honor, with their personality and their actions, not only their homeland, but also those who honored them.

TNH: Since 1987, and the International Humanitarian Award which you received in the USA, you have tied your life to the noble cause of offering to society. You have been honored by domestic and international organizations; you have helped thousands of people and especially children. What is the “ri-

through the supreme love that every mother feels for her children. Thus, in 1990, when I found out that there were no bone marrow transplants performed in Greece on sick children running the risk of losing their lives, we founded the Association of Friends of Children with cancer “ELPIDA (HOPE)”. At the time, the only possibility for a child to heal was to travel abroad, a fact that presumed a very high financial cost both for the family and for the state. The worst thing though was the time lost; it was like a clock counting down for the treatment and health of the child. Today, 25 years later, thanks to the struggles and work of “ELPIDA”, no child needs to travel abroad in order to have a bone marrow transplant.

In the Unit of ELPIDA we have been able to save the lives of over 800 children from Greece and the neighboring countries, while the Oncology Hospital for Children (Children’s Oncology Unit Marianna V. Vardinoyannis – ELPIDA) as is its official name, which ELPIDA created in its entirety and donated it to the State in 2010, deals with success with nearly all of the cancer incidents of children in our country. The “Foundation for the Child and Family” was established in 1997 with the objective of being active in all of the sectors related with children and the family – the rights of the child, its protection from abuse and exploitation, protecting children during war conflicts, educating them, etc.

TNH: How did you feel when you finally cut the ribbon, following years of efforts, at the first Oncology Hospital for children in the Balkans and how do you feel even today when you walk down the corridors and wards of the Hospital? Is there anything new that you and your associates are preparing and how could the Greeks Abroad support this effort?

MV: Every time that a project is completed I feel blessed by God who enabled me to see the vision become reality. My joy gives me wings and strength to continue the good fight, to make the next step. I feel the need to embrace all of the children and their parents and comfort them and tell them that everything is going to be all right.

At this time we are moving forward with the affiliation program with major pediatric hospitals abroad, which we started 3 years ago with the view to exchange scientific knowledge and combat child cancer. We believe this can become a platform for peace, friendship, and cooperation between the people. We had been already collaborating with John Hopkins and Philadelphia in the USA, with the SickKids of Canada, as well as with the greater pediatric and oncology centers of England, France, Netherlands, Turkey, Israel, Egypt, Serbia, Qatar, etc. Next, we are planning the development of the first National Center of Transplants for liver, lungs and kidneys for children in Greece, as well as the development of the Center of Excellence for specialized research on cases of neoplasia. A great satisfaction for us has been the touching response with which the Bank of Volunteer Bone Marrow Donors “Vision of HOPE” was met. “Vision of HOPE” was established by the foundation of ELPIDA and creates great prospects in the field of Bone Marrow transplants in our country. It allowed us to establish a great pool of volunteer Bone Marrow donors with the possibility of finding graft in our country for anyone who needs it. Already, within a year and a half that the Bank has been operating, compatible donors have been found and 2 human lives have been saved.

The Greeks abroad have always shown their significant support to Greece during very difficult times and when it comes to children they always show a special sensitivity. They are our valuable supporters in our work and they’ve always been by our side any way they can.

TNH: You frequently refer to the past and how one should honor it. With regard to your childhood, in Ermioni, what do you remember more? What have you kept and honored in the form of advice and role model from your parents? And what is it that you kept from your first discussions with your spouse Vardis Vardinoyannis, at a time when things were difficult and you were following him in the USA, Greece, England, and in Amorgos?

MV: I grew up surrounded by a lot of love and affection. My childhood was a very happy one and its memory works like a soothing factor in my soul when I go through hard times. I



Marianna Vardinoyannis with her husband, Vardis Vardinoyannis.

kept everything that my parents taught me, but above all else, I remember what my mother used to say to me often: “Give your children wings and roots. Wings to fly, and roots so that they return to you!” And I was fortunate to be able to share the same values and standards with my husband. I ask his opinion for everything and I draw my strength and inspiration from him in order to move forward with anything I do.

Regarding the locations that you mentioned, where we had to live certain periods of our lives, I keep deep into my heart the island of Amorgos, where my husband was exiled during the Dictatorship. It was there that I learned a lesson on giving and solidarity, which was unique; something that I keep unchanged in my soul. I was a young girl then, my third child had just been born, I was divided among my beloved children that I would leave behind and my husband who was alone on that distant island and I would leave in tears. I will never forget the kindness of the people there, their selflessness and solidarity. Every morning that I would wake up, I would always find a glass of milk on my window ledge, some flowers or a loaf of hot bread. It was their embrace that was telling me “have courage, you are not alone, you have some people who care about you”. It was there in Amorgos where I learned my greatest lesson in humanity and I shall never forget it.

The one it had in the past. It made the differences between social classes greater by being contemptuous of the substance and real meaning of the word “human being”. The “neighbor” – in the broad meaning of the word – became a point of competition instead of a point of companionship and synergies which had been before. I agree that our history and tradition can bring us back in order, because everything has been re-

“Every time that a project is completed I feel blessed by God who enabled me to see the vision become reality...”

peated in the past. However, how many of us have been taught from the past? That is why it is very important that we give our children a real education: a modern one but at the same time a deeply “Greek” one.

TNH: What does the man in your life, Vardis Vardinoyannis, and your family mean to you?

MV: My husband is everything to me. He is my mentor, my companion, my inspiration, and my strength; he is the role model of my children. He is a patriot, deeply philosophized, and a humanitarian. Having him by my side to advise me with his judgement and sensitivity I reached the point where I am today. I owe him everything. Our family is our whole life. Our shelter and our starting point. We are especially touched that our children also are fol-

our country, what mankind owes to this country and all of the human values that originate from our civilization. Not only to feel proud to be Greek, but above all to realize the great obligations that such an origin creates for them. Besides, we believe that the word “obligation” must be prevalent in all of our behavior, because life is first of all “an obligation” and then “a right”. With regard to the time that I spend with my children and grandchildren, I try to make it as long as possible, to the extent that they can also be available for us! Thank God we are the sort of families that get together on every opportunity; on Sundays, during celebrations, and on holidays! We are, fortunately, what we call a “traditional Greek family”.

TNH: What relaxes you after a tiresome day and what upsets you? And what dream of yours has remained a dream?

MV: Reading, music, and painting are the hobbies that relax me during my personal time. As to what upsets me, it’s the same that upsets all the mothers in the world. The most important is violence in all of its facets and especially the effects of violence on the safety and prosperity of the children. It helps a lot though if we do not stay idle in the face of it. We have to do something in order to change things for the better. Besides, this is the content that the late Robert F. Kennedy attributed to the term “Ripple of Hope”. He would say: “few are the ones who will know the greatness of changing the flow of history. But each one of us can fight to change a small amount, a small part of the facts. From the entirety of these actions the history of our generation will be written in the end”. I am obligated to admit that I am one of the fortunate ones that life offered them much more than what they dreamed of, as what I wanted was a good family. And for this I am grateful to God. I hope that the time will come when the big dream for a world of peace, justice, health and love for the children, will start becoming a reality day by day!

TNH: You frequently mention that “hope is a very strong word; a very substantial concept. It conveys optimism and comfort, expectation and yearning, a positive thought for the present and the future”. Do you believe that there is hope that the causes that lead millions of people from the Middle East to be uprooted from their homes, travel under harsh conditions, risking their lives frequently in the Aegean Sea will soon be eliminated? What do you say to the important people you speak with, especially abroad, about these refugees and more specifically about the children? What are your thoughts and feelings?

MV: The feelings that prevail inside me, when looking at the plight of these uprooted people from their homes, are sorrow, agony and indignation, but I try to put all of these aside and to focus on one thought: What can I do for them? As I have already



Marianna Vardinoyannis greets Pope Francis in March.

you to be honored by the “Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights” Center and in particular with the “Ripple of Hope” Award, which has been conferred to important personalities reflecting Robert Kennedy’s passion for equality, justice, human rights, as well as his faith that we should all fight in order to “render more noble the life of this world”?

MV: The honor is very great for me because the “Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights” Center has been fighting consistently and wholeheartedly for human rights. In fact, this is not only with regard to having them implemented, but also with regard to the education of the new generations in the concept of human rights and the importance of their recognition in modern civilization. The paths of our foundations are crossing frequently and it is very important and a great honor for me personally that the “Ripple of Hope” Award is conferred upon me on December 8, especially at a moment when my foundation has undertaken a major initiative in Greece, the creation of the program WE CARE for the vaccination and the provision of medical treatment to refugee children, who cross the Aegean by the thousands under horrible conditions, risking their lives in order to seek hope. Looking at the innocent eyes of these children one does not need more than half a minute to read the entire list of human rights that are being violated, at the great responsibility, of the entire “civilized” community.

TNH: Also, this year is another yet critical time for Greece and you will be honored along with other important people like Mr. Tim Cook, Mr. Roger Altman, and Mr. John Lewis. Do you feel that this honor to you is an opportunity for our tormented country to be honored as well? Is it a chance to highlight the ideals of democracy, justice, equality, which were born in Greece, but seem to have been forgotten?MV: Certainly, any honor to my person, or to any Greek man or Greek woman is an honor first and foremost for our people, since it highlights the values and the quality of these people, who despite the difficulties they suffer they stand tall with their heads held high, demonstrating a

“that you would want to accompany you when there is reference to your name?”

MV: What really touches me, what gives me strength and courage, makes me feel vindicated for the work to which I have dedicated myself all these years, is the characterization I was given once by the mother of a sick child. “You are Marianna of our heart” she had told me and she made me feel so emotional. I consider this to be the most important accolade ever conferred on me. For me the most precious thing is the smile and the love of the sick children and their parents, especially the smile of those who, having been healed now they embark on a new life, they study, become scientists, artists, athletes... they have their own families, children of their own, but they don’t forget the children of “HOPE (ELPIDA)”; they come back to us in order to help us.

TNH: When and how did you make the decision to become active with the “Foundation for the Child and Family”, which was renamed to “Marianna V. Vardinoyannis Foundation”, and the Association of Friends of Children with cancer “ELPIDA (HOPE)”?

MV: The children are the future and hope of our world. They are at the center of my heart and my thoughts. Starting from my own children and continuing with everyone else’s, I believe that they are the most precious thing we have in life! They are the continuation of life itself and the future of mankind.

With regard to my decision to become active through ELPIDA and the “Foundation of the Child and Family”, my deepest motive has been and remains the conviction that life is worth only when it is useful. This is what I’ve always been hearing in my home and it is a principle that I share with my husband, Vardis. I had the fortune to have a mother who was a role model for me early on in my life and she taught me the meaning of helping others. As I was growing up, a need was created within me to offer whatever I could to my fellow man. And this need became even more pressing, and it transcended into will and resolve, through motherhood;



Marianna Vardinoyannis hosts Archbishop Demetrios during a visit to “ELPIDA – Hope.”

TNH: In relation to Greece – its own past, historical and cultural – as a Greek citizen, but also as a Doctoral candidate of Archeology in the University of Sheffield of the United Kingdom, do you believe that several politicians and citizens failed to honor that past? That they only exploited it, but did not cultivate it, resulting in the country reaching its current state of crisis, not only in terms of finances but also in terms of values?

MV: The crisis of values is a global phenomenon and the roots of that is the fact that we as people have highlighted as the number 1 value money and wealth, to the point that it touched the limits of bliss. The concept of “well-being” acquired a totally different meaning than

lowing their own way, both at the family as well as at the professional level, but are always close to us. They support all of my initiatives; something that makes me feel all the more stronger in order to take the next step.

TNH: What do you say to your own children and grandchildren about Greece and about life in general in our days? How much time do you spend with them and what are your favorite hobbies?

MV: Our children are Greek above all else and they are trying to make their own children “Greeks” as well. What we have always told our children and repeat to our grandchildren about Greece is for them to try and understand the uniqueness of

mentioned to you through the initiative of my Foundation and in cooperation with the Central Association of Greek Municipalities, the Children’s Hospital “Agia Sophia”, the Medical Association of Athens, and the Charity Organization of the Holy Archdiocese of Athens “Mission”, the program WE CARE was developed, which provides medical and material aid. Our program is evaluated by UNESCO as a pilot program of collaboration of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) with Municipalities and it is intending to promote this throughout Europe via the European Federation of Cities.

I hope and strive so that we can leave a footprint of peace and humanity in this world.

HISTORY OF THE “Marianna V. Vardinoyannis Foundation”

“The True Wealth of Humanity is Creating a Future for Children”

TNH Staff

“Children are the Future!
“And the true wealth of humanity will be judged on whether we have managed to create for the future of this world, for children, a society living in peace, harmony, dignity, and truth.”
Let us all join forces towards this aim, with the Family at the focus.”

That is the inspirational message of Marianna V. Vardinoyannis, Founder and President of the Foundation that bears her name.

The scholar, linguist, and international humanitarian established the Foundation for the Child and Family in 1997, which was renamed the “Marianna V. Vardinoyannis Foundation” in 2012.

Its overriding mission is: through its multidimensional action focused on education, peace, health, social security and culture, it aims at illuminating every aspect of children’s life, sensitizing and informing the Greek and the international public opinion, pointing out weaknesses and deficiencies in order to contribute to the solution of problems and the coverage of needs.”

In furtherance of that endeavor, the Foundation has six fundamental goals:

1. To contribute to the peace – building.
2. To empower intercultural dialogue, tolerance, and understanding.
3. To gradually reduce the number of children victims of abuse, deprivation, and injustice.
4. To develop and strengthen family and social bonds in order to ensure appropriate conditions for the prosperity of children.
5. To create ever-increasing opportunities for the multifaceted development of youth in the contemporary world.
6. To contribute to the protection of cultural and natural heritage.

CHILDREN’S RIGHTS

Consistent with Vardinoyannis’ efforts to create a future for children, the Foundation emphasizes the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the first legally binding international instrument, formally and unanimously adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989, and ratified by almost every country in the world.

The Convention’s three major categories of rights are:

1. Protection (from every form of abuse, exploitation, discrimination, racism, etc.);
2. Benefits (right to education, health, provision, entertainment, etc.);
3. Participation (right to expressing their views, information, leisure, etc.)

The Foundation notes that such rights are abused not only in developing countries, but developed ones as well, including Greece.

In collaboration with UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) of which Vardinoyannis is Goodwill Ambassador, and UNICEF (United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund), and Greek and international governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the Foundation supports in full strength every initiative aiming at the respect and implementation of children rights. It has organized, supports and participates in meetings,



Above: A kiss from two healed children to Marianna V. Vardinoyannis during the event for the inauguration of the Children’s Oncology Unit Marianna V. Vardinoyannis – ELPIDA (HOPE). Below: Irina Bokova, Director General of UNESCO, Marianna V. Vardinoyannis, Grand Duchess of Luxembourg Maria-Therese, and UN General Secretary Ban Ki Moon at the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the founding of UNESCO in April.



conferences and events aiming at the sensitization and awareness of the common opinion on children rights, such as the International Convention for the Rights of the Child and the Role of the European Union, the Meeting of experts in Sorbonne with the topic: The Child and

the Family in the society of the 21st Century, in Europe, among other initiatives. It has also published the book The Ten Basic Principles of the United Nations’ Declaration of Children’s Rights, illustrated by the artist Manolis Charos.”

OTHER INITIATIVES

Its focus on children notwithstanding, the Foundation also focuses on the family, and on those in vulnerable regions of the earth. It undertakes important work regarding the following: Fight against Human Trafficking; Protection of the Innocence in



Eminence Archbishop of Athens and All of Greece Ieronymos visits the Children’s Oncology Unit Marianna V. Vardinoyannis - ELPIDA (HOPE).



The French Ambassador to Greece Bruno Delage confers to Mrs. Marianna V. Vardinoyannis the medal of the Knight of the Order of the Legion of Honor of the French Republic in 2006.

Danger; Protection of Civilians; Protection of Health; Prevention of Drug Misuse in Youth; Spreading the Culture of Peace; Promotion of the Dialogue among Civilizations; Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage; Dissemination of Knowledge; Eliminating Illiteracy; Sustainable Development; Achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals; Climate Justice; and Fighting against Poverty and Unemployment in Youth.



In the context of the work of the program ‘WE CARE’ that provides vaccinations and medical treatment to refugee children from Syria which was created by the Marianna V. Vardinoyannis Foundation, its President, Marianna V. Vardinoyannis, offers food to the children.



Marianna V. Vardinoyannis receives the Award from the Academy of Athens in 1997.



Greek President Karolos Papoulias and Marianna V. Vardinoyannis cut the ribbon for the opening of the Children’s Oncology Unit Marianna V. Vardinoyannis – ELPIDA (Hope) in October, 2010.

Marianna V. Vardinoyannis and Her Work

The multifaceted work of Marianna V. Vardinoyannis both in Greece and abroad focuses on social issues like human rights, child health, and welfare, humanitarianism, education, peace, cultural heritage, international dia-

logue, and sustainability. Vardinoyannis is Founder and President of the Association of Friends of Children with Cancer – ELPIDA (HOPE), and of the Foundation for the Child and Family, which in 2012 was renamed the “Marianna V. Vardi-

noyannis Foundation”. She is also on the board of numerous organizations and foundations, such as the Library of Alexandria, the Mentor Foundation against Drugs, the Light of Africa Foundation, the Council of Presidents of the Special Olympics Europe-Eurasia, and the Foundation for the Civilization of Peace (Spain), among others.

She was born in Athens and grew up in Ermioni. She is married to shipping and oil tycoon Vardis Vardinoyannis, President of Motor Oil Hellas; they have five children.

Together, they created a major humanitarian and cultural network in Greece and beyond. She holds degrees in archaeology from the University of Sheffield and economics at the University of Denver. She also has honorary doctorates from the Universities of Sheffield, London Metropolitan, Georgia, and the Deree American College of Greece.

Her recent book, “Labouring with the Challenges of Female Identity: Insights into Minoan Society”, is based on a study she conducted in the context of her post-graduate studies at the Uni-



A snapshot from the return of the village of Makistos to its residents after its restoration following its total destruction from the fires of 2007 in the Ilia region. Makistos was rebuilt from the ground up at the initiative of Marianna V. Vardinoyannis and returned to its residents in September 2010.

versity of Sheffield, and was presented officially in Paris during the celebration of UNESCO’s (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) 65th Anniversary.

Some of the major initiatives the building of the Marianna V.

Vardinoyannis-ELPIDA Oncology Hospital for Children, the first of its kind in Greece, in 2010; the development of Vision of Hope, which is the first major Bank for Bone Marrow Volunteer Donors in Greece; the development of the Bone Marrow

Transplant Unit at the St. Sophia Children’s Hospital in Athens, in 1993; the creation of the Guest House ELPIDA, which has been home to over 1700 families of children from rural areas; the reconstruction of the houses in Makistos, which were destroyed completely from fires in 2007; the establishment of the Chair for Greeks Abroad and of the Ioannis P. Vardinoyannis Library at New York University, and of the Constantine Karamanlis Chair for Greek and Southeastern European studies at Tufts University; and the founding of the Center for Hellenistic Studies in the Library of Alexandria.

Vardinoyannis has been the recipient of numerous awards for her efforts, including the Golden Cross of the Order of Benefaction of the Hellenic Republic, the title of the Officer and the Knight of the Legion of Honor of the French Republic, the Academy of Athens Award, the Office of the Lady Archon of the Patriarchate of Alexandria, the Paul Harris Fellow award of the International Rotary, the Medal “Mother Teresa” of the Albanian Republic, the “Grand Prix de la Charte de Paris contre le cancer”, etc.



A warm hug between Marianna V. Vardinoyannis and a child hospitalized at the Children’s Oncology Unit Marianna V. Vardinoyannis – ELPIDA (HOPE).

RFK Justice & Human Rights Center to Honor Marianna V. Vardinoyannis

By Constantine S. Sirigos
TNH Staff Writer

NEW YORK – The Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice & Human Rights, an organization dedicated to social justice around the world, will present Marianna V. Vardinoyannis with its Ripple of Hope Award at its Gala at the New York Hilton on December 8. Also honored will be Congressman John Lewis (D-GA), Apple CEO Tim Cook, and Evercore co-Founder Roger Altman.

The National Herald had the opportunity to discuss the award, Vardinoyannis, and the Center's work with its president, human rights activist and attorney Kerry Kennedy, RFK's daughter.

"It was founded in 1968 to carry forth my father's unfin-

ished work on social justice issues," she said.

"One of the reasons I am so excited about acknowledging and celebrating Mariana Vardinoyannis is because at a time when there is such a surge of Islamophobia and Afrophobia, she has embraced the refugees flooding into Greece and set up a whole series of programs to help give them the humanitarian aid they so desperately

need," Kennedy told TNH. But that was not what they had in mind when they decided to honor her, "but is goes to show why she was so much the perfect person to receive the award... We have worked with Marianna and done programming with her since 1986," Kennedy said.

"When we launched our Speak Truth to Power educational program in 2000, the first international place to which we brought it was Athens... Vardinoyannis hosted it and the best actors in Greece were onstage acting the part in a play and she published a book in Greek. Now, we are working with her to put the education program in all the schools in Greece.

"She has gotten the endorsement of successive ministers of education in Greece which is

joins a very long list of extraordinary leaders from Al Gore, Bill and Hillary Clinton, Robert De Niro, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and more, and we are really happy to be giving it to her."

Kennedy provided an overview of the organization's work, and emphasized that "today we also work on business and human rights with a coalition of individual and institution investors to talk about the impact of human rights violations on investment outcomes – domestically and internationally."

Financial markets, being in essence information processors, can also be moved by the knowledge companies' human rights-related situations. Kennedy gave as an example a famous mining disaster. "In 2007, investors were heavily invested in the Massey Big Branch Mine in West



ABOVE: Marianna V. Vardinoyannis and Kerry Kennedy, President of the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice & Human Rights.

LEFT: Hillary Clinton, Ethel Kennedy, Robert De Niro, and Marianna V. Vardinoyannis at the Ripple of Hope Awards of 2014.



much of their retirement benefits," Kennedy added.

"If you are an investor in Massey, you need to know its safety violations record to know how much you will charge them for the use of your money than you would for a safer bet," she said.

"Thus, investors need to be informed about humanitarian bottom lines also. We bring together the investment community and we talk to them about how they can determine which companies are compliant," Kennedy explained.

The Center has researchers and investment and human rights experts. They also look for diversity on boards and among top executives, and a human rights education program which reaches about a million

students worldwide each year.

"We teach students to create change and stop the bullies from their classrooms to the presidential palace," Kennedy said.

They also do human rights work on the ground on various issues such as exclusion, LGBT and racial bias, and in the Is-

lamic world; they do work in Egypt, where they are currently involved in a case of freedom of expression.

Kennedy has visited Greece often – "just a few months ago," she said.

Asked for her favorite spots, she said "wherever Marianna Vardinoyannis is because you know that you will be with people who really care about the country and who are interesting."

On the subject of helping Greece, Kennedy noted the importance of supporting young entrepreneurs.

"This is part of what our investors conferences is about – looking for those places that have a combination on educated, vibrant youth who are smart and motivated and are the best value for investment that one can imagine – that is investing in our future," she said, and was intrigued by the work of The Hellenic Initiative when she was informed about it.

She loved visiting the new Acropolis Museum "which Marianna worked so hard to build and keep current. It's an enormous vision to her hard work and vision.

"Going up the Acropolis itself," which she sees as the epitome of Western Civilization, was also a cherished experience for Kennedy.

"Greece is such an amazingly beautiful country and always such a treat to be there," she said as she was looking at photo online of Sifnos "yes, that beautiful harbor and that absolutely crystal clear water. It is amazing. I love all those white houses. I can't imagine how people leave there and come to New York."

The work of the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice & Human Rights is inspired by the words its namesake spoke in Cape Town, South Africa in 1966, during the darkest days of that country's apartheid nightmare: "It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance."

Robert F. Kennedy's Ancient Greek Inspirations

ATHENS – Robert F. Kennedy, according to the historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. was "the most creative man in the American public life."

As President Reagan said of RFK: "He aroused the comfortable. He exposed the corrupt, remembered the forgotten, inspired his countrymen, and renewed and enriched the American conscience."

Attorney General of the United States during the presidency of his brother, John, Kennedy received a thunderous ovation at the Democratic National Convention in 1964, months after his brother's assassination – the previous November 22. Kennedy was elected to the U.S. Senate (from New York) that year, and ran for president himself in 1968. After a thrilling primary victory in California on June 5, he was fatally shot minutes later, and died in the early morning hours of June 6.

Tributes to him include a U.S. Department of Justice Building, and the renaming of the heralded Triboro Bridge in New York City; both bear his name.

FOUNDATION HONORS KENNEDYS

The "Marianna V. Vardinoyannis Foundation" on June 10 awarded Kennedy's widow, Ethel, and daughter Kerry, who is President of the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice & Human Rights (Justice Center), the "Marianna V. Vardinoyannis Foundation" Prize 2015, conferred personally by Vardinoyannis in the ceremony, held at the Acropolis Museum in Athens.

Kerry Kennedy spoke of her father's fondness of Greek writers, such as Sophocles and Aeschylus. "Our own founding fathers were based on Pericles, when we said that we do not wish to copy other nations, but we want other nations to copy us. This is why we feel close ties with Greece up to this day... I believe that this idea of 'a unified world is especially important, because it is outrageous that in a country like Greece, a mother today has to decide whether to buy medicine for her aged parents or food for her children! There is no reason why this should be happening in a country that is a member

pretty amazing, as you know... it's because Marianna is so deeply respected because of her concerns for people who are struggling and her extraordinary patriotism. It doesn't matter what government is in power, all of them, with her endorsement of the program endorse it as well Kennedy said. "There is no doubt her leadership makes all the difference in the world."

"In receiving this award she

Virginia. That mine had more than 100 safety violations over a 12-month period on its ventilation system, in April of that year the system collapsed and 27 miners lost their lives. It was a human rights and environmental disaster," she said, but the investors were also wiped out.

Many of those were pension funds, so it means police and firefighters and teachers lost



Marianna V. Vardinoyannis confers on Ethel Kennedy, wife of the late Robert F. Kennedy and founder of the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice & Human Rights, an award from the Marianna V. Vardinoyannis Foundation in June. In the photo is also seen Center President Kerry Kennedy, Robert's and Ethel's daughter.

child labor? The goal of 'Speak Truth to Power' is not to give our young people facts that they will soon forget, but to ignite in them a lifelong commitment to human rights. Giving our children the tools to be human rights defenders is the surest path to a better future."

Kennedy thanked Vardinoyannis, who is the Foundation's President and UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador, calling it a "great honor" to be recognized by her, as "Marianna is one of my favorite people in the world. She is a source of inspiration, a valued friend and associate."

Vardinoyannis, in turn, praised Kennedy, expressing the Foundation's joy in welcoming "our distinguished guest, a great philhellene, a humanist, dynamic defender of human rights, justice and freedom," and "a tireless activist for peace, a multi-award-winning author, and at the same time an affectionate mother of three wonderful girls. Kerry Kennedy follows in the footsteps of her dear fa-

ther and her beloved mother [and Justice Center Founder] Ethel Kennedy, who on November 24, 2014 received the highest American distinction, the Presidential Medal of Freedom."

Kerry Kennedy:
"Marianna is one of my favorite people in the world. She is a source of inspiration, a valued friend and associate"

BORDERLESS HUMAN RIGHTS

Robert Kennedy's dedication to human rights did not stop at the American border; it extended to the entire world. He traveled to Eastern Europe, Latin America, and South Africa in order to share his beliefs that all individuals have a basic human right to participate in the political decisions affecting their lives and to be judgmental of their government without any fear of retaliation.

He also believed that those who fight against injustice

demonstrate the highest form of courage.

As a Senator, he laid the foundation for a series of projects, among which was aid to underprivileged children and students with disabilities, traveled to urban ghettos, in the Appalachians, the Mississippi Delta and areas populated by large numbers of immigrant settlers and migrant workers.

GREEK REFERENCES

Kerry Kennedy described that her father referenced Greeks in two of his most important speeches.

In the first, in South Africa, at the University of Cape Town, on June 6, 1966 (eerily, exactly two years before his death) he called upon the audience not to lose hope or resolve in their struggle for human rights. He described America's essential differences with Nazi Germany "as it was between Athens and Persia," and quoted Pericles: "If Athens seems great to you", he said, "Remember then that its glories were achieved by brave men, and by men who had learned which was their duty."

Kennedy noted that her father "shared with the Greeks the belief that improving the world was the duty of all of us, and he could not tolerate apathy or cynicism. He appreciated the fact that the modern word 'idiot (is)' comes from the Ancient Greek word for someone who refused to participate in public life (idiotis – concerned only with private/self matters).

The second speech was on the evening of April 4, 1968, when he suddenly learned of the assassination of civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Sharing his own pains in life (not least of which his own brother's assassination), RFK invoked a phrase of Aeschylus, slightly modified: "Even when we sleep, the pain that cannot be forgotten falls, drop-by-drop, on our heart, until, in the midst of our desperation, against our will, comes the wisdom through the awesome grace of God."

He concluded: "Let us dedicate ourselves to what the Greeks wrote so many years ago. Let us tame the ferocity of man and make noble the life of this world. Let us dedicate ourselves to this and say a prayer for our country and for our people."