

SAKHAROV PRIZE FOR F R E EDOM OF THOUGHT

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Foreword

"Peace, progress, human rights - these three goals are insolubly linked to one another: it is impossible to achieve one of these goals if the other two are ignored."

As early as 1975 Andrei Sakharov reminded us of the intrinsic relation between human rights, peace and development. Parliament created the Sakharov prize twenty years ago to support and honour individuals who work, and often risk their lives, on behalf of these goals. Over the past 20 years, since 1988, the "Sakharov Prize – for Freedom of Thought", has been awarded by the European Parliament to people or organisations that have made a decisive contribution to the fight for human rights in their respective countries and around the world.

Much progress has been made since then. Several of the laureates who are celebrating the anniversary with us this year are now able to enjoy the freedom and justice they fought for. Others, however, carry on their heroic struggle and continue to suffer from repression or enforced exile. Hu Jia, this year's Sakharov Prize Laureate is certainly one of them.

In 1989, when China was facing huge, peaceful protests against authoritarianism culminating in the terrible events in Tiananmen Square in Beijing, Hu Jia was 15 years old and went everyday to the Square to support the students and other protesters. A pioneering ecological activist during his university years and anti-Aids campaigner, Hu Jia also became one of the coordinators of the 'barefoot lawyers movement' mobilising legal experts, lawyers and academics in support of the same cause: upholding individual rights and combating injustice in China.

In 2008, as we mark the twentieth anniversary of the Sakharov Prize, Hu Jia can be honoured as a reminder of violations of human rights in China as well as a symbol of resistance to injustice. Persecuted in the past for his activism, arrested shortly after his testimony on 26 November 2007 via conference call before the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights, separated from his wife and daughter who live under house-arrest, he represents all the other Chinese and Tibetan citizens who courageously stand up against repression: lawyers, journalists, petitioners, human rights activists, writers and cyber-dissidents.

We know that basic rights and liberties are still denied to millions of citizens worldwide. We have a moral responsibility to help them. The European Parliament will continue to stand with those who defend our common universal values.

Hans-Gert Pöttering
President of the European Parliament

Andrei Sakharov – Inspiration for the Prize

Since 1988, in the spirit of Andrei Sakharov, the European Parliament has awarded the annual Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought in order to honour individuals or organisations for their efforts on behalf of human rights and fundamental freedoms and against oppression and injustice. From Gorky, where he was living in exile, Andrei Sakharov (1921-1989), the renowned physicist, member of the Academy of Sciences, dissident and 1975 Nobel Peace Prize winner, sent a message to the European Parliament saying how moved he was that it intended to create a prize for freedom of thought which would bear his name. He rightly saw this as an encouragement to all those who, like him, had committed themselves to championing human rights.

Coming from a background in nuclear physics and ending as a dissident, he not only sought the release of dissenters in his country but also drew attention to the relationship between science and society and to the issues of peaceful coexistence and intellectual freedom, which he analysed in his writings. In the eyes of the world, Sakharov came to embody the crusade against the denial of fundamental rights. Neither intimidation nor exile could break his resistance.

Like Andrei Sakharov, all the previous winners of the prize which bears his name have demonstrated just how much courage, patience and inner strength is needed to defend human rights and campaign for their universal recognition. Almost all have paid dearly for their commitment to defending human dignity, and many have faced persecution, loss of personal freedom or exile. In some cases the winners have not been authorised to receive their prize in person. On 14 December 2006 European Parliament adopted a resolution deploring this fact and calling for a follow-up mechanism to be set up to respond in such cases. In 2008, to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the creation of the Prize, the European Parliament and to demonstrate its continuous support, the European Parliament decided to invite all past Laureates to take part in the December Award ceremony, and especially, to promote the attendance of any Sakharov Prize winners who have been prevented from receiving their prizes in person in the past.

In awarding the Sakharov Prize, the European Parliament honours, in particular, outstanding achievements in the fight to protect freedom of thought and expression against intolerance, fanaticism and hatred. This reflects its conviction that fundamental freedoms include not only the right to life and physical integrity, but also freedom of expression and of the press, two of the most effective means of fighting oppression and key yardsticks by which to judge whether a society is democratic and open. The right to untrammelled freedom of opinion and expression, which is enshrined in Article 19 of the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 16 December 1966 and which includes 'the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any medium of [a person's] choice', reflects the spirit in which the European Parliament created the Sakharov Prize.

The European Parliament awards the human rights prize, endowed with EUR 50 000, at a formal sitting in Strasbourg which falls on or around 10 December, the day on which the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights was signed in 1948

Human rights in the European Parliament

The European Union is founded on the principles of freedom, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law. These principles are common to all Member States and are enshrined in the Treaty on European Union. The European Union respects the fundamental rights laid down in the European Convention on Human Rights, which was signed by all current EU Member States in Rome in 1950 under the auspices of the Council of Europe. Alongside the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the covenants based on it and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the Convention is the most important reference document for the EU and its Member States when dealing with issues of international law in the sphere of human rights.

The EU Treaty stipulates that the rights of an EU Member State which is guilty of a serious and persistent breach of the principles referred to above may be suspended and that every new Member State is required to respect those principles unconditionally. Vis-à-vis third countries, the Treaty defines the development and strengthening of democracy and the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms as being amongst the most important objectives of the Common Foreign and Security Policy and development cooperation policy.

This objective has been explicitly incorporated into the Treaty largely in response to pressure from the European Parliament, which has been encouraged to give ever greater priority to human rights, not least by the appeals it receives from citizens inside and outside the EU and the many and varied activities of non-governmental organisations.

At around the same time as the EU annual human rights report is published by the Council of Ministers, the Committee on Foreign Affairs draws up an annual report on the human rights situation in the world and EU human rights policy. The Subcommittee on Human Rights, which was reconstituted at the start of the 6th legislative term, is the EP body responsible for parliamentary initiatives in this sphere and provides a permanent forum for discussions with human rights activists on the human rights situation and democracy in non-member countries. In addition, the Development Committee holds regular meetings about Human Rights in ACP countries or on specific subjects such as child soldiers or child slaves, where both human rights NGOs and representatives of governments concerned take part.

Human rights violations in non-member countries and, in particular, individual cases are dealt with in the monthly debates on urgent subjects and the governments involved are urged to take action. The reactions of the governments concerned suggest that they are not insensitive to criticism from the European Parliament. EP resolutions sometimes have an immediate impact and they often serve as the basis for action by the Council of Ministers.

Parliament's legislative powers allow it to withhold its assent to the conclusion of important agreements with non-member countries if there are serious breaches of human rights and democratic principles. Consequently, it insists on strict compliance with the human rights clauses that are systematically included in such agreements and which provide for an agreement to be terminated in extreme cases. Parliament has strengthened its role by adopting political resolutions as part of the assent procedure, holding hearings with civil society representatives from non-member countries, sending ad hoc delegations to assess the human rights situation on the ground and last but not least through parliamentary political dialogue, which primarily involves the inter-parliamentary delegations of the EP. At their regular meetings with parliamentarians from partner countries, the EP delegates frequently have discussions on individual cases, which have on occasions produced positive results.

The main forum for political dialogue between the EP and parliamentarians from African, Caribbean and Pacific countries is the EU-ACP Joint Parliamentary Assembly. The Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly provides further opportunities for a structured dialogue on issues of human rights and democracy with Mediterranean countries. The Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly, EuroLat, established in November 2006, is the most recently created regional parliamentary forum. Among its three main objectives are questions relating to democracy, external policy, governance, integration, peace and human rights;

The European Parliament also closely monitors the work of the UN Human Rights Council set up in June 2006. The European Parliament has played a decisive role in putting human rights issues on the European agenda. It takes specific initiatives in a range of areas such as preventing torture, the protection of minorities, conflict prevention, promoting women's and children's rights, the protection of human rights activists, the rights of indigenous peoples and people with disabilities. The European Parliament has actively supported the campaign for a UN moratorium on the death penalty and the World Congress of national and international parliaments on the abolition of the death penalty, the

establishment of the International War Crimes Tribunal, the setting-up of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, replaced by the Fundamental Rights Agency inaugurated on 1 March 2007, and the EU campaign to combat violence against women. By participating in election observation missions, the European Parliament makes a further contribution to strengthening democracy in third countries.

The European Parliament has been able to use its budgetary powers to substantially increase the resources earmarked for programmes dealing with democracy and human rights. In 2006 the European Parliament successfully fought for the maintenance of a separate instrument to finance such activities, the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights. This is a financial and policy instrument contributing to the development and consolidation of democracy and the rule of law, the respect of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in third countries world-wide, and includes a special focus on civil society organisations.

The European Parliament also attaches great importance to the furtherance of citizens' economic and social rights in the Union, measures to combat racism, religious intolerance and xenophobia and the treatment of asylum seekers and migrant workers. The human rights situation within the EU is dealt with by the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs. If EU citizens consider that their fundamental rights have been violated, they can take the matter up with the European Ombudsman or the Petitions Committee of the European Parliament. The Ombudsman deals with complaints relating to the activities of EU bodies, whereas the Petitions Committee deals with petitions concerning breaches of their treaty obligations by Member States; Member States are frequently required to modify their legislation to bring it into line with Community law as a result of subsequent treaty infringement proceedings.

Hu Jia

Hu Jia, born 25 July 1973 in Beijing, is a prominent human rights activist and dissident in the People's Republic of China. Hu is a special breed of Chinese activist. Unlike some, he has embraced an unusually diverse range of political causes: beginning in 1996, Hu's early activism focused on the threat of desertification and China's fragile ecosystems, especially in Tibet, where he supported tree-planting campaigns and the protection of the endangered Tibetan antelope, or chiru. He has repeatedly called for an official enquiry into the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre as well as compensation for the victims and their families. He is also one of the coordinators of the 'barefoot lawyers movement', mobilising legal experts, lawyers and academics in support of the same cause. He is also known for his HIV/AIDS advocacy as the executive director of the Beijing Aizhixing Institute of Health Education and as one of the founders of the non-governmental organization " Loving Source. "

Hu Jia has often been persecuted for his actions. On 16 February 2006, Hu Jia was detained for 41 days. His detention was not acknowledged by the Chinese government. After returning to his apartment in Beijing, where he lives with his wife Zeng Jinyan (also an AIDS activist), Hu Jia was held under house arrest until March 2007. Two months later, on 18 May 2007, Hu Jia and his wife were placed back under house arrest on charges of "harming state security". Hu Jia remained active via emails and blogs, even whilst he was under house arrest.

On 26 November 2007 he spoke to Members of the European Parliament via conference call during a public meeting of the Subcommittee on Human Rights. In his statement, he expressed his desire that 2008 be the "year of human rights in China". As a direct result of his address to members of the European Parliament, Hu Jia was arrested, charged with "inciting subversion of state power", and sentenced on 3 April 2008 to three-and-a-half years in jail. He was found guilty of writing articles about the human rights situation in the run-up to the Olympic Games. Since his detention, Zeng and his daughter, Qianci, have also been put under house arrest. Their phone and internet connections have been cut off.

Hu Jia, who suffers from cirrhosis of the liver, is not receiving regular visits or medical attention.

Protests against his arrest have come from all over the world. The European Parliament passed a resolution demanding Hu's release, and American officials have raised the case with Chinese authorities. On 8 August 2008, Hu Jia's name together with 42 other Chinese intellectuals, appeared on an open letter entitled "One World, One Dream: Universal Human Rights", calling for more attention to human rights in China. On 6 September 2008, he and his lawyer, Teng Biao, published another open letter, "The Real China and the Olympics", detailing the situation of human rights in the run-up to the Olympics.

By awarding the Sakharov Prize to Hu Jia, the European Parliament acknowledges the daily struggle for freedom of all Chinese human rights defenders.

THE PRIZE WINNERS

- 1988** NELSON ROLIHLAHLA MANDELA and ANATOLI MARCHENKO (posthumously)
- 1989** ALEXANDER DUBČEK
- 1990** AUNG SAN SUU KYI
- 1991** ADEM DEMAÇI
- 1992** LAS MADRES DE LA PLAZA DE MAYO
- 1993** OSLOBODJENJE
- 1994** TASLIMA NASREEN
- 1995** LEYLA ZANA
- 1996** WEI JINGSHENG
- 1997** SALIMA GHEZALI
- 1998** IBRAHIM RUGOVA
- 1999** XANANA GUSMÃO
- 2000** ¡BASTA YA!
- 2001** IZZAT GHAZZAWI and NURIT PELED-ELHANAN and DOM ZACARIAS KAMWENHO
- 2002** OSWALDO JOSÉ PAYÁ SARDIÑAS
- 2003** UN SECRETARY GENERAL, KOFI ANNAN and ALL THE STAFF OF THE UNITED NATIONS
- 2004** BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS
- 2005** LADIES IN WHITE and HAUWA IBRAHIM and REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS
- 2006** ALIAKSANDR MILINKEVICH
- 2007** SALIH MAHMOUD MOHAMED OSMAN
- 2008** HU JIA

1988

Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela

Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, 1993 Nobel Peace Laureate, born in 1918 in Umtata, South Africa, was elected President and Head of Government of the Republic of South Africa in the first free elections in 1994. He has spent the greater part of his life behind bars. As leader of the ANC (African National Congress), he symbolised, for his fellow countrymen and the public worldwide, the resistance of black people to the oppressive apartheid regime. When he was awarded the prize in 1988 Mandela was still under house arrest.

Retired from public life in June 1999, he remains committed to his ideals and values in his two charities, the Nelson Mandela Foundation and the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, as well as in the initiative Global Elders which he launched on 18 July 2007 in Johannesburg together with Graça Machel and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. This project includes a group of world leaders, peace activists and human rights advocates whose goal is to solve global problems, using «almost 1 000 years of collective experience to dream up solutions for seemingly insurmountable problems like climate change, HIV/AIDS, and poverty» and «use their political independence to help resolve some of the world's most intractable conflicts.»

In his address during a Parliament sitting to mark 10 years of democracy in South Africa, Nelson Mandela said: 'A guiding principle in our search for and establishment of a non-racial inclusive democracy in our country has been that there are good men and women to be found in all groups and from all sectors of society; and that in an open and free society those South Africans will come together to jointly and cooperatively realise the common good. Historical enemies succeeded in negotiating a peaceful transition from apartheid to democracy exactly because we were prepared to accept the inherent capacity for goodness in the other.'

In July 2008 Nelson Mandela celebrated his 90th birthday and called once more for the intensification of global efforts in the fight against poverty and injustice.

1988

Anatoli Marchenko

Anatoli Marchenko (1938-1986), one of the former Soviet Union's best-known dissidents, died in Chistopol prison in December 1986 as the result of a hunger strike after more than 20 years in prison. He was a member of the group founded in 1975 to campaign for compliance with the Helsinki Final Act, particularly the clauses relating to the human dimension, security and cooperation.

He revealed the truth about the Soviet labour camps and prisons, but this earned him a prison sentence for anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda.

'The only way to fight the prevailing evil and illegality is, in my view, to know the truth.'

1989

Alexander Dubček

In 1989, the European Parliament honoured Alexander Dubček (1921-1992), one of the moving spirits behind the process of renewal and change in the former Eastern Bloc and the leading figure in the reform movement which became known as the 'Prague Spring'.

His aim of giving Socialism a 'human face' was shattered on 21 August 1968 by the Warsaw Pact tanks. Dubček was accused of treason, stripped of office and expelled from the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia; he spent the years up to 1985 as an ordinary worker. In 1988 he returned to political life as a civil rights activist.

After the revolution in Czechoslovakia, Dubček was elected President of the Federal Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Czechoslovakia. As one of the figures who also kept hope alive for the Soviet dissidents in their long struggle for glasnost, as Andrei Sakharov described him in a message read out during the award ceremony in January 1990, Dubček expressed the wish that 'as a result of the Prague Spring the great symphony of the European community spirit will continue to resound in 1990 and in all the years to come'.

Dubček died on November 7, 1992, as a result of injuries sustained in a car crash that took place a few weeks earlier.

1990

Aung San Suu Kyi

Aung San Suu Kyi, the opposition politician and winner of the 1991 Nobel Peace prize, was born in 1947, and was awarded the Sakharov Prize in 1990.

In August 1988, the military had broken a country-wide general strike for democracy and against Myanmar's then government and assumed power itself. Aung San Suu Kyi returned to Myanmar to head the democracy movement. However, the military regime carried out bloody reprisals, placing her and hundreds of members of the National League for Democracy (NLD), which she had founded, under house arrest in 1989. Despite the success of the NLD in the free parliamentary elections held in 1990, the military regime remained in power by imposing martial law. Aung San Suu Kyi refused to go into exile and was only released after six years, in July 1995. Aung San Suu Kyi expressed her convictions in these words: 'Even under the most oppressive state machinery courage always resurfaces, for fear is not the natural condition of civilised human beings.' On 30 May 2003 Aung San Suu Kyi was detained once again, along with 19 other members of the NLD, and placed under house arrest, cut off from all contact with her family, her friends and political supporters. In October 2004 the EU tightened its sanctions against Myanmar after the regime failed to comply with its demands, including the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and an end to the harassment of the National League for Democracy. Aung San Suu Kyi continues to speak out in favour of national dialogue, free elections, democracy and respect for human rights in her country.

Following the violent repression of anti-government demonstrations in Burma in September 2007, the European Parliament decided to voice its support for the Burmese protesters and condemned the brutal response by the Burmese authorities in its resolution of 27 September 2007.

The EP relaunched also the campaign to free Aung San Suu Kyi by displaying on the outside of Parliament's Brussels building a giant portrait of the Burmese opposition leader, bearing the slogan Free Aung San Suu Kyi now.

However, in May 2008 Myanmar extended Suu Kyi's detention for another year, keeping her confined to her residence for six consecutive years and resulting in her having spent thirteen of the last eighteen years as a political prisoner under house arrest.

The European Parliament denounced once more the continued detention of Aung San Suu Kyi and the other political prisoners in Burma in its resolution of June 2008. The Burmese authorities have refused permission for a delegation of MEPs to visit her.

1991

Adem Demaçi

In 1991 Parliament awarded its human rights prize to Adem Demaçi, a Kosovar born in Priština in 1936, thereby honouring a man who had spent the greater part of his life (1958-1990) in prison for fighting for the fundamental rights of the Albanians in Kosovo by means of the written and spoken word.

But prison could not silence Demaçi: he continued to raise his voice to make known the bitter truth about the Serbian oppression of the two million Albanians in Kosovo.

'Freedom of speech [is] the first, crucial step towards democracy. Without freedom of speech there is no dialogue, without dialogue the truth cannot be established, and without the truth progress is impossible.'

After his release, Adem Demaçi assumed the leadership of the Council for the Defence of Human Rights and Freedoms. From 1998 to 1999, during the Serb offensive, he was the political representative of the Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK). Since the war, he has devoted himself mainly to ethnic reconciliation and the return of refugees. He took on the chairmanship of the Committee for Mutual Understanding, Tolerance and Coexistence, representing all ethnic groups in Kosovo, 'because Kosovo belongs to everyone' and 'we want a free, democratic and multi-ethnic society'.

To this day he is involved in politics in Kosovo.

1992

Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo

The Argentinean human rights movement 'Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo' was awarded the Sakharov Prize in 1992.

From 1976 to 1983, Argentina lived under a military dictatorship. In April 1977, 14 women came together for the first time in the 'Plaza de Mayo' to make an appeal to President Videla. To begin with, the main aim of the group of mothers was to trace their lost children and to seek the prosecution of those responsible for the disappearance of 30000 people during the military dictatorship, but later they widened their struggle into a fight for an independent judicial system, political change, and peace.

The demonstrations that 'Las Madres' holds every Thursday outside the Casa Rosada, the President's residence, on the Plaza de Mayo are a symbol of resistance. At each demonstration members wear white headscarves, which are universally recognised as emblematic of the fight for justice.

The Argentinean mothers wish to see the country's young people show political commitment and oppose a system which has condemned millions of Argentineans to poverty and provides neither education, nor housing nor health care.

For this purpose, 'Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo' has set up a People's University to train these young people who previously had no access to education.

In 1999, the organization was awarded the United Nations Prize for Peace Education. In December 10, 2003 the Grandmothers' president, Estela Barnes de Carlotto, was awarded the United Nations Prize in the Field of Human Rights.

In December 2002 the movement held its twenty-second 24-hour Resistance March under the slogan 'No to the payment of external debt'.

'Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo' have not stopped seeking justice and truth despite many setbacks. The recent trials and imprisonment of some of those responsible for crimes against humanity in Argentina in the 1970's are a result of their unceasing efforts.

1993

Oslobodjenje

The daily newspaper Oslobodjenje, founded in 1943, was the winner of the Sakharov Prize in 1993.

Despite deaths and injuries among their colleagues and the destruction of the newspaper's offices by Serbian artillery, some 70 journalists – Muslims, Serbs and Croats – continued to work in a nuclear shelter in the cellar of their building in Sarajevo, risking their lives so that Oslobodjenje could continue to appear.

Zlatko Dizdarević, one of the editors at the time, and later an ambassador for Bosnia, said that Oslobodjenje's aim was to preserve and defend Bosnia-Herzegovina as a multiethnic state.

'Our efforts were directed against death and against the partition or even complete eradication of Bosnia-Herzegovina from the map. The people of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina will continue to fight against the partition which has its roots in the Europe that existed before the Great War'.

Oslobodjenje ('Liberation'), which takes its name from the newspaper founded by partisans fighting the German occupation of Yugoslavia, celebrated its 60th anniversary in 2003.

1994

Taslima Nasreen

When the doctor and writer Taslima Nasreen, who was born in 1962 in Bangladesh, won the 1994 Sakharov Prize, she had already sought refuge in Europe. Her works which criticise religious fundamentalism and, in particular, the oppression of women, are banned in her country. Islamic fundamentalists have issued threats against her life.

In her acceptance speech, she said she came from a part of the world where social tensions and human difficulties were unbearable. As a writer, she could not close her eyes to the daily suffering and starvation in the slums.

In September 1998 Taslima Nasreen returned to Bangladesh to her dying mother. As soon as this news came out, religious fundamentalists once again called for the writer to be put to death. A court issued a warrant for her arrest and threatened to confiscate her assets.

The European Parliament answered Taslima Nasreen's appeal for help and, in a resolution, called on the government of Bangladesh to protect her life and ensure her safety.

In January 1999, in the face of continuing threats, Nasreen left her homeland once again.

Since 1994, Taslima has lived in many countries in exile including France, Sweden and, since 2004, in India. But even there, she came under increasing pressure from Muslim groups' protests at her "anti-Islamic" novels and memoirs, forcing her to move to New Delhi and live under Indian government security protection from November 2007. Eventually, due to increasing death threats for her life by Islamic extremists in India as well as her failing health, she returned back to Europe in mid-March 2008.

In January 2008, Taslima Nasreen was awarded the Simone de Beauvoir Prize at the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the birth of Simone de Beauvoir.

1995

Leyla Zana

When the European Parliament awarded Leyla Zana the Sakharov Prize in 1995 on the basis of her courageous defence of human rights and commitment to forging a peaceful, democratic resolution to conflicts between the Turkish Government and its Kurdish population, she had already spent one year in imprisonment.

In the course of defending the rights of her imprisoned husband, Zana had assumed a leadership role which culminated in her candidacy in the Turkish parliamentary elections of 1991. She received 84 percent of the votes in her district of Diyarbakir. At her inauguration, she promised in Kurdish to 'struggle so that the Kurdish and Turkish peoples may live together in a democratic framework.'

Based on her speeches and writings in defence of Kurdish rights, Leyla Zana, together with three other Kurdish MPs of the pro-Kurdish Party for Democracy, was charged with being affiliated to the PKK, and sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment by the Ankara State Security Court in December 1994.

The government offered in 1997 to release her for health reasons, but Zana refused. 'I hope to see a general amnesty for all political prisoners. I do not wish to be released on health grounds while my political friends remain in captivity.'

After the retrial in 2003, which – like the first trial – was considered by the European Court of Human Rights as not being fair and independent, the court decided that the former Kurdish MPs should serve the remainder of their prison sentences.

However, on 9 June 2004 Turkey's Appeal Court decided to revoke the verdicts and overturn the sentences. On 14 October 2004, Leyla Zana was finally able to address a European Parliament plenary session in person at a special ceremony in Brussels.

1996

Wei Jingsheng

The 'father of the Chinese democracy movement' was the 1996 winner of the Sakharov Prize.

China's most prominent dissident was born into the family of a civil servant on 20 May 1950, initially joined the Red Guard as an enthusiastic supporter of the ideals of the Maoist Cultural Revolution, but, disillusioned by the atrocities committed in the name of the class struggle, turned instead to humanism and democracy.

When Deng Xiaoping came to power in 1978, Wei Jingsheng helped to create the 'Wall of Democracy'. In wall newspapers Chinese citizens called for the injustices they had suffered to be made good. 'What is real democracy?', asked Wei on a poster, attracting attention and the wrath of the Chinese Government.

When, in 1979, he called Deng Xiaoping a dictator in the mould of Mao Zedong, he was arrested, convicted of counter-revolutionary crimes at a show trial and sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment and hard labour.

After his release in 1993, Wei Jingsheng did not give up. He set up links with the Western media and continued to denounce the flagrant human rights violations in China. In 1994 he vanished into police custody, and at the end of 1995 he was once again sentenced to 14 years' imprisonment for plotting to overthrow Communism. His health steadily deteriorated as a result of inhuman prison conditions and ill-treatment by fellow prisoners.

On 16 November 1997, as a result of persistent international pressure, Wei Jingsheng was released from prison and deported to the USA. As chairman of the Overseas Chinese Democracy Coalition (OCDC), founded in 1998, and through his own Wei Jingsheng Foundation, he is still campaigning to achieve his overriding objective: human rights and democracy in China.

1997

Salima Ghezali

Salima Ghezali, the 1997 winner of the Sakharov Prize, was born near Algiers in 1958. In the 1980s she became involved in the Algerian women's movement, inter alia as a founder member of 'Women of Europe and the Maghreb' and as editor-in-chief of 'NYSSA', the women's publication she herself had founded.

The women's rights activist became a committed campaigner for human rights and democracy in Algeria. After 1994, as publisher of the weekly magazine 'La Nation', she increasingly focused on issues of censorship. Her articles constantly called for a peaceful and democratic solution to the crisis in Algeria, which has cost the lives of tens of thousands of people, including many journalists. As a result, she became a target for criticism from both the Algerian authorities and Islamic extremists.

The appearance in 'Le Monde Diplomatique' of her report on the human rights situation in Algeria prompted the authorities to order the closure of her magazine in 1996. Salima Ghezali reacted by saying that 'Drawing attention to the principles which form the foundations of our human society and exercising vigilance are the best means of ensuring that civilisation wins out over barbarism.'

On 25 April 1996, at a hearing on press freedom held by the European Parliament, Salima Ghezali described the fear and pressures to which journalists in Algeria are exposed if they seek to circumvent censorship and escape the murderous wrath of their opponents.

In 2002, shortly before publication of 'La Nation' was to resume, she confirmed that the weekly magazine would continue to campaign for the opening up of Algeria to democracy in the future.

Salima Ghezali has been a Board member of the Euro-Mediterranean Foundation of Support to Human Rights Defenders (EMHRF).

1998

Ibrahim Rugova

In 1998, as the armed conflict between Serbian units and the Kosovo Liberation Army escalated, the European Parliament sent out a message by awarding the Sakharov Prize to the political leader of the Kosovo Albanians. In giving the prize to Ibrahim Rugova, the European Parliament honoured a man committed to the principle of peaceful resistance to violence.

Dr Ibrahim Rugova, who was born on 2 December 1944 in Cerrca (Istog), Kosovo, taught literature at the University of Priština before being elected leader of the Kosovo Democratic Alliance (LDK) in 1989. That year, Belgrade abolished the autonomous status of the province of Kosovo; the Albanians found themselves subjected to oppression, and opposition leaders were arrested. In 1990 the two million Kosovo Albanians adopted their own constitution, in 1991 in a referendum 97% of them voted for an independent Kosovo, and in 1998 they confirmed Ibrahim Rugova as President of their self-proclaimed 'Republic of Kosovo'.

The pacifist Rugova stuck doggedly to his approach based on non-violent opposition to the Serbian regime, constantly reiterating his willingness to enter into dialogue with Belgrade. At the same time, he endeavoured to win over world opinion to his people's cause. He never faltered in urging the international community to step up its pressure and offer Kosovo protection.

Convinced that his people could achieve self-determination only through peace, on 18 March 1999 Ibrahim Rugova signed the Rambouillet peace agreement as the chief negotiator for the Kosovo Albanians. Belgrade's refusal to endorse the agreement led on 24 March to the launch of NATO attacks on Yugoslavia which were intended to last three months. On 28 March Rugova's key adviser in the peace negotiations, Fehmi Agani, was murdered in Priština. Rugova himself was forced to go underground. In March 2002 Ibrahim Rugova was elected as the first President of Kosovo. President Rugova died of cancer on 21 January 2006.

1999

José Alexandre 'Xanana' Gusmão

Xanana Gusmão was born on 20 June 1946 in Laleia, East Timor. When the Portuguese withdrew, Indonesia began a policy of destabilising East Timor. On 7 December 1975, Indonesia invaded. Gusmão went underground and in 1978 became leader of the military wing of the Revolutionary Front for the Independence of East Timor (FRETILIN).

The violence which accompanied the invasion cost an estimated 200 000 lives, but failed to break the people's determination to resist. Xanana Gusmão sought to secure a peaceful solution to the conflict by proposing a peace plan and talks under UN supervision to the Indonesian Government. In 1986 he managed to bring together the various political and social groupings to form the Timorese National Resistance Council (TNRC). On 20 November 1992 Xanana Gusmão was arrested. He was sentenced to life imprisonment, subsequently reduced to 20 years, on charges of separatism and illegal possession of arms and ultimately, in February 1999, placed under house arrest. Even the imprisonment of Xanana Gusmão, who is also known as the 'Mandela of Timor', failed to break the opposition in East Timor. In releasing Xanana Gusmão on 7 September 1999 – shortly after the referendum of 30 August, in which 80% of the population of East Timor had voted for independence – Indonesia's President Habibie was responding to massive international pressure. Xanana Gusmão, who has become a symbol of resistance in East Timor and the embodiment of the hopes of the international solidarity movement, said on his release: 'As a free man, I promise to do everything in my power to bring peace to East Timor and my people'. In April 2002 the first free presidential elections were held in East Timor. Xanana Gusmão was elected with almost 83% of the votes. On 20 May 2002 Kofi Annan officially declared the Democratic Republic of East Timor an independent state. While José Xanana Gusmão served as President of East Timor until May 2007, he became Prime Minister of the country in the outcome of legislative following the legislative elections of 30 June 2007.

2000

¡BASTA YA!

The pressure group BASTA YA (Stop it now), which was granted consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council in July 2004, consists of people who work for basic human rights, democracy and tolerance in the Basque country. Members of the group come from different ideological backgrounds but agree on three principles:

- > They actively oppose terrorism.
- > They support all victims of terrorism and political violence.
- > They uphold the rule of law, as enshrined in the Constitution and Statute of Autonomy.

Fundamental freedoms and human rights are under threat in the Basque country from terrorism by ETA and related groups. Thousands of people have been victims of intimidation, extortion, blackmail and attacks, with families and property also targeted. They are unable to express themselves freely or exercise their rights without taking great risks.

The members of BASTA YA are risking their lives to fight terrorism and the only 'weapon' they have is the peaceful mobilisation of the people to protect their basic freedoms. BASTA YA wants to raise awareness through actions designed to display solidarity with all those who oppose terrorism and support democratic values.

In March 2002 the group's spokesman, Fernando Savater, told the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs that, after 25 years of daily struggle, the people have had enough and, in the last ten years, 10% of the population have already left the Basque country.

In July 2004 BASTA YA gained a consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

2001

Izzat Ghazzawi

A Palestinian born in 1951, Izzat Ghazzawi was a professor at Birzeit University and held a master's degree in English literature. He chaired the Union of Palestinian Writers, wrote novels and short stories, was a literary critic and organised and chaired the first International Writers' Conference in Palestine (1997).

Izzat Ghazzawi was a member of the Executive Bureau of the Palestinian Council for Justice and Peace and was awarded the International Prize for Freedom of Expression in Stavanger in 1995. He was imprisoned and punished on a number of occasions by the Israeli authorities as a result of his political activities.

His life was marked by the murder, by the Israeli Army, of his son Ramy, aged 16. Ramy was killed in the courtyard of his school as he went to help a wounded friend. Despite this tragedy, Izzat Ghazzawi always continued to seek cultural and political dialogue with the Israeli people.

Together with the Israeli writer Abraham B. Yehoshua and the photographer Oliviero Toscani, he published a book on relations between the Palestinians and the Israelis which became hugely successful.

Izzat Ghazzawi died on 4 April 2003.

Nurit Peled-Elhanan

An Israeli born in 1949, Nurit Peled-Elhanan is a university professor of comparative literature. She represents all Israelis who are committed to a negotiated solution to the conflict and who clearly acknowledge the right of two peoples and two States to exist side by side on an equal footing. Her father is the famous General Matti Peled, who is renowned for his efforts to foster peace and progress.

Her 14-year-old daughter, Smadar, was killed in an attack carried out in West Jerusalem by a Palestinian suicide bomber. When her daughter was killed, Nurit did not give in to despair but made speeches which focused on the responsibility borne by those who implement a short sighted policy which refuses to acknowledge the rights of others and fuels hatred and conflict. Nurit Peled-Elhanan founded the Israeli-Palestinian Bereaved Families Forum.

Speaking to secondary school pupils in Rimini on 4 February 2004, Nurit Peled-Elhanan said 'It is high time that we define what is happening in the Middle East in terms of criminality rather than in political and military terms ... It is time to teach how to recognise false ideals and how to oppose the terrible misuse of ideals ... It is high time ... for us to become individuals again instead of nations, individuals instead of troops, and to work together to save those children who are still alive by saying "enough is enough".

Through their lives and their commitment, Izzat Ghazzawi and Nurit Peled-Elhanan embody the hope of a negotiated, peaceful solution to the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis. Their personal tragedies have not turned them into enemies; their pain has not been transformed into hatred, but instead into the energy required to find ways of respecting the rights of individual citizens.

Dom Zacarias Kamwenho

In 1999 renewed awareness of the need to fight for peace and human rights began to increase among the Angolan people, encouraged by the efforts of church leaders and various civil society bodies to foster 'inclusive national reconciliation'.

Archbishop Zacarias Kamwenho is in the vanguard of this peace movement. Born in Chimbundo (Huambo, Angola) in 1934, ordained in 1961, and made Archbishop of Lubango in 1995, Dom Zacarias Kamwenho expressed his firm, impartial and determined views to all parties of the conflict in an effort to achieve lasting peace through political dialogue after 26 years of civil war. In 2001 he was awarded the Sakharov prize in recognition of his untiring efforts for peace.

The ceasefire which came about in 2002 after the killing of Jonas Savimbi, the peace talks and the general climate of support for democratisation can largely be attributed to the campaign conducted by Dom Zacarias Kamwenho and other religious and civil leaders.

In 2003 Archbishop Zacarias Kamwenho resigned as chair of the Bishops' Conference of Angola and São Tome (CEAST) but he continues to work actively through his diocese and the Ecumenical Committee for

Peace in Angola (COIEPA) for the realisation of democracy, respect for fundamental freedoms and human rights, the implementation of the rule of law and lasting national reconciliation.

2002

Oswaldo José Payá Sardiñas

In 2002 the European Parliament awarded the Sakharov Prize to the founder of the Movimiento Cristiano Liberación (Christian Liberation Movement), Oswaldo José Payá Sardiñas, born in 1952, thus honouring his undeterred commitment to national dialogue and democratic change in Cuba.

Despite being persecuted and condemned since his youth for his criticism of Fidel Castro's policy, his commitment is unwavering. In 1997 Payá Sardiñas drew up the Varela project calling for a national referendum on freedom of expression and assembly, free pluralist elections, the release of all political prisoners, and economic and social reforms. In so doing Payá Sardiñas demonstrated his support for the goal of bringing about political change using existing legal means. He and his supporters succeeded in gathering 25 000 signatures and presenting the project to the National Assembly of People's Power in May 2002. For the first time, the opposition came together to support the manifesto 'Todos Unidos' (All Together).

In March 2003, 75 Cubans – two thirds of whom had been active in the campaign for a referendum – were sentenced to long-term prison sentences for offences against national independence and territorial integrity.

In his address to the European Parliament, Oswaldo José Payá Sardiñas pledged a commitment that the Cuban Government's repression would not halt the campaign, as the Cuban people wanted change without violence.

In July 2003, 200 Members of the European Parliament put their signatures to the 'Sakharov initiative' giving Oswaldo José Payá Sardiñas an assurance of their continuing support. In 2003, Payá and other leaders launched a National Dialogue process in which over 12 000 Cubans on and off the island discussed their visions for Cuba's future. Their comments and suggestions were systematically collected and included into the Program for All Cubans presented by Payá to the public in 2006 as a contribution to a peaceful and democratic transition.

A resolution adopted on the 21 June 2007 by the European Parliament reiterated the need to follow-up on the laureate by inviting him to the European Parliament or sending a European Parliament delegation to meet him in Cuba.

2003

UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan and all the staff of the United Nations

in special memory of Sergio Vieira de Mello and the many other UN officials who have lost their lives in execution of their service for peace in the world.

In awarding the 2003 Sakharov Prize to the United Nations, the European Parliament gave recognition to UN action in favour of peace, human rights and fundamental freedoms and in support of democracy and the rule of law around the world.

In the era of globalisation efforts have been made under Kofi Annan's leadership to develop the UN into a more efficient instrument for global needs: 'We will continue our efforts to tackle poverty, disease, climate change, and the spread of small arms. And we will also work together to fight terrorism and the spread of weapons of mass destruction. The United Nations must confront all these threats at once.'

The Sakharov Prize honours the United Nations staff who works tirelessly for world peace, often under difficult conditions. They run the risk of losing their lives and many of them have.

The Prize was awarded in special memory of Sergio Vieira de Mello, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and one of the worthiest representatives of the UN agents who, while serving as Kofi Annan's special representative in Iraq, was killed in 2003 along with other UN officials in an attack on the UN Headquarters in Baghdad.

After completing two five-year terms as the UN Secretary General in January 2007, Kofi Annan has been involved with several organizations having both global and African focuses. Amongst others, he was appointed president of the Global Humanitarian Forum in Geneva and became a member of the Global Elders, a group of leaders "to contribute their wisdom, independent leadership and integrity to tackling some of the world's toughest problems".

As head of the Panel of Eminent African Personalities, Annan participated in the negotiations to end the civil unrest in Kenya at the beginning of 2008 and successfully achieved a resolution of the crisis whereby President Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga signed a coalition government agreement in February 2008.

2004

The Belarusian Association of Journalists

The Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ) occupies a pre-eminent position among the prize winners for its commitment to the cause of freedom of speech and the promotion of independent and professional journalism in Belarus.

Representing almost 1 000 media workers, the Association works under extremely difficult conditions to protect the legitimate rights of journalists, who are not uncommonly the victims of intimidation, harassment, criminal prosecution and expatriation. In a number of individual cases, prompt intervention by the BAJ has enabled those responsible for death threats against journalists to be brought to account. Despite the lack of an independent judiciary, the BAJ's lawyers have frequently been successful in representing journalists and the media in court.

The Association also plays an important role as an observer, documenting conflicts between government authorities and the non-government media, advising newspapers and inviting the authorities to adopt equivalent measures. Journalists are also continuously striving to improve the high, professional standard.

An important part of the Association's work involves increasing public awareness of the constitutional right to freedom of information and of how people can exercise their rights. To this end the BAJ is working to prevent the adoption of a new repressive media law. Through its Law Center for Media Protection, the BAJ is working to improve the current regulatory framework.

On 3 May 2005, World Press Freedom Day, the Association called for support for the independent press in Belarus as the only source – given the situation in the country – of up to- date and comprehensive information for the citizens of Belarus on what is happening in the country and the rest of the world.

2005

Ladies in White

The Ladies in White from Cuba were one of the three laureates of the Sakharov Prize in 2005. With the award, the European Parliament recognised their courage and commitment to the cause of human rights in Cuba and drew attention to the continuing detention of the 75 political dissidents imprisoned since March 2003 mostly for simply criticising the lack of political freedom in the country. In Cuba, speaking out against the government is a subversive act punished by up to 25 years in prison.

Any attempt to forget about the prisoners has failed as their wives, mothers and daughters have brought international attention to their situation through their peaceful protest. They call themselves the Ladies in White ('Damas de Blanco') and were formed as a spontaneous movement in early 2004. They are not a political party or bound to a political organisation of any type. By wearing white to symbolise innocence and purity they act like the Argentinian women who used a similar tactic in the 1970s to demand information about their children who went missing during the military dictatorship. These women, the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, won the Sakharov Prize in 1992.

Every Sunday, the Ladies in White attend religious services in the Church of Santa Rita, after which they peacefully walk down Havana's Fifth Avenue, flowers in hand, calling for the liberation of their loved ones and for all those arbitrarily incarcerated on the island. Initially, they started writing letters to the Cuban authorities but they did not get a single reply. It is the first time in 47 years that women in Cuba have gone out into the street to protest against unjust imprisonment.

Despite having been threatened and insulted, the Ladies in White continue to stand up for the rights of Cuban political prisoners and the dignity of all Cuban people. The most serious attack on them was 20 March 2004 - Palm Sunday - when they were assaulted and insulted by members of the pro-government Federation of Cuban Women. Their demand for justice and their call for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners is carried forward by a peaceful struggle. They are united in their anguish in the face of the appalling conditions their loved ones as prisoners are suffering. The Ladies in White have called for solidarity amongst all peoples for their cause.

Five women: Laura Pollán, the wife of Héctor Maseda, Miriam Leiva, the wife of Oscar Espinosa Chepe, Berta Soler, the wife of Ángel Moya, Loyda Valdés, the wife of Alfredo Felipe Fuente, and Julia Núñez, the wife of Adolfo Fernández Sainz, were selected by the group to receive the Prize on behalf of the Ladies in White at the ceremony of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The Cuban authorities did not authorise the representatives to leave the country to receive the Prize in Strasbourg. They were represented by Blanca Reyes, one of their activists currently living in Spain. To this date, the Sakharov Prize has not been handed to the Ladies in White. The European Parliament continues to insist on their right to receive the Prize in person at a plenary session.

Hauwa Ibrahim

One of the 2005 Sakharov Prize winners was Hauwalbrahim, a 37 year-old human rights lawyer from Abuja, Nigeria, and a mother of two sons. She was born in a small, poor village, the daughter of a Mullah. A career as a lawyer was not supposed to figure in her destiny. At the age of 12 she was supposed to get married and her studies ought to have ended at primary school, but she refused this destiny.

As one of only a few women lawyers practising in northern Nigeria, her work took her into the rural hinterland, where she had to travel by camel or donkey to get to the villages. She describes this time as among the best of her life, because she was able to relate to the grass roots that she came from.

She is acutely aware of the importance of education in the empowerment of women and as a defence for those facing the greatest deprivation. Poverty and illiteracy go hand in hand - and fundamentalism feeds on ignorance. Hauwa Ibrahim, who was brought up as a Muslim herself, works tirelessly to fight for religious fundamentalism. Hauwa Ibrahim has built up what can only be described as an extraordinary practice: defending people who are condemned under Islamic Sharia law which is applied in 12 northern states of Nigeria. Death sentences, although not carried out for the moment, continue to be handed down. Since 1999, Hauwa Ibrahim has worked free-of charge as defence counsel in 47 cases, many of which have involved women accused of adultery and subjected to death by stoning. It was her ability to arouse international public opinion that made it possible to save the lives of Amina Lawa, Safiya Hussaini and Hafsatu Abukabar. She was equally heavily involved in other cases of cruel and inhuman punishment, such as women sentenced to flogging or young boys sentenced to amputation for theft.

Hauwa Ibrahim has become an iconic figure, but her charisma makes some uncomfortable. She is banned from pleading in Islamic courts. 'I do not comment on the Koran', she said. 'My only objective is to have the fundamental rights of each and every human being respected, like the rule of law and the right to a fair trial.'

Hauwa argued successfully that Sharia law requires the Sharia courts to respect the procedural and substantive rights guaranteed by Sharia law as well as the Nigerian Constitution and that the international human rights treaties to which Nigeria is signatory are observed.

Today, Hauwa's cause resonates beyond Nigeria's borders. But for her the most difficult task is yet to be achieved, that of making her voice heard in her own country.

Reporters Without Borders

Reporters Without Borders - one of the three Sakharov Prize laureates in 2005 - campaigns for press freedom around the world, defends and supports journalists and other media workers who are victims of persecution and censorship.

According to Reporters Without Borders, more than a third of the world's population live in countries where they do not enjoy press freedom. As of 18 October 2007, 77 journalists have been killed worldwide while carrying out their work. Today, around 130 journalists around the world are in prison and sometimes spend years in jail simply for doing their job. Reporters Without Borders has been fighting such practices for 20 years now.

Reporters Without Borders, kept on constant alert via its network of over 120 correspondents, rigorously condemns any attack on press freedom world-wide by keeping the media and public opinion informed through press releases and public-awareness campaigns. Not only does it highlight the moral arguments against restrictions of press freedom, censorship and persecution of the press but also offers practical assistance to journalists who work in war zones.

In January 2002, when it created the Damocles Network, Reporters Without Borders acquired a judicial arm. In order to ensure that murderers and journalist torturers are brought to trial, the Network provides victims with legal services and represents them in court.

The organisation's initiatives are being carried out on five continents through its national branches and regional offices, in close cooperation with local and regional press freedom organisations.

Reporters Without Borders' trilingual website keeps a daily tally of attacks on press freedom worldwide and offers the opportunity of signing online petitions in support of imprisoned journalists. To circumvent censorship, it occasionally publishes articles which have been banned in their country of origin, hosts newspapers that have been closed down in their homeland and serves as a forum for journalists who have been 'silenced' by the authorities of their country.

On 10 December every year, the association awards the 'The Reporters Without Borders – Foundation of France Prize' to journalists for their outstanding contribution to the cause of press freedom in their country.

2006

Aliaksandr Milinkevich

Aliaksandr Milinkevich, born in 1947 in the city of Hrodna, has served as the leader of the democratic opposition in Belarus.

He was chosen to be the joint presidential candidate of the United Democratic Opposition in October 2005, collecting more than 100,000 supporting signatures, and he was able to keep the Belarusian opposition together to form a common front against Aliaksandr Lukashenka throughout the campaign for the presidential elections of 19 March 2006. Aliaksandr Milinkevich called for a truly democratic future for Belarus and presented himself as a real alternative to the authoritarianism of Lukashenka.

His diplomatic approach to negotiation and cautious public appearances helped him to build firm international support for his struggle. The results of the elections were assessed by the European Union as neither free nor fair, and furthermore, subject to fraud. Mr Milinkevich officially received 6% of the votes, but unofficial reports state that his popular support was much higher.

The human rights situation in Belarus has deteriorated since the elections of March 2006. The authorities have enacted a law criminalizing behaviour deemed critical to the state. The silencing and imprisonment of journalists, activists, and other critics found to be politically inconvenient by the current regime still continues.

In April 2006, Mr Milinkevich was himself imprisoned for 15 days, together with other opposition members, for taking part in an 'unsanctioned rally', a peaceful demonstration in Minsk, to mark the 20th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster. In a growing hostile political environment Aliaksandr Milinkevich has been arrested several times in recent years but no charges were filed. against him

Despite the oppression, Mr Milinkevich is committed to continuing his fight for a democratic future in his country, and for the return of fundamental rights to the Belarusian people, despite an increasingly difficult political climate.

2007

Salih Mahmoud Mohamed Osman

Mr Osman is a lawyer working with the Sudan Organisation against Torture ("SOAT") to provide free legal representation to people who have been arbitrarily detained and tortured by the Sudanese government.

Over two decades during Sudan's various civil wars Mr Osman has risked his own life to provide legal and medical aid to the victims of the conflict. Mr Osman and SOAT have also been active in cataloguing crimes that have taken place - particularly in the Darfur region - and they are engaged in a campaign to have rape prosecuted as a war crime. He is also actively involved in the protection of over 2 million Sudanese who have been forced to abandon their homes.

In his effort to provide a record of the alleged war crimes in the Darfur region, Mr Osman turned over to the International Criminal Court (ICC) his interviews with witnesses and records of crimes in order to assist the Court's prosecutions. In fact, the ICC prosecuted crimes in Darfur in 2005 and issued an arrest warrant against alleged Sudanese perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity, followed by the indictment of the Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir in July 2008.

Mr Osman's fight against injustice in Sudan has come at a personal cost. Members of his own family have suffered as a result of action by the militias. Mr Osman himself was persecuted for his actions, detained several times, held incommunicado and tortured.

Since 2006, Mr Salih Osman has served as an opposition member of the Sudanese Parliament. He works on legal reform and focuses on promoting the rule of law through the implementation of the provisions of the interim constitution.