



The Arab Spring wins Sakharov Prize 2011

The European Parliament Sakharov Prize for freedom of thought in 2011 goes to five representatives of the Arab people, in recognition and support of their drive for freedom and human rights. It will be presented to the winners by President Jerzy Buzek at Parliament's formal session in Strasbourg, on 14 December.

Parliament's 2011 Sakharov Prize goes to Asmaa Mahfouz (Egypt), Ahmed al-Zubair Ahmed al-Sanusi (Libya), Razan Zaitouneh (Syria), Ali Farzat (Syria) and posthumously to Mohamed Bouazizi (Tunisia). This nomination was submitted jointly by the EPP, S&D, ALDE and Green groups.

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Following the decision by the Conference of Presidents (Parliament President and political group leaders) Thursday morning, President Buzek underlined "these individuals contributed to historic changes in the Arab world and this award reaffirms Parliament's solidarity and firm support for their struggle for freedom, democracy and the end of authoritarian regimes". He added, their award was "a symbol for all those working for dignity, democracy and fundamental rights in the Arab world and beyond."

Asmaa Mahfouz

Ms Mahfouz joined the Egyptian April 6th Youth Movement in 2008, helping to organise strikes for fundamental rights. Sustained harassment of journalists and activists by the Mubarak regime as well as the Tunisian example prompted Ms Mahfouz to organise her own protests. Her Youtube videos, Facebook and Twitter posts helped motivate Egyptians to demand their rights in the Tahrir Square. After being detained by the Supreme Council of Armed forces, she was released on bail due to pressure from prominent activists.

Ahmed al-Zubair Ahmed al-Sanusi

Mr Ahmed al-Sanusi, also known as the longest-serving "prisoner of conscience", spent 31 years in Libyan prisons as a result of an attempted coup against Colonel Gaddafi. A member of the National Transitional Council, he is now working to "achieve freedom and race to catch up with humanity" and establish democratic values in post-Gaddafi Libya.

Razan Zaitouneh

Ms Zaitouneh, a human rights lawyer, created the Syrian Human Rights Information Link blog (SHRIL) which reports on current atrocities in Syria. She publicly revealed murders and human rights abuses committed by the Syrian army and police. Her posts have become an important source of information for international media. She is now hiding from the authorities who accuse her of being a foreign agent and have arrested her husband and younger brother.

Ali Farzat

Mr Farzat, a political satirist, is a well-known critic of the Syrian regime and its leader President Bashar al-Assad. Mr Farzat became more straightforward in his cartoons when the March 2011 uprisings began. His caricatures ridiculing Bashar al-Assad's rule helped to inspire revolt in Syria. In August 2011, the Syrian security forces beat him badly, breaking both his hands as "a warning", and confiscated his drawings.

Mohamed Bouazizi

Mr Bouazizi, a Tunisian market trader set himself on fire in protest at incessant humiliation and badgering by the Tunisian authorities. Public sympathy and anger inspired by this gesture led to the ousting of Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. Mr Bouazizi's self-immolation also sparked uprisings and vital changes in other Arab countries such as Egypt and Libya, collectively known as the "Arab Spring".

Sakharov Prize for freedom of thought

The Sakharov Prize for freedom of thought, named in honour of the Soviet physicist and political dissident Andrei Sakharov, has been awarded by the European Parliament every year since 1988 to individuals or organizations that have made an important contribution to the fight for human rights or democracy. The prize is accompanied by an award of €50,000.

This year, the other two shortlisted finalists were Belarusian civil activist and journalist Dzmitry Bandarenka and the Columbian San José de Apartadó Peace Community.