2007 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought

Salih Mahmoud Osman, a Sudanese human rights lawyer working in the Darfur region of Sudan, has been awarded the 2007 Sakharov Prize for freedom of thought. MEPs from across the political spectrum voted to honour Mr Salih for his work in trying to bring justice to the victims of civil war in the troubled region. Accepting the prize on Tuesday 11 December in Parliament's Chamber in Strasbourg, Mr Salih called for Europe and the international community not to abandon the people of Darfur.

It is estimated that over 400,000 people have died in the conflict in Darfur - a situation that Mr Salih describes as "genocide". In an interview with the Parliament's website just prior to the award he said that in Darfur there would be "no peace without justice". You can read a full transcript of that interview by clicking on the "interview" link in the first section.
Sakharov prize 2007 - nominees

The promotion and protection of human rights, democracy and the rule of law are among the most fundamental priorities of the European Parliament. The prize awarded since 1988 carries the name of the Russian physicist Andrei Sakharov (1921-1989): an outspoken critic of the nuclear arms race, Soviet dissident and freethinker.

The annual prize awards those:
  • defending human rights and fundamental freedoms, particularly the right to free expression
  • safeguarding minority rights
  • fostering respect for international law
  • promoting developing democracy and the rule of law

Nelson Mandela, Ibrahim Rugova, Aung San Suu Kyi, Reporters without Borders and Aliaksandr Milinkevich are among the previous winners of the prize.

The 2007 nominees

The shortlist was chosen from among the following nominees.

Bartholomew I is a defender of the freedom of religion in Turkey and promoter of the inter-religious dialogue and tolerance. Nominated by Philip Claeys for the ITS Group.

Zeng Jinyan a cyber-dissident reporting daily about human rights abuses in China in her blog and her husband Hu Jia an anti-AIDS and environmental activist. Nominated by Monica Frassoni and Daniel Cohn-Bendit for the GREEN/EFA Group.

Joya Malalai is an Afghani MP, social worker and defender of women's rights. A member of the National Assembly of Afghanistan, suspended for exposing warlords in Parliament she has survived four assassination attempts. Nominated by Vittorio Agnoletto, Andre Brie and Tobias Pflueger for the GUE/NGL Group.

Salih Mahmoud Osman is a human rights lawyer with the Sudan Organisation Against Torture who provides free legal representation for the many victims of Sudan's civil war and human rights abuses. Nominated by Josep Borrell Fontelles (PSE), Thierry Cornillet (ALDE), Jose Ribeiro e Castro (EPP-ED), Frithjof Schmidt (GREENS/EFA), Jurgen Schroder (EPP-ED), Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck and Marco Cappato for the ALDE Group and 177 other MEPs.

Anna Politkovskaya, a Russian journalist who investigated human rights abuses and torture in Chechnya. She was shot dead on 7 October 2006. Nominated by Joseph Daul for the EPP-ED Group.

Bartholomew I's nomination was subsequently removed from the list after the Patriarch told the Parliament he would not accept it
2007 Sakharov Prize finalists:

The 2007 Sakharov finalists are, in alphabetical order:

**Anna Politkovskaya**

This Russian journalist made her name investigating and reporting human rights abuses and torture especially in lawless Chechnya. She authored several books about the Chechen wars, life in Russia and President Putin's regime and received numerous prestigious international awards for her work. Politkovskaya survived a poisoning attempt, but was shot dead on 7 October 2006 in the elevator of her apartment block in central Moscow. The perpetrators have not been brought to justice.

**Salih Mahmoud Osman**

A human rights attorney working with the Sudan Organisation Against Torture, he has for over two decades provided free legal representation for the many victims of Sudan's civil war and human rights abuses. Mr. Salih's fight against injustice has had a personal cost; members of his family have been killed and tortured. He serves currently as a Member of the Sudanese National Parliament.

**Zeng Jinyan and Hu Jia: Children of Tiananmen**

Zeng Jinyan is a cyber-dissident reporting Chinese rights abuses in her daily blog. Her husband Hu Jia is an anti-AIDS and environmental activist. Both human rights activists live in Beijing under house arrest. They were prevented from leaving China on May 18, accused of being a threat to national security.

We will portray the candidates in more detail in the run-up to the 2007 Sakharov award.
Anna Politkovskaya: investigative journalist gunned down in Moscow

Anna Politkovskaya made her name as a journalist for "Novaya Gazeta" from 1999 to 2006. This period coincided with the rise of Vladimir Putin to the Russian Presidency and the launching of the second Chechen war.

Both of these events and the influences they had on Russian society were closely scrutinised by Mrs Politkovskaya in her work. She reported on allegations of human rights abuses and torture in Chechnya and on restrictions on press freedom in Russia. Her pen was scathing in its denunciation of the state of Russian society. In one of her last books "Putin's Russia: life in a failing democracy" she accused the Russia secret police of attempting to revert to a Soviet style dictatorship.

Ultimate price for writing uncomfortable truths

Her reward for such journalism brought her respect and recognition abroad but at home she was harassed, threatened and survived a poisoning attempt. In October 2006 her luck ran out and she was gunned down in the elevator of her apartment in Moscow.

Her death brought widespread international condemnation of the political climate in Russia with her family laying the blame squarely on the Russian authorities. Her death brought into focus the dangers Russian journalists face - since 1993 almost 300 of them have been killed in Russia. After the killing, over 1000 people filed past her coffin to pay their respects. In August this year ten people were arrested in connection to the murder. Anna Politkovskaya (b August 1958 d. October 2006).
Salih Mahmoud Osman: Attorney in Sudan working for victims of civil conflict

Over two decades during Sudan's various civil wars Salih Mahmoud Osman (b.1957) has risked his own life to provide legal and medical aid to the countless victims of the conflict. Working with the Sudan Organisation Against Torture ("SOAT") he has given legal protection and representation to the victims of human rights abuses.

In its work SOAT has been successful in overturning judgements of death or amputation and they are engaged in a campaign to have rape established as a crime of war.

As well as dealing with the victims of abuses, Mr Salih and SOAT have also been active in cataloguing crimes that taken place - particularly in the Darfur region of Sudan.

Persecuted for his actions

Mr Salih's fight against injustice in Sudan has had personal cost. Members of his own family have been killed, tortured, or burned out of their homes by the militias. He himself was imprisoned by the Sudanese government for over seven months in 2004 without a charge or a trial. On November 8, 2005, he was awarded Human Rights Watch's highest honour for his work in Sudan.

Mr Salih serves currently as a Member of the Sudanese National Parliament. In that new role, he is focused on promoting the rule of law through the implementation of the provisions of the interim constitution.
Zeng Jinyan and Hu Jia: Chinese dissidents

Zeng Jinyan (22) is a Chinese dissident who has used the burgeoning power of the internet to focus on human rights abuses. With a blog dubbed "Tiananmen 2.0" she was recently listed by Time magazine as one of the great heroes of our times.

Her husband and fellow dissident Hu Jia (34) has been engaged in a long struggle to awaken Chinese people to ecological concerns and the dangers of the AIDS virus. He has been instrumental in using the power of the law to protect dissidents through recruiting young lawyers and law students to the cause of human rights. When just 15 in 1989 he took place in the iconic demonstrations in Tiananmen square that were later crushed by the Chinese authorities.

Internet freedom controlled by "great fire wall of China".

Being a critic of the government in China has led to harassment and intimidation from the authorities with their house under 24 hour surveillance by the authorities. From August 2006 to March 2007 Zeng Jinyan and Hu Jia were put under house arrest.

Whilst both have used the internet to advocate their cause they are not alone. According to human rights organisations most of the so called "cyber-dissidents" are to be found in China. Press freedom is closely monitored and internet access guarded by what has been dubbed "the great fire wall of China".
MEPs make the case for Sakharov nominees

On Wednesday night MEPs and observers had the chance to make their pitch on behalf of each of the 3 Sakharov nominees. With the winner being chosen on 25 October it was an opportunity for their supporters to make the case for honouring either Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya, Sudanese lawyer Salih Mahmoud Osman or Chinese dissidents Zeng Jinyan and Hu Jia. Organised by Parliament's human rights sub-committee, the situation in Sudan's Darfur, Russia, and China was also discussed.

The event attracted dissidents and representatives of human rights NGO's from across the world. Moderated by the BBC's Shirin Wheeler it was an opportunity to discuss the influence the three nominees have.

Zeng Jinyan and Hu Jia: Chinese dissidents

First up was the nomination of "cyber-dissidents" Zeng Jinyan and Hu Jia. On behalf of the Greens/EFA group Daniel Cohn-Bendit MEP called them children of those who rebelled in Tiananmen Square. He reminded his audience that the forthcoming 2008 Olympics were "a decisive moment to underline that things aren't going well in China" and drew attention to the "closely monitored and policed internet" there.

Cai Chongguo is Editor-in-Chief of the China Labour Bulletin based in Paris. She paid tribute to the bravery of Zeng Jinyan and Hu Jia saying that they provided verifiable information to the public. She called for international support against China as in the run up to the Olympics she said that the Chinese authorities were engaged in a "clean-up" before the games to stifle dissent. China should be reminded of its responsibilities to the environment, Tibet and Burma she said.

"Kafkaesque, absurd situation" - defenders and defendants behind bars

Marie Holzman of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) described the situation in China as "Kafkaesque" and "absurd", referring to the imprisonment of hundreds of lawyers leading to a situation where defenders and defendants were in jail.

British Conservative Edward McMillan-Scott said the Parliament "shouldn't be ignoring what happens in the biggest (by population) country on Earth".

Dr Salih Mahmoud Osman - legal advocate for victims of conflict

Dr Salih Mahmoud Osman has helped victims of Sudan's long civil war find legal recompense and medical help over two decades. Mr Salih's nomination was introduced by José Ribeiro e Castro (EPP-ED) and Josep Borrell Fontelles (PSE) both of whom visited Darfur earlier in the year. Mr Ribeiro said that Mr Salih "is fighting with his voice to put a stop to the tremendous suffering in Darfur". Josep Borrell called the suffering in Darfur "one of the biggest tragedies of our time".

2.4 million displaced, 4 million need international aid

The extent of crisis in Sudan's western province of Darfur was outlined by Reed Brody of Human Rights Watch. He said "2.4 million have been displaced and 4 million depend on international aid to survive".

Osman Hummaida, a former head of the Sudan Organisation Against Torture (SOAT) and colleague of Dr Salih said Sudanese justice leaves a great deal to be desired. "Justice is quick, (there is) no time for appeals". He also said that "by going to Court you could not achieve much". He said at present 95% of those sentenced to death or amputations in Sudan were from the Darfur region.

Through his work Dr. Salih has "collected statistics, created a network of lawyers, rehabilitation centre for torture victims".

Anna Politkovskaya: Russian journalist gunned down in Moscow
German MEP Elmar Brok (EPP-ED) said that the work of Anna Politkovskaya was an example of "the goals we tie to the Sakharov prize". He said it was thanks to her that the outside world has some idea of what had taken place during the second Chechen war.

Sergieï Sokolov is Editor-in-chief of Novaya Gazeta - the newspaper for which Anna Politkovskaya worked. He said his paper had lost 5 journalists in 15 years and that her nomination was a token of support for them. He also spoke of the culture of impunity that prevails in Russia with 70% of murders going unpunished.

"Political murder"

Anna Politkovskaya's family lawyer Karinna Moskalenko called her shooting "political murder". She said the Russian government had created an "environment of intolerance to opposition and journalists" and that Ms Politkovskaya's right to life had been violated.

Spanish MEP Ana Maria Gomes (PES) talked of the "crucial role courageous journalists can play". Jacek Saryusz-Wolski (EPP-ED) spoke of the impact of the prize.
Parliament calls for Aung San Suu Kyi release

Following the recent events in Burma, the European Parliament is pursuing its campaign for the release of 1990 Sakharov Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi by the Burmese regime. Giant posters in Brussels and Strasbourg call for her to be freed immediately. Aung San Suu Kyi is one of several Sakharov Prize winners who over the years have been unable to receive their prizes personally because of the restriction placed upon them.
2007 Sakharov Prize winner is Salih Mahmoud Osman

Salih Mahmoud Osman is this year's winner of the Sakharov Prize for freedom of thought. EP President Hans-Gert Pöttering announced the name of the laureate October in plenary in Strasbourg after the leaders of Parliament's political groups chose the winner from three shortlisted candidates.

Announcing the award, Mr Pöttering lauded Mr Salih's commitment to Darfur's victims. "In the face of violence and arbitrary power, Salih Mahmoud Osman stands up for dialogue and justice. And there can be no democracy without justice. By granting the Sakharov Prize to Salih Mahmoud Osman, the European Parliament shows its support for the action of this courageous man who has become the voice of Darfur, and through him, for the establishment of the rule of law in Sudan."

The President said that group leaders had decided to find a suitable way to honour the life and work of the Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya, who was assassinated in Moscow in October 2006. The €50,000 Sakharov prize will be presented in a ceremony on 11 December in Strasbourg, during the Parliament's plenary session.
Publicising the Sakharov Prize

The Sakharov Prize is an important award in the field of freedom of thought and human rights. Enclosed is some material that you, your friends or your organisation can use to find out more about the 2007 prize and its winner, Sudanese Human Rights Lawyer Salih Mahmoud Osman

You are more than welcome to use this material with a link to our website. Click on the first link below to access to the page gathering digital banners (two sizes, .gif format), video clips (internet formats) and posters (.pdf).

All the material is available in 22 EU languages.
Salih Mahmoud Osman: "no peace without justice"

Salih Mahmoud Osman is the winner of the 2007 Sakharov Prize for his human rights work as a lawyer in the troubled Darfur region of Sudan. The prize, awarded every year by the European Parliament, celebrates those who have defended freedom of thought somewhere in the world. On the day he receives the award in Strasbourg, we publish an interview with him. In it, Mr Salih calls for the West to face up to the moral, ethical and legal responsibility to protect Darfur's civilians from the genocide.

It is estimated that over 400,000 people have died in Darfur. Despite numerous UN resolutions, there is no peace in the region - which is about the size of France.

MEPs awarded you this prize for your commitment to democracy, dialogue and rule of law. Will it make a difference to your work against injustice in Darfur?

SMO: I am really glad about this recognition of the work of us human rights defenders in Sudan, and Darfur in particular. We are working in a hostile environment, under perpetual danger of being intimidated, arrested, detained and tortured. Still I think there is always an ethical and moral responsibility to stand with the people.

There is a real human suffering in Darfur. For me as a lawyer it is genocide. More than 400,000 people have died and more than 2000 villages have been erased. Rape is used as a weapon of war; young girls, as young as 8, are being assaulted. Many rapes take place in front of the victims’ male relatives to humiliate them.

Despite serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, there is no justice. There is an atmosphere of total impunity; all the perpetrators are still beyond the reach of justice. We talk about impunity because our judicial system is incompetent and unwilling to provide justice.

Your country is still in the midst of a violent conflict, what do you think are the keys to peace and reconciliation in Darfur?

SMO: There will never be peace in Darfur and Sudan without justice. There is no peace without justice. Justice is a very important and basic element of peace, and cannot be compromised for any political reasons.

In the south of Sudan more than 2 million people were killed and about 4 million have been displaced. Justice is not for the purposes of revenge; it is for a lasting peace and a possible reconciliation. The nature of the atrocities will never allow the victims and survivors to forget about their suffering. This is why justice is important.

After a long silence, the international community has apparently "woken up". Could Europe do more for Darfur and what steps in particular are needed?

SMO: For many victims and survivors steps by the international community were too slow. Many UN Security Council resolutions have never been (effectively) implemented. Nevertheless, it is the international community – Europe, America, Canada – that made it possible for more than 5 million people to be alive today through humanitarian assistance.

People of Europe brought to victims things to keep them alive, but it is not enough. We want them to think about protecting the lives perishing daily, and help the innocent to go back to their homes with safety and dignity. It is not acceptable to leave people in the camps for more than four years now. We want to see more concern from Europe, rallies for solidarity with the people of Darfur, like in the US.

We want Europe to put pressure on the government of Sudan to allow deployment of hybrid forces. Europe has responsibility to send troops to Darfur. I will be calling on the leaders of Europe to think about their mor-
al, ethical and legal responsibility to protect the lives of people and to prevent the government from destroying our communities.

**How will this human rights prize, previously awarded also to freedom fighter and President Nelson Mandela, impact on your work?**

**SMO:** It is an incredible honour to receive the same prize that Nelson Mandela, the legend, received. I am determined to meet him one day. It is amazing that the European Parliament decided to award him the prize and now to me. The fact that other people will know what I did gives me courage and determination. People have started to realize that this prize is not only for me, but also for Darfur, Sudan and Africa as well.