



Sakharov Prize 2007 awarded to Salih Mahmoud Osman, who calls for world to intervene in Darfur

The European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought was awarded on Tuesday to this year's winner, Sudanese human rights lawyer Salih Mahmoud Osman, by EP President Hans-Gert Pöttering. Addressing a packed Strasbourg plenary chamber, Mr Osman spoke of the horrors taking place in Darfur and of the need for the international community to intervene, even against the wishes of the Sudanese government.

He told the House "I am from Darfur, I was born in Darfur. I have been a victim of detention and torture because of my work. Members of my own family have been tortured and displaced by the militia in Darfur". Describing his work in detail, he said: "For many years, in my work, I have represented thousands of people who needed my help in front of the courts. I have seen thousands of people who have been tortured; I have seen hundreds of women and young girls who have been victims of sexual abuse; I have seen the four million who have been forcibly displaced from their homes".

No peace without protection: time for world to act, in particular Europe

The UN Security Council has adopted several resolutions on Darfur. Unfortunately none has been implemented effectively. "The victims feel disappointed", said Mr Osman. "They are waiting to hear from you; from the people of Europe. Your leaders have been talking tough about the policies of the Sudanese Government in Darfur. But so far we haven't seen any concrete steps".

"The people of Darfur need the European Union to show a strong, united position regarding the protection of innocent civilians", went on Mr Osman. He insisted that protection was possible "through the deployment of the UN-AU hybrid forces", adding that "the involvement of the international, and especially European forces, is imperative even though the Government of Sudan may be unwilling to accept that at the present moment". "In Darfur, and in Sudan, there will be no peace without justice and without protection".

No peace without justice: human rights violators still outside the law

A further problem is that, despite serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, "none of the perpetrators has been brought to justice", said Mr Osman. "All perpetrators are beyond the reach of domestic justice. This conflict is one which is marked by a culture of total impunity". The International Criminal Court has been partly successful in promoting accountability and "the people of Darfur ask you to support the work of the ICC", said Mr Osman, adding "As a lawyer, and a native of Darfur, I know there can never be a lasting peace in the region without justice".

In conclusion, the laureate said he was proud to accept the honour "on behalf of so many Sudanese who believe - as I do - in human dignity and in the pursuit of justice".

EP President: "Parliament confirms solidarity with people of Darfur"

In his introductory address, EP President Hans-Gert Pöttering stressed that Mr Osman was the unanimous choice of Parliament's Conference of Presidents for the 2007 Sakharov Prize. By this decision, he said, "Parliament confirms its solidarity with the people of Darfur and restates its belief that any lasting solution for this region will require justice, democracy and human rights".

Mr Pöttering reminded the House of the shocking figures of 400,000 dead and over 2.5 million displaced persons and refugees in Darfur. Mr Osman has courageously chosen to fight back. "For many years, he has defended the rights of victims of the Darfur conflict" and as a result he "puts his life in peril every day for the cause of human dignity and justice".

He is "actively committed to the defence of women's rights", in particular of victims of sexual violence. He also "fights daily to make those guilty of war crimes face up to their responsibilities, at national and international level". Mr Osman does not work only to provide legal aid to victims, emphasised Mr Pöttering. He has also decided to shoulder a political role and has been an opposition member of the Sudanese parliament since 2005.

In his closing words, Mr Pöttering said: "Mr Osman, we congratulate you on your tireless work" and "we hope that the recognition conferred by this prize gives you strength and protection, year after year, as long as your struggle lasts".

Mr Osman's name is now added to the list of past African winners of the Sakharov Prize: Nelson Mandela (1988), Salima Ghezali (1997), Dom Zacarias Kamwenho (2001) and Hauwa Ibrahim (2005).

The Sakharov Prize comes with a cheque for €50 000. The session ended with the playing of the European Hymn in honour of Mr Osman.

Osman also honoured at a joint meeting of three EP committees

On Monday evening Mr Osman addressed a joint meeting of the three EP committees involved in the process of choosing candidates for this year's Sakharov Prize.

In his address and his replies to MEPs' questions, Mr Osman spoke of his own periods of imprisonment and stressed time and again the world's duty to intervene in his country to prevent further deaths. "You have a moral duty to act now, not to say sorry tomorrow", he said.

Josep **Borrell** (PES, ES), chair of the Development Committee, praised Mr Osman's courage but also took the opportunity to draw attention to the disastrous situation in other parts of the region, including Somalia and Eritrea.

Jacek **Saryusz-Wolski** (EPP-ED, PL), chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, stressed that "human rights are universal, indivisible and a fundamental prerequisite for democracy and that even a little progress, in whatever part of the globe, contributes to peace and democracy throughout the world".

Hélène **Flautre** (Greens/EFA, FR) chair of the Human Rights Subcommittee, highlighted Mr Osman's work in documenting acts of violence, thereby helping bring people to justice, such as the two individuals who had been indicted by the ICC.

Previous winners of the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought

- 1988 Nelson Mandela and Anatoli Marchenko (posthumously)
- 1989 Alexander Dubcek
- 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 Jinsheng
- 1997 Salima Ghezali
- 1998 Ibrahim Rugova
- 1999 Xanana Gusmão
- 2000 ¡Basta Ya!
- 2001 Izzat Ghazzawi, Nurit Peled-Elhanan and Dom Zacarias Kamwenho
- 2002 Oswaldo José Payá Sardiñas
- 2003 UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and all the UN staff
- 2004 Belarusian Association of Journalists
- 2005 Ladies in White, Hauwa Ibrahim, Reporters without Frontiers
- 2006 Alexander Milinkevich

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