

**SAKHAROV PRIZE COMMUNITY
NEWSLETTER
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Sakharov Prize Laureates and MEPs issue an open letter calling for the release of Prisoners of Conscience and Human Rights Defenders

19-05-2020: In an open letter co-signed by 14 individual or collective Sakharov Prize laureates and 62 Members of the European Parliament, the Sakharov Community issued an urgent appeal for the release of all Prisoners of Conscience and Human Rights Defenders. They urge on all governments "to release urgently every person detained without sufficient legal basis, including human rights defenders and others detained simply for expressing critical or dissenting views." Like all detainees, prisoners of conscience and human rights advocates face significant health threats due to the COVID-19 crisis. Some governments took measures to reduce prison overcrowding, but pardons and early releases were not applied to prisoners of conscience. The Sakharov Community expressed great concern in particular over the cases of Nasrin Sotoudeh, Ilham Tohti, jailed members of the Democratic Opposition in Venezuela and Raif Badawi.

See the letter attached.

Committee on Women's Rights worried about women's rights defenders

28-05-2020: The Chair of the European Parliament Committee on Women's Rights Evelyn Regner sent a letter to EU High Representative Josep Borrell, urging him to take action to defend women's rights defenders across the world. They are facing prison and mistreatments in many countries, notably Saudi Arabia, Nicaragua, Turkey and Iran – where 2012 Sakharov Prize Laureate Nasrin Sotoudeh held a hunger strike to protest the management of the coronavirus crisis in penitentiaries. Women's rights defenders are all the more vulnerable in the context of covid-19, which spreads much faster in prisons. The Committee called on Borrell to engage with these countries in order to secure the release of all women's rights defenders and to stop their persecution. It invited Borrell to support the establishment of a multilateral redress mechanism for the victims of human rights violations and encouraged him to launch a global campaign to secure the release of prisoners of conscience and human rights defenders.

Venezuela's Supreme Court approves Luis Parra as Parliament speaker; the Attorney general seeks to declare Guaido's party "terrorist organisation"

27-05-2020: The Democratic opposition, which was jointly awarded the Sakharov Prize in 2017, faces a crucial situation as the Supreme Court of Venezuela recognised Luis Parra as President of the opposition-led National Assembly (AN) claiming that there was "no constitutional breach" in the January elections. Luis Parra is a dissident opposition leader who was sworn in back in January, ending Guaido's tenure. However, Guaido and his supporters declared the session invalid after security officials had prevented them from attending. This comes at a time when Voluntad Popular, his political party, is facing a ban, as Venezuela's Attorney General has asked the Supreme Court to consider declaring it a "terrorist group." More information [here](#) and [here](#).

The Belarusian Association of Journalists joins the FreeThePress Campaign, urging the UN to help release jailed journalists

05-05-2020: The **Belarussian Association of Journalists**, Sakharov Prize Laureate in 2004, co-signed a letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, calling him to take action to secure the release of journalists jailed around the world. 191 press freedom and human rights organizations signed the letter, arguing that the current sanitary crisis puts jailed journalists in a life-or-death situation. The Committee to Protect Journalists' most recent data show that at least 250 journalists are behind bars in 33 countries. The letter comes after the UN Secretary-General issued a policy brief on 23 April 2020 urging States to "resort to non-custodial sanctions and release selected categories of prisoners."

Link to the [letter](#).

Joint letter of US legislators to President Trump raises Ilham Tohti's situation

03-05-2020: Congressman James P. McGovern (Democrat), Chair of the bipartisan and bicameral Congressional-Executive Commission on China and Senator Marco Rubio (Republican), Co-Chair of the Commission, sent a letter to President Trump expressing concerns over the Chinese government's restrictions on freedom of expression. They point out that there are more journalists and bloggers detained in China than anywhere else in the world. McGovern and Rubio ask President Trump and the US administration to raise specific cases in discussions with Chinese leader Xi Jinping and senior Chinese officials, including the case of 2019 Sakharov Prize Laureate **Ilham Tohti**, sentenced to life in prison.

Link to the [letter](#).

Calls to release Raif Badawi after a Saudi decision abolishing flogging

26-04-2020: Saudi Arabia's Supreme Court has reportedly issued a directive to end flogging as a form of punishment and Saudi Arabia's King Salman ordered to stop the death penalty for crimes committed by minors. This triggered new calls for the release of 2015 Sakharov Prize Laureate **Raif Badawi**, who was punished to 50 lashes before hundreds of spectators and sentenced to 10 years in prison in 2015. Irwin Cotler, Chair of the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights Chair and former minister of justice of Canada, urged his country to call for the release of Raif Badawi during Ramadan to allow him to reunite with his family in Quebec. "Saudi Arabia's purported reforms, he wrote, should not obscure the widespread repression and the accompanying untold, unprecedented human cost that continues to mount."

[Source](#)

Irwin Cotler's [opinion piece](#)

Hauwa Ibrahim: Science education as a bulwark against violence in Nigeria

13-04-2020: 2005 Sakharov Prize Laureate **Hauwa Ibrahim** fights violent extremism in Nigeria by expanding young people's access to education in science. Better access to education in science, technology and mathematics, she argues, would mean more opportunities for young men and women across Nigeria, better income and self-fulfilment. She sees a direct link between low access to school and adherence to extremist ideologies, which are, in her words, "an opium for the powerless, illiterate and impoverished." Together with the Wellesley Centre for Women, Hauwa Ibrahim has developed science, technology and mathematics summer camps hosted in three northern Nigeria communities: Bauchi town, Hinna village, and Gombe city. Over 1,200 pupils, aged 10-14 took part in these camps, which involved science experiments, engineering classes, artistic performances, and more.

More information [here](#).