

SAKHAROV PRIZE COMMUNITY
NEWSLETTER
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Discover the Sakharov Prize nominees 2020

17-09-2020: EP Political groups and Members have nominated four candidates for this year's Sakharov Prize. The European Peoples' Party, Socialists & Democrats and Renew Europe groups chose **the democratic opposition of Belarus** represented by the **Coordination Council** and **political and civil society figures**. The opposition, led by brave women Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Svetlana Alexievich, Maryia Kalesnikava, Volha Kavalkova, Veranika Tsapkala created the Coordination Council to facilitate a peaceful transition of power. The Council is helped by political and civil society personalities, including Siarhei Tsikhanouski, Ales Bialiatski, Siarhei Dyleuski, Stsiapan Putsila, Mikola Statkevich and others.

The European Conservatives and Reformists' also proposed **the democratic opposition in Belarus**. They believe it is best represented by **Sviatlana Tsikhanouska**, Coordination Council leader and main opponent of Lukashenko during the elections of 9 August. She embodies the Belarusian people's will for democracy, free and fair elections and respect for human rights.

The Greens' and United European Left's candidate is **The Guapinol activists and Berta Cáceres**, environment and indigenous rights defenders in Honduras. **The Guapinol** are a group of activists facing judicial persecution for their fight against mining activities damaging their land and rivers. Cáceres was an activist for land and indigenous rights, assassinated in 2016.

A group of 43 Members, led by Malin Björk, Terry Reintke, Marc Angel and Rasmussen Andersen, proposed **Polish LGBTI activists** – Jakub Gawron, Paulina Pajak and Paweł Preneta to receive the Sakharov Prize. They created the "Atlas of Hate", a project mapping the many local Polish municipalities that had adopted, rejected or had pending "anti-LGBTI resolutions". Activist Kamil Maczuga played an important role to monitor debates on the issue in local governments and to spread information to activists and media in and outside of Poland.

The Identity and Democracy group nominated **Najeeb Moussa Michael**, the Catholic Archbishop of Mosul, Iraq, who ensured the evacuation of religious minorities - Christians, Syriacs and Chaldeans from Mosul to Kurdistan when the Islamic State took the city in August 2014. He also helped the Yazidi refugees in Iraqi Kurdistan and saved from destruction many historic manuscripts and archives from the 13th to the 19th century.

President Sassoli intervenes over life-threatening situation of Nasrin Sotoudeh

15-09-2020: Opening [#DemocracyWeek2020](#), President Sassoli asked for the immediate release of Iranian human rights lawyer **Nasrin Sotoudeh**: "Democracy is not faceless - it has the faces of all those who continue to fight for it". The **2012 Sakharov Prize laureate** is in critical health after a month of hunger strike, as her requests to free political prisoners amidst the Covid crisis remain unheard. The President's public appeal comes along with increased diplomatic demarches aiming at the liberation of Sotoudeh. In a personal message to Nasrin, President Sassoli urged her to end her hunger strike, as her life is at risk. [Twitter](#)

Mandela's grandson sends a letter of support to Nasrin Sotoudeh.

17-09-2020. When **Nelson Mandela (1988 Sakharov Prize laureate)** died in 2013, **Nasrin Sotoudeh** and fellow women's rights activists gathered to leave flowers in front of the South

African embassy. They did it to remember Mandela and celebrate his lifelong struggle for freedom and against apartheid. Today, Mandela's grandson, after hearing about Nasrin's hunger strike, has written a letter to her, a woman whose fight is at home, but her message is global. Here is that letter: "Dear Nasrin, We have never met but I humbly want thank you for honouring the memory of my grandfather Nelson Mandela. You and your fellow citizens are breathing life into our collective dream for freedom, equality and justice for all. I pray for your health and for your release. You don't stand alone and your shared vision for our future reverberates across the world to the shores of Africa and Beyond. I hope to meet you soon and send you love. Humbly, Kweku"

Massive mobilisation for Dr Mukwege's security a success

31-08-2020: In a joint press statement, on 12 August Vice-President Heidi Hautala and Chair of the Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI) Maria Arena asked for UN forces to return to protect the Panzi hospital and **Dr Mukwege**. The **2014 Sakharov Prize laureate** and Nobel Prize winner received death threats this summer after denouncing massacres perpetrated in his country and insisting on justice. On 31 August, Dr Mukwege advocated in Parliament's DROI Committee for the implementation of the 10 years-old UN Mapping Report to end impunity in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Meanwhile, the City of Brussels stepped up mobilisation for Dr Mukwege's security with a digital campaign, displaying the doctor on 70 public screens around the city. On 9 September, MUNOSOC eventually returned to ensure Dr Mukwege's protection albeit on a temporary basis. The European Parliament keeps coordinating with major stakeholders to ensure a sustainable security solution for Dr Mukwege. [EP Press release](#) ; [BXL](#)

Attempt to kill Raif Badawi in prison

30-08-2020: A fellow prisoner belonging to a terrorist group tried to assassinate **2015 Sakharov Prize laureate Raif Badawi** in his Saudi prison, according to a tweet by his wife Ensaf Haidar. Badawi started a hunger strike in protest against the lack of care for his life until a member of the Saudi Human Rights Commission visited him in prison on 1 September and enquired about his complaints and needs. [Twitter @miss9afi](#)

Parliament suspends Aung San Suu Kyi from the Sakharov Community

10-09-2020: The European Parliament decided to exclude **1990 Sakharov Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi** from all activities of the Sakharov Community. The decision comes against the backdrop of MEPs repeated criticism of Aung San Suu Kyi's stance in the Rohingya case. Vice-President Heidi Hautala commented the move as "a clear response to her lack of action, her aiding and enabling of the persecution of the Rohingya in Myanmar and her denial of responsibility of her country's government for the ongoing crimes against this community. She has ignored the European Parliament requests and has not lived up to the values for which the Sakharov Prize stands." [EP press release](#)

Situation in Xinjiang raised at EU-China summit

15-09-2020: China declared itself open to give access to its Xjnjiang region to observers from the European Union. The EU raised the issue during the EU-China on-line summit on 15 September. By awarding the **Sakharov Prize in 2019 to Uyghur scholar Ilham Tohti**, the European Parliament drew attention to the dire situation in Xinjiang. Tohti, an advocate for dialogue between Uyghurs and the Han, serves life in prison on charges of separatism.

Speaking after the EU-China summit, a spokesman of the Chinese Foreign Ministry did not specify if access to the region would be free. He also stressed his country refuses to submit to an international enquiry based on a presumption of guilt. The international community accuses China of human rights violations in Xinjiang on a massive scale. These include the detention of almost two million Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities in internment camps, where they endure indoctrination, abuses and forced labour. <https://m.rtl.be/info/1244450>

"There is a war against journalists in Belarus now"

16-09-2020: Instead of celebrating their 25th anniversary, **Belarussian Association of journalists** (BAJ) "decided to dedicate this day to (their) members. Everyone who has been illegally detained. Beaten. Convicted. Who had their equipment broken or seized, or whose websites were blocked. Who were not let to print or distribute their newspapers. Everyone who does real and truthful journalism. Founded in 1995, BAJ has been struggling for media freedom and against repression and censorship in Belarus. The European Parliament honoured their work with the **Sakharov Prize in 2004**. [BAJ website](#)

Venezuelan Government pardons political prisoners

01-09-2020: The Venezuelan government announced [the liberation and pardon](#) of more than 100 prisoners, following [negotiations](#) between Nicolás Maduro and former presidential candidate Henrique Capriles, mediated by the Turkish government. Among those pardoned are political opponents jailed, exiled or under protection in foreign embassies. However, prominent leaders such as Leopoldo López (refugee in the Spanish Embassy) or Julio Borges (exiled in Colombia) were not included in the list. The move follows the recommendation of the Truth Commission, a body of the National Constitutional Assembly. It aims to create the conditions for a broad participation in the parliamentary elections scheduled for 6 December. [AP News France 24 Maduro statement](#)

Venezuela: UN report urges accountability for crimes against humanity

16-09-2020: A United Nations fact-finding mission to Venezuela disclosed the main [conclusions of its report](#). According to the investigators, the Venezuelan Government is responsible for several crimes committed against the human rights of its citizens, including extrajudicial executions, politically motivated detention and torture. The mission considered that the crimes "*were coordinated and committed pursuant to State policies, with the knowledge or direct support of commanding officers and senior government officials.*" The UN investigators also deplored the erosion of judicial independence, which leads to impunity for the perpetrators. [New York Times](#) [ABC News](#) [Euronews](#) [BBC](#)

Nasser Zefzafi ends hunger strike after 25 days

08-09-2020: Leader of the Moroccan Hirak movement, 2018 Sakharov Prize finalist Nasser Zefzafi and his prison mate Nabil Ahamjik suspended a 25-day hunger strike after Zefzafi's critical health triggered his evacuation to a hospital in Fes. Zefzafi's father Ahmed told the press that the authorities had met their requests of better food, longer family visits and phone calls. [Tel Quel](#)

Urgency Resolutions

17-09-2020: The European Parliament resumed the adoption of urgency resolutions. This important instrument for voicing concerns over breaches of human rights was suspended

during the peak of the Covid crisis, when Parliament had to focus on passing legislation to stem the fallout of the pandemic. In its September plenary session, Parliament adopted three urgency resolutions. 1.) On **the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)**, the EP expressed grave concern about the danger facing Sakharov and Nobel Peace Prize laureate **Dr. Denis Mukwege**. Members condemned recent death threats against Mukwege, his family and the Panzi hospital staff and insisted that the DRC government investigate them. The resolution also addressed the general human rights situation in the DRC. 2.) Parliament expressed concern at the rapidly deteriorating human rights situation in **the Philippines**. It called on its government to heed UN recommendations and to address widespread extrajudicial killings. Parliament also condemned the threats and violence against journalists, including in the case of Maria Ressa and insisted that politically motivated charges against her be dropped. 3) MEPs are very worried about the deteriorating security situation in the north of **Mozambique**. In the past three years, terrorist groups launched over 500 violent attacks in the area, claiming over 1500 lives. Parliament called on the Mozambican authorities to take decisive action and to bring all those suspected of terrorist activity to justice through fair trials.