

EP SAKHAROV PRIZE NETWORK

NEWSLETTER

February - March 2014

EP PRESIDENT SCHULZ APPEALS FOR THE RELEASE OF RAZAN ZAITOUNEH

10-3-2014: opening the plenary session of the European Parliament today, the President of the European Parliament and co-Chair of the Sakharov Prize Network Martin Schulz called on behalf of the European Parliament for the release of kidnapped Syrian Sakharov Prize Laureate Razan Zaitouneh.

"Two months ago Razan Zaitouneh was kidnapped by an unknown armed group in the rebel area of Douma (suburbs of Damascus), together with her husband and fellow activists. Up to now nothing has been heard from the Sakharov Prize Laureate and her fellow activists since they were kidnapped. On behalf of the European Parliament I call for their immediate release.

"Razan Zaitouneh was awarded the Sakharov Prize in 2011. Her life was threatened by the regime and by the rebel groups for what she was, a courageous young woman who refuses to compromise and continues to fight peacefully for democracy and a free Syria.

"Razan is not an isolated case. Many Syrian women are captured, jailed, and kidnapped. They are enduring the most barbarian tortures. War crimes and crimes against humanity are perpetrated against Syrian women from all walks of life and from all generations. Massive and systematic sexual violence is used as a war weapon to destroy furthermore the Syrian society. The European Parliament strongly condemns these crimes.

"Two days ago we celebrated the International Day of Woman. The European Union must act and assist by all means those, organisations or individuals, who are helping women survivors of these horrors to rebuild their life. We must support all those who are fighting against impunity by documenting as much as possible all the abuses perpetrated against women".

The February plenary session of the European Parliament unanimously adopted a resolution demanding "the immediate, unconditional and safe release of all political prisoners, medical personnel, humanitarian workers, journalists, religious figures and human rights activists, including 2011 Sakharov Prize winner Razan Zaitouneh." Sakharov Prize Laureates Reporters Without Borders and the Hostages in Syria Support Committee also called for the release of Razan Zaitouneh and that of the journalists imprisoned in Syria.

Links:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/content/20140307IPR38109/html/Opening-call-to-release-Sakharov-laureate-Razan-Zaitouneh>; http://www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/sakharov/home_en.html

Ali Ferzat on the core of the Syrian tragedy: the "forgotten human hopes for dignity and freedom"

10 March 2014: Ali Ferzat, Syrian Sakharov Prize Laureate 2011, was in the Czech capital city of Prague on 5 and 6 March to raise awareness of human rights issues in the conflict in Syria with the support of

the European Parliament and in cooperation with Czech NGO People in Need, organisers of the One World Film Festival.

Mr Ferzat attended the One World Film Festival premiere of the Syrian documentary *Return to Homs* by Talal Derki, and debated the current conflict with Sergei Danilochkin, Director of RFE/RL's Radio Free Iraq and Marek Stys, Head of Emergency and External Relations of People in Need.

Mr. Ferzat refocused public attention on the initial hopes and values of the Damascus Spring and the first protests and events in 2011, which, he said, led up to the "moral victory of Syrian people who by stepping up against injustice have already succeeded".

The speakers agreed that humanitarian relief should be the minimum contribution by the international community, which, however, has to play a stronger role in dealing with the source of the problem. The questions from the public focused on the role of specific actors and potential ways of speedily ending the conflict. The debate was streamed online by Czech Television.

During his visit to Prague, Mr Ferzat met with government representatives, media and NGOs, bringing debate of the Syrian conflict back to the core of the tragedy: amidst the ongoing conflict are the forgotten human hopes for dignity and freedom.

He discussed ways of alleviating the suffering of the Syrian people and dealing with the current conflict, and emphasised the necessity of a full use of binding international standards and procedures to ensure that at least the humanitarian crisis in Syria is brought under control.

Link: <http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/ct24/kultura/264638-debata-z-jednoho-sveta-2014-syrie-moralni-dilema-sveta/>

Unicef reports on the devastating impact on children of the war in Syria

11-3-2014: Syria is now one of the most dangerous places on earth to be a child, Unicef said today, unveiling today its report on the impact on Syrian children of more than three years of conflict and turmoil. Witnesses have reported children and infants killed by snipers, victims of summary executions or torture, Unicef said.

Figures in the report state that since March 2013, the number of children affected by the crisis has more than doubled to more than 5.5 million. More than six million people have been displaced inside the country, meaning that more than a third of all Syrian children are no longer living in their own homes or communities. The number of child refugees has more than quadrupled from 260,000 to more than 1.2 million. Of these children, 425,000 are under the age of five.

Link: <http://www.unicef.org/>

Malala urges better child protection, helps Syrian refugees, backs campaign against FGM

10-3-2014: addressing an event organized in Westminster abbey in the UK to celebrate Commonwealth Day, Sakharov Prize Laureate 2013 Malala Yousafzai urged the Commonwealth countries to provide better assistance for the protection of children. Children in Pakistan, India and various African countries have to deal with many hurdles like poverty, violence and cultural barriers in order to get education, Malala said.

This has been a busy month for Malala who recently spoke at the We Day event in London, telling the thousands of young people present at the educational movement and youth empowerment activity: "Every day that I meet young people like you who are committed to changing the world – I am the one who is inspired." At the Women of the World Festival she talked about her Fund's work in promoting female education.

In February, the 2013 Sakharov Prize Laureate, visited refugee camps on the Jordan-Syria border and Amman, helping children cross the border, playing football with them and distributing books. The Malala Fund will support displaced Syrian children throughout the region.

Malala has also backed the campaign against female genital mutilation led by the 17-year-old British Fahma Mohamed, which aims is to educate British children about FGM in all schools in the UK.

Malala is also a nominee for the 2014 World Children's Prize and for the 2014 Nobel Prize.

Link: <http://malalafund.org/blog/>

Guillermo Fariñas hospitalised for beating during arrest, urges strong EU talks

18-2-2014: the 2010 Cuban Sakharov Prize Laureate was severely beaten by police as he was arrested along with 22 other members of the Patriotic Union of Cuba, in his hometown of Villa Clara, as they tried to hold a weekly meeting. He was hospitalised for an internal inflammation caused by a beating with handcuffs.

74 members of the **Damas de Blanco, the 2005 Cuban Laureates**, were also violently arrested while attempting to attend mass.

Mr Fariñas also publicly expressed concern about the EU's decision to negotiate an agreement with Cuba, and said he may return his Sakharov Prize should the EU fail to take a sufficiently strong stance on human rights.

Links: <http://bit.ly/1lPmGPQ>; <http://bit.ly/1dJcm7z>; <http://hrlid.us/1eMsKG3>

Spanish court will not investigate the death of 2002 Sakharov Prize Laureate Oswaldo Payá

27-2-2014: the Audiencia Nacional declared it is "not competent" to investigate Mr Payá's death in a car crash in Cuba in 2012, when considering the legal action against two Cuban military officers brought by Mr Paya's family. The family reject the Cuban investigation's verdict of a car accident and believe that an official car driven by government agents caused the fatal accident in a "premeditated and deliberate manner" as stated in the lawsuit. The family is campaigning for an international investigation into Mr Paya's death.

Link:<http://www.martinoticias.com/content/cuba-espana-negativa-investigar-muertes-paya-cepero/32446.html>

Hu Jia detained for interrogation, acknowledges that prison term might be inevitable

26-2-2014: the 2008 Laureate was detained by the authorities on 26 February for "provoking and stirring up trouble". Mr Hu thinks that they are collecting evidence against him that will eventually lead to a lengthy jail term.

Link:<http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1435893/activist-hu-jia-accepts-he-faces-jail-again-after-latest-police>

Jafar Panahi to Hassan Rouhani: "Do Not Try to Establish a New System of Censorship!"

6-2-2014: the Iranian 2012 Laureate has criticised the regime, in particular President Rouhani, for "not accomplishing his electoral promises." He stated that only 5% of Iranian filmmakers dare to portray the Iranian reality, and that "from those, 90% will never get permission to screen their movies in the country."

Links: <http://bit.ly/1lqFvGe>; <http://bit.ly/1fkC9iF>

Celebrating 25 years of the Sakharov Prize in Washington DC

14-1-2014: Sakharov Prize Laureates Wei Jingsheng and Hauwa Ibrahim and the daughter of deceased Laureate Oswaldo Payá, Rosa Maria Payá, all currently residing in the United States were the main speakers at a series of events organised by the European Parliament Liaison Office with the US Congress in Washington DC to mark the 25th Anniversary of the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought.

A highlight of the programme included also the 2005 Sakharov Prize Laureates Reporters Without Borders. A high number of Members of Congress spoke at this meeting organised together with the Tom

Lantos Commission, the Wei Jingsheng Foundation, Freedom House and Cuba Democracy Advocates as co-sponsors.

Hauwa Ibrahim pointed out that the Sakharov Prize has given her a springboard for her work, and completely new opportunities. She described her strategies for how to work in fundamentalist environments, often very risky, and the need for being able to work "from within". Rosa Maria Payá said that the Prize had been very important both for her own family and for the opposition movement, as it put the light on the situation of the Cuban people and acknowledged the reality they are living in. "It gave us the feeling that we were accompanied by the international community". She was also very clear in requesting an international inquiry into the death of her father, and release of political prisoners, as preconditions for a decision on opening up of negotiations on an EU-Cuba agreement.

Wei Jingsheng explained that international support is crucial for human rights defenders, emphasizing that he managed to survive when many of his colleagues were killed, due to international support and attention. He encouraged both the EU and the US not to be shy when it comes to raising human rights violation in China, in what he sees as a deteriorating situation, and that by coordinating actions for prisoners' release, real results could be achieved.

Link:http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/autocrats-are-losing-the-battle-over-censorship/2014/01/17/114a954e-7ef3-11e3-93c1-0e888170b723_story.html?tid=hpModule_6c539b02-b270-11e2-bbf2-a6f9e9d79e19&hpid=z11

European Parliament human rights resolutions February 2013

Situation in Thailand

MEPs call for "free and fair" elections, and condemn "the destructive actions of anti-government protestors who prevented voters from casting their ballots" in the recent elections. "Both government supporters and anti-government demonstrators should refrain from any political violence and move forward within Thailand's democratic and constitutional framework", they add. MEPs call on the authorities to fully investigate the recent cases of violence and prosecute those responsible.

Link:<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P7-TA-2014-0107+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>

Right to education in the Transnistrian region

Parliament condemns "the increased administrative pressure being exercised by the self-proclaimed authorities in Transnistria" towards Romanian teaching institutions, and calls for "greater involvement of the EU in solving this conflict in its immediate neighbourhood", "a speedy procedure" for visa liberalisation with Moldova and the "speeding up the technical procedures leading to the signing and provisional application of the Association Agreement".

Link: <http://bit.ly/1ndUqrX>

Bahrain, in particular the cases of Nabeel Rajab, Abdulhadi al-Khawaja and Ibrahim Sharif

The EP calls for "the immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of conscience, political activists, journalists, human rights defenders and peaceful protesters". They express "grave concern regarding the Bahraini authorities' treatment of Nabeel Rajab and other human rights activists, in addition to their refusal to grant him the early release for which he is eligible in accordance with the law." The EP states that the EU High Representative and member countries should work together "to develop a clear strategy" in respect of EU actions "to actively push for the release of the imprisoned activists and prisoners of conscience". Link: <http://bit.ly/1nCbowM>

Briefs:

Xanana Gusmão to step down as Prime Minister in July 2014: the 1999 the Sakharov Prize Laureate was elected as East Timor's first President in 2002, and Prime Minister in 2007.

The Russian "Foreign agents" law is damaging NGOs: Lyudmila Alexeyeva, Laureate 2009, says NGOs such as her Moscow Helsinki Group have to cut their budgets and reduce staff.

Pussy Riot beaten by Cossacks, arrested in Sochi: the 2012 Sakharov Prize nominees **were beaten** at the Sochi Olympic Games, and then detained in the protests following the Games closing ceremonies.

Wei Jingsheng, 1996 Laureate, met with senior US Congressman Frank Wolf to discuss the recent deterioration of the human rights in China, especially the situation related to religious freedom, and agree on further work and cooperation.

Bring Taslima Nasreen back home, says Bangladeshi Human Rights Commission. The 1994 Laureate is under a fatwa after the publication on her feminist writings.

Salih Osman, 2007 Laureate, denounced the genocide in Darfur in his home country, Sudan, and pointed to the lack of action by the international community, at a TEDx talk in São Paulo, Brasil.

A recording is available here: <http://tedxtalks.ted.com/video/Salih-Mahmoud-Osman-at-TEDxRuaM;search:tag:%22brazil%22>