

SAKHAROV PRIZE NETWORK NEWSLETTER No. 1/2019

Sakharov Fellows for 2019 selected among over 1,300 applicants

01-02-2019: Human rights defenders from all over the world applied for the fourth edition of the European Parliament Sakharov Fellowship, with many skilful and strongly motivated candidates among them. Only 14 each year become Sakharov Fellows. They receive the opportunity to follow a two-week intensive training in Brussels and at the European Inter-University Centre for Human Rights and Democratisation in Venice. Fellows form a pool of human rights defenders with whom the European Parliament remains engaged. The programme usually takes place in the summer, but this year it is planned for 1 to 13 April due to the European Elections in May. Candidates represent a variety of human rights causes, gender and geographical balance. The 2019 Fellows come from Iran, the Philippines, Uzbekistan, Congo, Kenya, Algeria, Morocco, South Sudan, Russia, Ukraine, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Colombia and Haiti. Link: [Sakharov Prize Network website](#)

2007 Sakharov Prize Laureate Salih Osman detained again

08-02-2019: **2007 Sakharov Prize laureate Salih Osman** was arrested on 8 January 2019 in his law office and is currently in custody. His family is not allowed to contact him. Human rights groups have reported that security forces in Sudan have arrested hundreds of people after demonstrations started in the country on 19 December 2018. A protest against the government's decision to increase the price of bread escalated to requests for President Omar al-Bashir to step down. Osman's family is particularly worried about his detention in light of his hypertension and diabetes. Salih Osman was in jail also from January to April 2018. The European Parliament promptly adopted an urgency [resolution](#) asking for his release (see below).

European Parliament recognises Juan Guaidó as the interim President of Venezuela

31-01-2019: The European Parliament voted to recognise leader of the National Assembly Juan Guaidó as Venezuela's acting President, in accordance with the Venezuelan Constitution. MEPs urged the EU to accept Guaidó as "the only legitimate interim president of the country until new free, transparent and credible presidential elections can be called in order to restore democracy." In a [resolution](#), adopted with 439 votes in favour, 104 against and 88 abstentions, MEPs reiterated their support to the National Assembly as Venezuela's only legitimate democratic body. In **2017**, the European Parliament awarded **the Sakharov Prize** to the **democratic opposition in Venezuela**.

MEPs and Sakharov Prize laureates campaign for the release of imprisoned peers

13-12-2018: MEP Maite Pagazaurtundúa (ALDE, ES), founder of **2000 Sakharov laureate ¡Basta Ya!**, initiated a campaign to free four Sakharov Prize laureates held as political prisoners: **Raif Badawi, Leopoldo López, Oleg Sentsov and Nasrin Sotoudeh**. Several laureates and MEPs co-signed her letter to the EU High Representative Federica Mogherini, to the President of the European Commission Juncker and to President of the European Council Tusk. The letter asks EU leaders to demand the Saudi, Venezuelan, Russian and Iranian Governments to release immediately the jailed laureates and to mobilize the international community to insist on their liberation. The letter also recalls that **2011 Sakharov Prize laureate Razan Zaitouneh** is still missing in Syria.

Human rights defender in Iran punished for his activities

22-01-19: A court in Tehran sentenced **Reza Khadan, husband of 2012 Sakharov Prize laureate Nasrin Sotoudeh**, to six years in prison on charges of "assembly and collusion against national security" and "propaganda against the ruling establishment". Another activist, Farhad Meysami, received the same sentence. Khadan is a known human rights defender in Iran. He has advocated for the release of his wife and has defended women who have been persecuted for their campaign against the forced imposition of the hijab. Khadan was arrested at his home in Tehran in September 2018. After a court hearing on 19 December 2018, he was provisionally released until his latest arrest.

2017 Sakharov Prize nominee Asia Bibi free from criminal prosecution

29-01-2019: The Supreme Court of Pakistan confirmed an acquittal decision concerning Asia Bibi and she is free to leave her country. Asia Bibi, a Pakistani Christian woman, was imprisoned in 2009 on charges of blasphemy and later sentenced to death. The prosecution of Asia Bibi put her family in danger. It also claimed the lives of politicians who publicly opposed the blasphemy laws and Bibi's trial. The EP followed developments closely and on several occasions spoke up in Bibi's defence and against the blasphemy laws. In 2011, the EP adopted a resolution on the murders of [Salman Tasser](#) and [Shahbaz Bhatti](#) for opposing the blasphemy laws. In 2014, the EP [urged](#) Pakistan to drop accusations against minorities based on blasphemy laws and [expressed](#) concern about Lahore High Court's decision to confirm Asia Bibi's conviction. In 2016 and 2017, the EP voted resolutions on the [attacks](#) in a playground in Lahore and on the [situation](#) of human rights defenders and the death penalty in Pakistan.

President Tajani meets 2017 Sakharov Prize laureate Lorent Saleh

10-01-2019: On the sidelines of Spanish Partido Popular Congress in Madrid, President Tajani met **Lorent Saleh** to discuss the current situation in Venezuela. During the meeting, Tajani reaffirmed the commitment of the European Parliament towards democracy and human rights in Venezuela and pledged to aid the Venezuelan people to overcome the current difficult political and economic situation.

Nasser Zefzafi has health problems

04-02-2019: **2018 Sakharov finalist Nasser Zefzafi** was transferred to hospital for a check-up after an incident in prison. Prison administrators claimed that Zefzafi harmed himself to "create disorder". His father declared on Facebook that his son "felt pain in one of his legs before it began to become like symptoms of hemiplegia, since he could not move or feel the right side of his body". The National Human Rights Council (CNDH) of Morocco sent a medical team to examine Zefzafi and stated on 31 January that his health condition is not worrying. Zefzafi's father claims that his son's health problems are the result of violence he experienced on the day of his arrest in May 2017.

EP urgency resolutions on Mehman Yuseynov in Azerbaijan and on human rights breaches in Sudan.

17-01-19: In two resolutions adopted during its January plenary session, the EP called for the immediate and unconditional release of anti-corruption activist Mehman Huseynov and [urged](#) the Azerbaijani authorities to drop all new charges against him. The EP also [called](#) on the Sudanese government to put a stop to the deadly use of force, arbitrary arrests and detention of peaceful protesters in Sudan. The EP urged to release **2007 Sakharov Prize laureate Salih Mahmoud Osman** and to guarantee him urgent medical care and access to his lawyer and family. Link: [EP Press release](#)

EP urgency resolutions on the situation in Chechnya and Oyub Titiev; on Zimbabwe; and on Women human rights defenders in Saudi Arabia

14-02-19: In three resolutions adopted during its February plenary session Parliament called on Russian authorities to repeal the laws severely restricting NGOs' ability to work independently and effectively in **Chechnya**. MEPs also requested the immediate release of **Sakharov Prize laureate 2009 Memorial's director Oyub Titiev**. MEPs urged the government of **Zimbabwe** to immediately withdraw all military personnel and the youth militia who have been deployed across the country terrorising residents. Zimbabwean authorities should investigate allegations of human rights violations and abuses, including rape and sexual violence by security forces and bring those responsible to justice. The systematic torture used by soldiers and police must stop. On women's rights in **Saudi Arabia**, MEPs expressed their concern over the government web services used by men to track women. MEPs further criticised recently legislation allowing Saudi women to be notified by text message if they are divorced. They also asked for the release of women's rights activists and defenders as well as the Saudi blogger and **Sakharov Prize laureate 2015 Raif Badawi**. The Saudi authorities should introduce an immediate moratorium on the death penalty. Link: [EP Press release](#)

On-line info: [Sakharov Prize Network website](#)