



Democratic **opposition**

in **Venezuela**

**2017 Sakharov Prize Laureate**

Since 1988 the European Parliament has awarded the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought to individuals and organisations who have made an exceptional contribution to the fight for human rights.

# The democratic opposition in Venezuela

National Assembly (Julio Borges) and all Political Prisoners as listed by Foro Penal Venezolano represented by Leopoldo López, Antonio Ledezma, Daniel Ceballos, Yon Goicoechea, Lorent Saleh, Alfredo Ramos and Andrea González.

For the last several years, Venezuela has been in political crisis. The ruling party has steadily limited the rule of law and the constitutional order, and in March 2017 the Supreme Court stripped the democratically elected National Assembly of legislative power. Julio Borges, the president of the National Assembly, summed up the situation in Venezuela in the following words: "It's not only a political confrontation in Venezuela. It's a vital, existential, values-based confrontation".

At the same time, the number of political prisoners has amounted to more than six hundred, according to the latest report of Foro Penal Venezolano (Venezuelan Penal Forum), a prominent Venezuelan human rights organisation that provides legal assistance pro bono, to those with limited economic resources and presumed to be detained arbitrarily, tortured or assaulted during protests. Among the political prisoners are prominent opposition leaders Leopoldo López, Antonio Ledezma, Daniel Ceballos, Yon Goicoechea, Lorent Saleh, Alfredo Ramos and Andrea González.

While Venezuela opposition leader Leopoldo López was temporarily granted house arrest in July after more than three years in detention, he was transferred back to prison in August 2017. Another prominent opposition politician and former mayor of Caracas, Antonio Ledezma, has been under house arrest since 2015, while fellow former mayors Alfredo Ramos, of Iribarren, and Daniel Ceballos, of San Cristobal, have also been imprisoned, as well as a student activist Lorent Saleh. Two Spanish citizens, Andrea Gonzalez and Yon Goicoechea, are among the political prisoners.

Since the beginning of the year, more than 130 opponents have been murdered and more than 500 have been arbitrarily imprisoned.

# Andrei Sakharov

Andrei Sakharov (1921-1989) was a renowned USSR physicist, human rights activist, dissident and advocate of reform. A pioneer in nuclear physics and the father of the Soviet hydrogen bomb, Andrei Sakharov was 32 years old when he became a full member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. However, by the late 1950s, he became increasingly concerned about the consequences of nuclear testing and the political and moral implications of his work, which could lead to mass deaths. In the 60s he became a critic of nuclear arms race and as a result he was banned from all top-secret military work and stripped of his privileges.

In 1970 he became one of the co-founders of the Committee on Human Rights in the USSR, and started campaigning for human rights and the victims of political trials. In 1972 he married fellow human rights activist Yelena Bonner. Despite increasing pressure from the government, Sakharov not only sought the release of dissidents in his country, but became one of the Soviet regime's most courageous critics, embodying the crusade against the denial of fundamental rights. He

was, in the words of the Nobel committee, which awarded him the Peace Prize in 1975, 'a spokesman for the conscience of mankind'. He was not allowed to go to receive his Nobel Prize, but neither repression nor exile could break his resistance.

Andrei Sakharov was exiled to the closed city of Gorky in 1980, after he publicly protested against the 1979 Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan. While in exile, he lived under tight Soviet police surveillance. In recognition of Sakharov's life-long commitment to human rights, in 1988 the European Parliament has established a prize named after him. In the words of Jean-Francois Deniau, the rapporteur on the initiative, Sakharov was 'a European citizen who was the personification of freedom of thought and expression and who had decided, because of his convictions and his conscience, to renounce all the material advantages and all the honours which were open to him'.

# The Sakharov Prize

Awarded for the first time in 1988 to Nelson Mandela and Anatoli Marchenko, the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought is the highest tribute paid to human rights work by the European Union. It gives recognition to individuals, groups and organisations that have made an outstanding contribution to protecting freedom of thought.

Through the prize and its associated network the EU supports laureates, who are strengthened and empowered in their efforts to defend their causes. The prize has so far been awarded to dissidents, political leaders, journalists, lawyers, civil-society activists, writers, mothers, wives, minority leaders, an anti-terrorist group, peace activists, an anti-torture activist, a cartoonist, long-serving prisoners of conscience, a film-maker, the UN as a body and even a child campaigning for the right to education. It promotes in particular freedom of expression, the rights of minorities, respect for international law, the development of democracy and implementation of the rule of law.

The European Parliament confers the Sakharov Prize with its EUR 50 000

endowment at a formal plenary sitting in Strasbourg towards the end of each year. Each of the Parliament's political groups may nominate candidates, as may individual Members (the support of at least 40 Members is required for each candidate). The nominees are presented at a joint meeting of the Foreign Affairs and Development Committees and the Human Rights Subcommittee, and the members of the full committees vote on a shortlist of three.

The final winner or winners of the Sakharov Prize are chosen by the Conference of Presidents, a European Parliament body led by the president, which includes the leaders of all the political groups represented in the Parliament, making the choice of laureates a truly European choice.

# Laureates

- 2017** Democratic opposition in Venezuela
- 2016** Nadia Murad and Lamyia Haji Bashar
- 2015** Raif Badawi
- 2014** Denis Mukwege
- 2013** Malala Yousafzai
- 2012** Nasrin Sotoudeh and Jafar Panahi
- 2011** Arab Spring (Mohamed Bouazizi, Ali Ferzat, Asmaa Mahfouz, Ahmed El Senussi and Razan Zaitouneh)
- 2010** Guillermo Fariñas
- 2009** Memorial (Oleg Orlov, Sergei Kovalev and Lyudmila Alexeyeva, on behalf of Memorial and all other human rights defenders in Russia)
- 2008** Hu Jia
- 2007** Salih Mahmoud Mohamed Osman
- 2006** Aliaksandr Milinkevitch
- 2005** Ladies in white, Hauwa Ibrahim, Reporters Without Borders
- 2004** Belarussian association of Journalists
- 2003** United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan and all the staff of the UN
- 2002** Oswaldo José Payá Sardiñas
- 2001** Izzat Ghazzawi, Nurit Peled-Elhanan, Dom Zacarias Kamwenho
- 2000** *!Basta Ya!*
- 1999** Xanana Gusmão
- 1998** Ibrahim Rugova
- 1997** Salima Ghezali
- 1996** Wei Jingsheng
- 1995** Leyla Zana
- 1994** Taslima Nasreen
- 1993** *Oslobođenje*
- 1992** *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo*
- 1991** Adem Demaçi
- 1990** Aung San Suu Kyi
- 1989** Alexander Dubček
- 1988** Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela and Anatoli Marchenko (posthumously)



*Andrei Sakharov with his wife Yelena Bonner*

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