

Nadia Murad and Lamiya Aji Bashar - Winners of the 2016 Sakharov Prize for freedom of thought

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Drawings by Ali Ferzat, 2011 Sakharov Prize laureate

The President of the European Parliament Martin Schulz made the following statement on the awarding of the 2016 Sakharov Prize for freedom of thought to Nadia Murad and Lamiya Aji Bashar. The two women were chosen by President Martin Schulz and political group leaders on Thursday morning in Strasbourg.

“By awarding the Sakharov Prize to Nadia Murad and Lamiya Aji Bashar, the European Parliament asserts its support for freedom of thought as one of the fundamental human rights, a right which must be respected everywhere, with no exception.

Nadia Murad and Lamiya Aji Bashar share a painful and tragic story: both of them have had to witness the atrocities committed by the so-called Islamic State, both of them have seen their closest family killed, and both of them have been denigrated to sex slaves and exploited.

Their tragic story does not end there: Nadia Murad and Lamiya Aji Bashar were able to escape. They were able to escape to Europe and find protection among us. During their escape, these two young women had to overcome fear, and Lamiya Aji Bashar was heavily injured. But this did not stop them because they felt that their duty was to survive to struggle for those they left behind and to engage in another cause, the fight against impunity.

I cannot put into words the courage and the dignity they represent.

Today, Nadia Murad and Lamiya Aji Bashar have become the voice for the women victims of the Islamic State's campaign of sexual violence and enslavement. They have become the public advocates for the Yazidi community in Iraq and they point the finger at the genocidal campaign that the terrorist organisation Islamic State is conducting against this minority.

They are the voice of the countless victims of trafficking, a voice that calls for an end to such atrocities, for the respect of human dignity, and for freedom of belief and justice.

We in Europe have sworn to defend these universal values. This is why it is so important that we

honour Nadia Murad and Lamiya Aji Bashar today. Because we show that Europe cares and is committed to stand by those courageous individuals who embody such values.“

Further information

This year's other finalists were Can Dündar, Turkish journalist and former editor-in-chief of the leading Turkish opposition newspaper Cumhuriyet and the Ukrainian, Crimean, Tatar activist Mustafa Dzhemilev.

The Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought is awarded each year by the European Parliament. It was set up in 1988 to honour individuals and organisations defending human rights and fundamental freedoms. Last year the prize was awarded to the Saudi Arabian blogger and writer Raif Badawi.

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