Official report of debates

Václav Havel Human Rights Prize

Ms Liliane MAURY PASQUIER (Switzerland, SOC, President of the Assembly): Ladies and gentlemen,
I have the honor to open the award ceremony of the Václav Havel Human Rights Award 2019.
And I invite you first to watch a short video that traces the origins of the Prize.

[...]
Madame Secretary General,
Madame Deputy Secretary General,
Mr President of the Court,
Madam Commissioner for Human Rights,
Dear colleagues, dear short-listed candidates, dear members of the Jury, ladies and gentlemen,
The Václav Havel Human Rights Prize, which we will award in a moment, will have a very special meaning for me, as well as –I'm sure– for all of us present here.
Indeed, this year we are celebrating the 70th anniversary of the Council of Europe.
We pay tribute to 70 years of sustained efforts and struggles for freedom, dignity, the Rule of Law and social justice on our continent.
More importantly, what we are celebrating today is 70 years of concrete, courageous and determined action by women and men campaigning for Human Rights every day.
Indeed, in addition to being an ideal to which we aspire or a legal conception that we all share, Human Rights have a human face, they incarnate.
This face is that of those whose rights are violated or who are in a situation of great vulnerability. But it is also the face of those who come to their aid, using our assets and tools, to defend the rights and freedoms that are ours: Human Rights defenders, journalists, activists and civil society activists, ordinary women and men who decide to oppose injustice, to protest abuse of power, or simply to help those in need.
Ladies and gentlemen,
The three shortlisted nominations for the 2019 Award are all up to this image.

In this report:
1. Speeches in English, French, German and Italian are reported in full in English.
2. Speeches in other languages are summarised from the interpretation and indicated by *.
3. Speeches in German and Italian are available in full on the Assembly’s website.
4. The text of the amendments is available at the document centre and on the Assembly’s website. Only oral amendments or oral sub-amendments are reproduced in the report of debates.
5. Corrections should be handed in at Room 1081 not later than 24 hours after the report has been published.
Mr Ilham Tohti is a renowned Uyghur intellectual in China. He has been working for more than 20 years to improve the situation of the Uyghur minority and to promote interethnic dialogue and understanding in China. In September 2014, he was sentenced to life imprisonment. He is currently in prison. Mr Tohti is represented today by Mr Enver Can, director of the Tohti Foundation.

Mr Buzurgmehr Yorov is a Human Rights lawyer in Tajikistan who has been persecuted for almost 20 years because of his political convictions and activism. He has publicly denounced the government and the police for their Human Rights violations on numerous occasions. Mr Yorov has also been in prison since 2015, sentenced to 28 years. Mr Yorov is represented today by Mr Jamshad Yorov, his brother.

The Youth Initiative for Human Rights was established in 2003. It promotes reconciliation by connecting young people in the countries of South-East Europe with different ethnic groups, regions and countries, to strengthen their participation in the transitional justice process, to work together for Human Rights and to create conditions that will prevent the resurgence of the ethnic conflict that devastated the region for so many years. The Youth Initiative for Human Rights is represented today by Mr Ivan Djuric, Program Director of the Initiative.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I now have the great honour to announce the winner.

This year, the jury of the Václav Havel Human Rights Prize decided to award the prize to two winners, Mr Ilham Tohti and the Youth Initiative for Human Rights.

I would most sincerely like to congratulate the winners, regretting that Mr Tohti cannot be here with us today. It is always difficult to make a choice when before us stand personalities and organisations with exceptional backgrounds, but we had to make a decision and we tried to remain as faithful as possible to Václav Havel's legacy. The award winners are undoubtedly living up to this legacy. Their commitment to human rights is exemplary, even though they have not hesitated to defend causes that are not unanimously accepted in society. The message they carry is one of dialogue and respect. Their admirable courage enables them to resist misunderstanding and rejection, as well as political pressure, which, in Mr Tohti's case, has led to a criminal conviction for freely expressing his views. Finally, and most importantly, in my opinion, their actions carry a message of hope for all those who aspire to a better world, where the dignity, rights and fundamental freedoms of all are respected and guaranteed.

Today, as we express our gratitude and support to our two winners, we also want to send a message of hope to the millions of people they represent and for whom they work. Human rights have no borders and our assembly will continue its action for the values to which we are committed, with courage, determination and perseverance.

Ladies and gentlemen, I now invite Mr Enver Can, Director of the Tohti Foundation, and Mr Ivan Djuric, Director of the Initiative's programs, to join me at the podium to receive the Awards and diplomas.

(Applause)

I now invite Mr Jamshad Yorov to join me on the podium to receive the diploma we are awarding to Mr Buzurgmehr Yorov.

(Applause)

I now invite all finalists to come to the podium, as well as the jury members, for a family photo, please.

[...]

And I now invite Mr Enver Can to say a few words.