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Human Rights Defenders from Iran and Zimbabwe share 2006 Martin Ennals Award

The Jury of the Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders (MEA) announced today in Atlanta that the 2006 laureates are Akbar Ganji, Iran, and Arnold Tsunga, Zimbabwe.

Akbar Ganji is an investigative journalist, turned activist, who was jailed for six years on charges of “collecting confidential information harmful to national security”. In spite of physical abuse he steadfastly refused to compromise on the principles of democracy and human rights for all Iranians and was conditionally released last April, after serving his sentence.

Arnold Tsunga is an outstanding lawyer, Chairman of the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights, who continues to provide a voice to Zimbabweans silenced by repression. For representing victims of human rights violations he is constantly harassed and threatened. He was arrested several times and recently released on bail.

The Chairman of the Jury of the MEA, Hans Thoolen, in announcing the laureates during the opening session of the Human Rights Defenders Policy Forum at the Carter Centre, described the two laureates as follows: “They are symbols of the human rights movement in their respective countries, where standing up for human rights and democracy is a dangerous activity”. The eleven organizations on the jury of the MEA call on the Governments of Iran and Zimbabwe to ensure the safety of the laureates and allow them to work without intimidation and harassment. The Ceremony will take place in Geneva next 12 October.

Background

MEA: The main award of the human rights movement. The Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders (MEA) is a unique collaboration among eleven of the world’s leading human rights organizations to give protection to human rights defenders worldwide. The Jury is composed of the following NGOs: Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Human Rights First, International Federation for Human Rights, World Organization Against Torture, International Service for Human Rights, Front Line, International Commission of Jurists, Diakonie Germany, International Alert, Huridocs. The previous laureates are: Aktham Naisse, Syria (2005); Lida Yusupova, Russia; Alirio Uribe Muñoz, Colombia; Jacqueline Moudeina, Chad; Peace Brigades International; Immaculee Birhaheka, DR Congo; Natasha Kandic, Yugoslavia; Eyad El Sarraj, Palestine; Samuel Ruiz, Mexico; Clement Nwankwo, Nigeria; Asma Jahangir, Pakistan; Harry Wu, China.

MEA Patrons: Asma Jahangir, Barbara Hendricks, Jose Ramos-Horta, Adama Dieng, Leandro Despouy, Robert Fulghum and Theo van Boven.

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