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Exceptional Uzbek woman honoured in Geneva on 20 November

Mutabar Tadzhibaeva, a human rights activist from Uzbekistan, will receive the 2008 Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders (MEA) on Thursday, 20 November. She was released from prison on 2 June 2008 and was allowed to travel abroad and attend the international ceremony in Geneva at the prestigious Musée Ariana from 1800 local time.

The award will be presented by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navanethem Pillay, and opera star Barbara Hendricks will perform. This year's event is covered by Swiss Television for the European Broadcasting Union.

The program includes exclusive film images and a round table with experts on Uzbekistan. The event is co-organised with the Municipality of Geneva which wants to commemorate in this way the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Mutabar Tadzhibaeva has long helped ordinary people to find justice, monitored trials and publicized their findings public. She was sentenced to 8 years in prison for her outspoken criticism of the Government over the 2005 massacre of Andizhan, where hundreds unarmed civilians were killed and wounded.

Uzbekistan will be under examination under the Universal Periodic Review of the UN Human Rights Council next month. In this context, the Chairman of the Jury of the MEA, Hans Thoolen, draws the attention of the international community to Mutabar Tadzhibaeva's dramatic past and present situation, and encourages Uzbekistan to continue its reforms and to release all human rights defenders still in prison.

A unique collaboration among 10 of the world's leading human rights organizations makes the MEA the prize of the whole human rights movement. The jury is composed of the following non-governmental organizations (NGOs): Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Human Rights First, International Federation for Human Rights, World Organization Against Torture, International Commission of Jurists, German Diakonie, International Service for Human Rights, Front Line and HURIDOCS.

Patrons of the Martin Ennals Award: Louise Arbour, Asma Jahangir, José Ramos-Horta, Theo van Boven, Adama Dieng, Leandro Despouy, Barbara Hendricks, Robert Fulghum, and Werner Lottje.

The MEA, created in 1993, is granted annually to an individual or an organization who has displayed exceptional courage in combating human rights violations. The previous laureates are: Rajan Hoole-Kopalasingham Sritharan, Sri Lanka and Pierre Claver Mbonimpa, Burundi (2007); Akbar Ganji, Iran and Arnold Tsunga, Zimbabwe; Aktham Naisse, Syria; Lida Yusupova, Russia; Alirio Uribe Muñoz, Colombia; Jacqueline Moudeina, Chad; Peace Brigades International; Immaculée Birhaheka, DR Congo; Natasa Kandic, Yugoslavia; Eyad El Sarraj, Palestine; Samuel Ruiz García, Mexico; Clement Nwankwo, Nigeria; Asma Jahangir, Pakistan; Harry Wu, China (1994).

Martin Ennals (1927-1991) was instrumental to the modern human rights movement. A fiercely devoted activist, he creatively pursued ideas ahead of his time as the first Secretary-General of Amnesty International and the driving force behind many other organisations. His deep desire was to see more cooperation and solidarity among NGOs: the MEA is evidence that this is possible.

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