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Syrian Human Rights Defender receives 2005 Martin Ennals Award

Aktham Naisse, President of the Committees for the Defence of Democratic Liberties and Human Rights in Syria will receive the prestigious 2005 Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders (MEA) for his work for over 30 years in the democratic movement in Syria. The award will be presented by Louise Arbour, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, during a ceremony on 12 October 2005 at the Batiment des Forces Motrices in Geneva, within the framework of the International North South Media Festival.

Aktham Naisse is one of the founding members of the Committees for the Defence of Democratic Liberties and Human Rights (CDF), created in 1989, and the publication *Sawt al-Dimokratiyyah* (the Voice of Democracy). Aktham Naisse has written articles and courageously spoken out in national, regional and international forums. He was arrested six times for publicly demanding respect for human rights.

In recent years Aktham Naisse was charged with “opposing the objectives of the revolution” and “disseminating false information aiming at weakening the State”, risking a prison sentence of 15 years. Thanks to international pressure, he was finally acquitted on Sunday 26 June 2005 by the Supreme State Security Court.

A few days before his trial Aktham Naisse wrote to the Martin Ennals Foundation: *“I feel more motivated and happy because there are people interested in our problem, people that care for us and support us in our fight for human liberty. I have a great emotion because I know now that we are not struggling alone against human rights violation.”*

Background

A unique collaboration among eleven of the world's leading non-governmental human rights organizations makes the MEA the main award of the human rights movement. The jury is composed of the following: 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, International Alert, HURIDOCS and DCI.

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: Lida Yusupova, Russia (2004); Alirio Uribe Muñoz, Colombia (2003); Jacqueline Moudeina, Chad (2002); Peace Brigades International (2001); Immaculée Birhaheka, DR Congo (2000); Natasa Kandic, Yugoslavia (1999);

Eyad El Sarraj, Occupied Palestinian Territories (1998); Samuel Ruiz García, Mexico (1997); Clement Nwankwo, Nigeria (1996); Asma Jahangir, Pakistan (1995); Harry Wu, China (1994).

Martin Ennals (1927-1991) was an influential figure in the modern human rights movement. He was 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.

*For media contacts and general **information** on the MEA, please contact Luis Marreiros, Coordinator. Tel: +41.22.8094925 (marreiros@martinennalsaward.org) or visit our website: www.martinennalsaward.org*

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566
Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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