

GENEVA

Three activists winners of the Martin Ennals Prize in Geneva

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Video

The Martin Ennals Prize honors three human rights activists this year. Vietnamese journalist Pham Doan Trang, Burkinabé Daouda Diallo and Bahraini Abdul-Hadi Al-Khawaja are rewarded, the Martin Ennals Foundation announced on Wednesday in Geneva.

"The jury has chosen three inspiring figures from the human rights movement", notes the president of the jury, Hans Thoolen. In Vietnam, Pham Doan Trang fought for fundamental freedoms for many years, before being recently sentenced to nine years in prison. The UN has called for his release, while the Ennals Foundation is worried about his health.

This activist "suffers from serious illnesses and has no access to a doctor or a lawyer", one of her advisers told the press. She was beaten by the police, an attitude that partially disabled her. This award is "the strongest message" for the authoritarian regime in Vietnam that the international community supports it, said his relative.

Forced into hiding

For his part, Mr. Diallo documents the violations perpetrated by the Burkinabé army and the jihadists. His organization has identified more than 1,000 extrajudicial executions of civilians in connection with the violence. A situation that has earned him harassment, thefts and threats to his own safety, especially after a massacre that claimed dozens of victims also in 2019. "I am often forced to live in hiding," said Mr. Diallo.

Diallo, whose home has been vandalized several times. In the aftermath of the 2019 violence, he says he received many calls from organizations to come together to denounce the abuses. He then launched his institution which collaborates with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). This award reinforces the "credibility" of the action he leads, according to him.

In Bahrain, Mr. Al-Khawaja, one of his country's main protesters, has been imprisoned for ten years. He was sentenced after being accused of plotting to overthrow the regime and led several hunger strikes. His safety in prison requires "rapid intervention", says the Martin Ennals Foundation.

"He paid the price for his commitment", from exile to prison through torture, said his daughter. "It is difficult to know what to expect" from the authorities after this reward, she added, not ruling out reprisals but insisting on the importance of supporting her activism. She called for the release of all political detainees and human rights defenders. And to denounce the attitude of European governments who do business with the authorities of Bahrain.

Ceremony postponed due to coronavirus

The three winners will receive 20,000 to 30,000 francs. Everything will depend on the search for funds, specifies the spokesperson. Due to the pandemic, the ceremony had to be postponed to June 2. Until now, this Nobel Prize for human rights defenders has featured a winner plus two finalists. "The decision was made by the Foundation Board and the jury to no longer make a difference," a spokeswoman told Keystone-ATS. From now on, three activists will be honored each year.

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