

Speeches from Halima Bashir, Elena Kudimova and Leila Alikarami

Read here the speeches delivered at the Award Ceremony by Elena Kudimova and Leila Alikarami, and Halima Bashir's speech that was read by actress, Lashana Lynch.

Dr. Halima Bashir

I am honoured to accept this year's Anna Politkovskaya Award on behalf of the hundreds of thousands of women and children who have suffered, and continue to suffer in my homeland, Darfur.

I am humbled by this recognition, and for the attention it may draw to the on-going conflict in Darfur. This prize is inspired by a woman who had human rights and justice as her guiding principles, and who paid for peace and freedom with her life, as have so many thousands in Darfur.

My own life is testimony to the one conflict that is causing more death and suffering than any other today, but which seems to go so unnoticed and unreported.

After the Rwanda genocide the world pledged that "never again" would it stand by as innocents were killed in the hundreds of thousands. Sadly, for too long the world did just that in Darfur. No one knows how many have been killed – but the numbers run into the hundreds of thousands. Men, women and children. Unarmed. Innocent. Defenseless.

Some four million people have been driven from their land, and forced to live in refugee camps. Even there, even today, some seven years after the killings, they are still not safe or secure. Those camps are attacked; women are raped; children are kidnapped. Each of those refugees is an individual – each a human being with hopes and fears and dreams just like my own.

Today, there is a peacekeeping force on the ground in Darfur. However, the UNAMID force is woefully undermanned and under-equipped, and ill-prepared to defend the huge numbers of vulnerable civilians it is tasked to protect.

In short, for the millions of refugees the prospect of going home – because, remember, for all of us Darfur is our home – is a distant dream. Our land is there. Our villages are there. Our orchards are there, our forests for gathering firewood, and the graveyards of our ancestors. Every Darfuri refugee just wants to go home to live in peace and security and with dignity, and to rebuild their lives.

If the world could not guarantee 'never again' in Darfur, will it not find the resources and capacity and the collective will to guarantee four million people the right to go home?

I saw the waves of devil horsemen riding into my village. I heard their cries as they taunted us, calling us 'black dogs and slaves'. As a trained medical doctor, I treated the victims of the child rapes. Imaging it. Imagine a country where grown men draw up a policy of rape as a weapon of waging war. This is what happened in my country.

The world failed to stop the horror, and still the refugee camps are not secure. I've seen the pictures the children draw today of the horror, the memories and the trauma burned deep into their minds. The least those children deserve is to be allowed home — home to rebuild their lives in a loving family.

And the least every Darfuri deserves is justice. The International Criminal Court has indicted the President of Sudan, and others, for war crimes in Darfur. This has been criticized by some as inflaming the conflict, but there was little that could make it worse for us, for the survivors. And like all victims of an unspeakable horror we crave justice and a reckoning. For us, for we Darfuri victims, there can be no real homecoming, or closure, without justice being done.

The world failed to deliver on 'never again' in Darfur. All we now ask is the right to go home, in peace and freedom, and for justice to be done.

I'm so grateful to receive this year's Anna Politkovskaya Award, and on behalf of so many. I am just a voice for the millions of others; I'm speaking because they cannot speak, locked away in the refugee camps as they are. This Award will support their fight for freedom and justice, and their struggle to be allowed to go home.

Elena Kudimova

Anna Politkovskaya was my sister. For the world she is now a symbol — a courageous woman who was very, very determined to seek out the truth and expose it, regardless of the consequences. She gave voice to the small and insignificant, the terrified and oppressed. The name of Anna Politkovskaya has come to symbolise the fight for freedom everywhere.

Today is the fourth anniversary of her death — four years since my phone rang and I heard her son say, 'Mum has been killed.' For us, her family, Anna was not a symbol. She was an ordinary human being, a beloved mother, sister, daughter. Her little granddaughter, whom she never met, is named after her. Little Anna can recognise her grandmother from photographs, but no more than that.

We have grieved, we have tried to mend our lives and carry on. Anna's children are very proud of her, and the example she has shown the world. Yet we continue to wait for justice to be done. The investigation into Anna's murder remains open and inconclusive.

But although my sister is dead, her spirit lives on. It endures in the lives of other brave women who continue the same struggle – in different countries, and under different circumstances.

There are many more heroines like Anna. But we only have one prize a year to mark their struggle and courage. And tonight we celebrate Halima Bashir of Sudan.

Leila Alikarami

Last year the Anna Politkovskaya Award was given to the women of Iran for their courage in attempting to change Iranian law, and society in general. Their struggle for human rights, and women's rights, during the past year has very much lived up to this honour.

To begin with some good news. The award ceremony last year, which was filmed and broadcast, was seen by many people in Iran. This followed the aftermath of last year's elections.

Due to the splendid efforts of RAW in War many Iranians were delighted and encouraged to see a large crowd in London expressing support for their cause.

Since that time, Iranian women have continued their struggle – under the most difficult conditions – to achieve equal rights. They repeatedly tried peaceful means, such as the committee of Mourning Mothers. This was established by Iranian women whose children were either killed or imprisoned. Every Saturday they gather in one of the parks of Tehran holding signs and placards with photos of their children to protest against the violence.

During the past year a number of women's rights activists were arrested and tried, and some given prison sentences. At present many men and women, who are only claiming their legitimate rights, are in prison. Nasrin Soutodeh, a human rights lawyer and women's rights activist, who has defended many cases, has been in solitary confinement for over a month.

We urge the international community to support our cause.

On the other hand, one positive outcome of our struggle is that many women, regardless of ideological differences and political concerns, have sought to achieve a common goal – legal equality.

In recent months the Family Protection Bill – which promotes polygamy – was debated in the parliament. It faced opposition from different groups and leading women’s rights activists. The bill has been postponed subject to parliamentary reviews.

Iranian women are fighting to pave the way to democracy. We remain hopeful of victory.