



Press Release

2005 Rafto Prize to Chechnyan Human Rights Advocat Ms Lida Yusupova

The Professor Thorolf Rafto Memorial Prize for 2005 is awarded to the Chechnyan lawyer and human rights advocate Ms Lida Yusupova, in recognition of her brave and unrelenting efforts to document human rights violations and act as a spokeswoman for the forgotten victims of the war in Chechnya. Ms Yusupova struggles to defend human dignity in a chaotic war situation and in a context where the working conditions and security of human rights advocates and journalists are increasingly compromised.

This year's Rafto Prize laureate, Ms Lida Yusupova (born on 15 September, 1961), has been Office Director in Grozny of the Russian human rights organisation Memorial. Ms Yusupova has been active in bringing forth lawsuits regarding human rights violations to Chechnyan courts. Memorial is one of very few such organisations that continue to operate in Chechnya. The incidents that Yusupova and her fellow co-workers in Memorial have documented are serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law by Russian federal and Chechen security forces, committed without fear of legal consequences: Extrajudicial killings, enforced "disappearances" of civilians, illegal arrests and torture.

The war in Chechnya has persisted for the past seven years, resulting in a degree of destruction that is almost incomprehensible. The policies of the Russian government in Chechnya have resulted in a marginalisation of the more moderate Chechnyan groups that have pursued peaceful approaches to end the suffering of the population. Instead, the consequence of Russian policies has been to strengthen the position of extreme Islamist groups that resort to acts of terror and suicide bombings.

Amongst Chechnyans today, there are widespread feelings of despair caused by the terror, hatred directed towards those exercising the terror, as well as a sense of having been

neglected and abandoned by the entire world. Governments that prior to the tragic events of 11 September were critical of the Russian attacks upon Chechnya and the massive destruction that they caused, now stand united with President Vladimir Putin in a common “war against terror”, and critical inquiries into Chechnya have subsided.

In 1995, during the so-called first war in Chechnya, the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia received the Rafto prize. The organisation has worked for many years in pursuit of a peaceful solution to the conflict. Ten years later, the Rafto prize to Ms Lida Yusupova serves as a reminder that the conflict remains unresolved and the possibility of a negotiated settlement now appears more remote than ever before. The war has resulted in the imposition of dramatic restrictions on freedoms of expression in Russia, while the political and military handling of the conflict in North Caucasus has significant repercussions for the development of democracy in Russia and for the security environment for Europe as a whole.

In a situation where “the silence of the West kills”, as expressed by the philosopher André Glucksmann, the Rafto Foundation hopes that through the recognition of this year’s prize laureate, Ms Lida Yusupova, the attention of the world may once again be directed towards Chechnya, the most serious crisis in Europe today.

The prize will be formally awarded to Ms Lida Yusupova at The National Theatre in Bergen, Norway, at 6 pm on Sunday 6 November, 2005.

The Rafto Prize is awarded by the Professor Thorolf Rafto Foundation for Human Rights in Bergen, Norway. Former laureates include Ms Aung San Suu Kyi, Dr José Ramos-Horta, Dr Shirin Ebadi, Ms Leyla Zana, and Ms Rebyia Kadeer. Four of the Rafto Laureates have subsequently received the Nobel Peace Prize.

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Useful link

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