Panel discussion with
Winners of the 2018
United Nations prize in the field of human rights
ECOSOC
18 December 2018, 1:15-2:30pm

Concept note

Background
General Assembly Resolution 2217(XXI) of 19 December 1966 established the United Nations prize in the field of human rights (hereinafter referred to as the “Human Rights Prize”) and stipulated that it would be awarded for the first time on 10 December 1968, on the occasion of the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and thereafter not more than at five-year intervals.

This year marks not only the tenth award of the Prize, but also the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The anniversary is a chance for the world to celebrate the Universal Declaration and to reaffirm the enduring human rights principles and standards it has helped establish.

As in previous years, a special committee was entrusted with the selection of the winners, consisting of the Presidents of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Human Rights Council, and the Chairs of the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee and the Commission on the Status of Women.

Four winners were selected by the special committee for the 2018 Prize (see annex for short bios):
- Ms. Rebeca Gyumi – an activist for the rights of women and girls (Tanzania);
- Ms. Asma Jahangir (posthumously) – a human rights lawyer (Pakistan);
- Ms. Joênia Wapichana (Joênia Batista de Carvalho) – an activist for the rights of indigenous communities (Brazil); and
- Front Line Defenders – an organization advocating and working for the protection of human rights defenders (Ireland).

A commemorative plenary meeting of the General Assembly is to be convened by the President of the General Assembly in the morning of 18 December 2018, in recognition of the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

At the end of this commemorative plenary meeting, which is expected to last 1 ½ - 2 hours, an award ceremony will be held in the General Assembly Hall, for the Human Rights Prize, during which the winners will be presented with a commemorative plaque by the Secretary-General.

In the afternoon of the same day, 18 December 2018, a High-level meeting will be held in the Trusteeship Council Chamber, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Declaration on human rights defenders.
However, there will not be an occasion for the Prize winners to speak at any of these meetings. In addition, there will be very limited opportunity for a very few representatives of civil society to speak at the human rights defenders High-level meeting.

Therefore, it is proposed that OHCHR convene an event during the lunch hour on 18 December, comprising a moderated panel with the Prize winners and an open discussion with the audience. This will give both the Prize winners and other representatives of civil society an opportunity to speak about their work and the role of human rights defenders.

The lunch time event would be moderated by ASG Andrew Gilmour. However, it is suggested that the High Commissioner attend the beginning of the event for a short while to make a few remarks of congratulation to the Prize winners.

Programme

“Civil society: expanding our human rights influence”

Panel discussion with the winners of the

2018 Human Rights Prize

Tuesday 18 December 2018

1:15- 2:30pm

ECOSOC Chamber

(buffet lunch served 12:30-1:10pm, Express Bar)

Chair and moderator: Andrew Gilmour, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights

1:15pm Opening remarks by HC (TBD) or ASG for Human Rights
1:20-1:45 [5 minute remarks by each winner
Followed by 5 minutes of questions & answers with moderator]

1:20 Ms. Rebeca Gyumi
1:25 Representative of Ms. Asma Jahangir
1:30 Ms. Joênia Wapichana
1:35 Front Line Defenders
1:40-1:45 Questions and answers between panellists and moderator
1:45-2:25 Questions and comments from the audience
2. 30pm Moderator closes the discussion

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ANNEX

2018 Human Rights Prize Winners

Ms. Rebeca Gyumi - activist for the rights of women and girls (Tanzania)

Rebeca Z. Gyumi is a Founder & Executive Director at Msichana Initiative, a Tanzanian civil society organization which aims to empower girls through education and addresses challenges which limit girls’ right to education. She has worked for over 8 years with an organization working on youth, as a TV personality and youth advocate. Ms. Gyumi challenged the constitutionality of section 13 and 17 of The Law of Marriage Act of 1971 that allowed girls to marry at the age of 14 and 15 where there is parental consent or court's sanction. She won the case before the High Court of Tanzania in 2016.

Ms. Asma Jahangir (posthumously) - human rights lawyer (Pakistan)

Asma Jahangir (1952-2018) was Pakistan’s leading human rights lawyer. For three decades, she defended the rights of women, children, religious minorities and the poor. Having founded the first legal aid centre in Pakistan in 1986, Ms. Jahangir courageously took on and won very complicated cases. She has been threatened, assaulted in public and placed under house arrest for defending human rights. She was elected as the first female President of the Supreme Court Bar Association of Pakistan and co-founded and was the first Chairperson of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. Ms. Jahangir has also served as United Nations Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, arbitrary or summary executions, then as the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief and subsequently as the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Ms. Joênia Wapichana (Joênia Batista de Carvalho) – activist for the rights of indigenous communities (Brazil)

Joênia Wapichana (officially Joênia Batista de Carvalho) is the first woman indigenous lawyer in Brazil and a member of the Wapixana tribe of northern Brazil. After taking a land dispute to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Ms. Wapichana became the first indigenous lawyer to appear before the Supreme Court of Brazil. In 2013, she was appointed as the first president of the National Commission for the Defense of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Front Line Defenders – organization advocating and working for the protection of human rights defenders (Ireland)

Front Line Defenders or The International Foundation for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders is a human rights organization founded in Dublin, Ireland in 2001, to protect human rights defenders at risk. The organization works to address the protection needs identified by defenders themselves and to enable them to continue their work without the risk of harassment, intimidation or arrest.