

Strasbourg, 17 December 2002

**Address by Pat COX on the occasion of the celebration of the 15th Anniversary of the Sakharov Prize**

15 YEARS FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM OF THOUGHT

In the world today, the real borders are not between nations, but between powerful and powerless, free and fettered, privileged and humiliated, said Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations, accepting the Nobel Peace Prize one year ago.

Now that geographical borders have disappeared in Europe, it is all the more important for us to attack these other borders and to support those who, daily, regardless of the personal price, endeavour to blur them, who resist oppression and who rise up to fight for freedom.

For democrats throughout the world Andrei Sakharov symbolised this resistance. In creating the Sakharov Prize in 1988, the European Parliament wished to show, in a modest way, that it stands shoulder to shoulder with those resistance fighters, those fighting in defence of freedom of thought.

Today we commemorate 15 years of the Sakharov Prize. Let me read to you the role of honour of Sakharov laureates:

Year 1998: Nelson MANDELA (South Africa), Anatoli MARCHENKO (former Soviet Union)  
Year 1989: Alexander DUBCEK (Czechoslovakia)  
Year 1990: Aung San SUU KYI (Myanmar, former Burma)  
Year 1991: Adem DEMAÇI (Kosovo)  
Year 1992: The Mothers of the Mayo Square (Argentina)  
Year 1993: Oslobodjenje (Bosnia-Herzegovina)  
Year 1994: Taslima NASREEN (Bangladesh)  
Year 1995: Leyla ZANA ( Turkey)  
Year 1996: Wei JINGSHENG (China)  
Year 1997: Salima GHEZALI (Argelia)  
Year 1998: Ibrahim RUGOVA (Kosovo)  
Year 1999: Xanana GUSMÃO (East Timor)  
Year 2000: Basta Yá! (Espagne)  
Year 2001: Izzat GHAZZAWI (Palestine), Nurit PELED (Israel), Dom Zacarias KAMWENHO (Angola)  
Year 2002: Oswaldo PAYÁ (Cuba)

Some of those to whom we have awarded the Sakharov Prize over those 15 years are here. I am very grateful to them for coming. They will say a few words to you on their views today and their hopes for the future. Some of those who have not been able to come have sent us messages that have been distributed.

Among the recipients of our prize who are not here today, I would like to mention specially:

Leyla Zana, who received the Sakharov Prize in 1995. Having been elected a member of the Turkish Parliament in 1991, at the age of 30, she was sentenced in December 1994 to 15 years in prison together with other members of parliament, also Kurds, for having exercised her freedom of expression. Together with her husband, Mehdi Zana, who was also sentenced to several years' imprisonment for statements he had made to the European Parliament, she has for years been trying to achieve a peaceful political resolution to the Kurdish issue in Turkey. Leyla Zana is still in prison despite numerous appeals from the international community and in particular this Parliament. Again today, I requested the Turkish authorities to initiate such procedures as will lead to the release of political prisoners, including Leyla Zana, at the earliest possible date.

Aung San Suu Kyi, who assumed leadership of the democratic movement against the dictatorship in Burma in 1989 and who, despite repression, house arrest, and personal suffering has continued her fight for democracy. As of this year Aung San Suu Kyi is of course no longer under house arrest but is unable to leave the country for fear of not being allowed to return. Nor is she able to carry out the mandate which she obtained by an overwhelming majority more than ten years ago.

Some of the recipients of our prize have seen their struggles rewarded with success, in particular:

Nelson Mandela, who in 1988 was the first to be awarded the prize, when he was still living under house arrest. After his release, in 1994 he became the President of South Africa in the first free elections, and led his country through its change towards a democratic and non-discriminatory regime.

Xanana Gusmao [Shannana Gushmao], who led East Timor through an exemplary process to independence and who is expected to address the House in the coming year.

Ibrahim Rugova, the political leader of the Albanians in Kosovo, who never swerved from his position based on non-

violence and dialogue with the Serbian authorities. Ibrahim Rugova is now the first president of Kosovo.

Throughout the years, the European Parliament has taken the lead in keeping human rights high on the international agenda.

This is not an abstract commitment; it was forged in the tragic experiences of Europe's barbaric twentieth century and it has been used in the last 50 years to construct a Europe that has learned from, but not forgotten, its past.

The importance that the European Union attaches to respect for human rights is reflected in our increased commitment to mainstreaming human rights and democratisation in all aspects of our internal and external actions. We consider that human rights inside and outside the European Union should be measured with the same yardstick.

The European Parliament has a central role in insisting on accountability and in monitoring the Council and the Commission in the implementation of human rights provisions. We have also decided to build close links between the institutions to improve our common policy in this field.

But indispensable to our political mission is the work, dedication, idealism, and courage of those we celebrate as Sakharov laureates and the invaluable contribution of so many active NGOs in the Human Rights field.

The European Parliament will remain a watchdog against human rights violations. Your vigilance must be our guide.

As I said at the Copenhagen Summit, " We must never cease to assert the primacy of Human Rights in the world", and on behalf of the European Parliament and its members, we thank you for your defence and promotion of Human Rights throughout the world.