Press Release
Stockholm, 8 June 2016

**Speaker’s decision to block the ‘Alternative Nobel’ from Parliament shows bias, says Right Livelihood Award chief**

Today, the Speaker of the Swedish Parliament, Urban Ahlin, has told the Swedish TT news agency that the Right Livelihood Award will not be allowed to host its annual ceremony in Riksdagen, breaking the 30-year tradition of award presentation in Parliament.

This unilateral decision comes despite mounting support from across the political spectrum in Sweden, with several parliament members from seven parties calling on the Speaker to continue hosting the Right Livelihood Award ceremony in Parliament. 83% of Swedish politicians from all parties support continued presentation of the Right Livelihood Award in Parliament, according to a recent survey by the Right Livelihood Award Foundation.

The issue has received international attention, with the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association, Maina Kiai, saying the Speaker’s decision to block the Right Livelihood Award was “disappointing to see during this era of closing space.”

In an open letter published by Svenska Dagbladet, 13 Right Livelihood Award Laureates stated that the award presentation in the Swedish Parliament was a ‘life-changing’ moment, which helped save lives and empower human rights activists around the world.

Earlier today, the Speaker blocked participation of Cecilia Magnusson, member of the parliamentary association in support of the Right Livelihood Award (SÅRLA), at the Parliament Board meeting which was expected to consider the issue. She had never been denied participation before and had earlier criticised the Speaker’s decision in the media.

“By taking arbitrary decisions and blocking key members of SÅRLA from attending the Board meeting, the Speaker has shown clear bias against the Right Livelihood Award. However, he cannot ignore the broad support the Award has among Swedish MPs and civil society,” says Ole von Uexkull, Executive Director of the Right Livelihood Award Foundation.

“Excluding international civil society representatives like our Laureates from access to the heart of the Swedish democracy sends a very worrisome signal about Sweden’s commitment to human rights and freedom of expression worldwide. Without an open exchange between our country’s democratically elected officials and some of the world’s leading human rights defenders and change makers, Sweden’s internationally recognised ‘soft power’ will be diminished. And without the symbolic protection offered by Riksdagen, many of these human rights defenders will face greater danger in their home countries,” von Uexkull adds.
Background
Since 1985, the Right Livelihood Award has been presented in the Swedish Parliament, on the invitation from the Association for the Right Livelihood Award in the Parliament (SÅRLA), an association of parliamentarians from all seven established political parties of the Swedish Parliament.

On May 21, Swedish public broadcaster SVT revealed that the Speaker had decided that the Right Livelihood Award will no longer be presented in the Swedish Parliament. The stated reason was lack of space, even though the room where the ceremony takes place stands empty most of the time.

Moreover, the Speaker’s decision pre-empts the conclusions of the ongoing review on the allocation of parliamentary facilities, which is expected to be completed by 31 August 2016. SÅRLA has submitted an application to the Parliament Board to be included among the groups that have the formal right to book parliamentary premises for events of public significance in the future.

About the Right Livelihood Award
Founded in 1980, the Right Livelihood Awards are presented each year in the Swedish Parliament and are often referred to as ‘Alternative Nobel Prizes’. They were introduced “to honour and support those offering practical and exemplary answers to the most urgent challenges facing us today”. In addition to presenting the annual awards, the Foundation supports the work of its Laureates, particularly those who may be in danger due to the nature of their activities. There are now 162 Right Livelihood Award Laureates from 67 countries: Previous Laureates include Swedish children’s book author Astrid Lindgren, Kenyan environmentalist Wangari Maathai, and Congolese surgeon Denis Mukwege.

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