



Press Release

Stockholm, 26 September 2017

## 2017 Right Livelihood Awards Honour Inspiring Changemakers and Champions of Justice

The Laureates of this year's Right Livelihood Award, widely known as the 'Alternative Nobel Prize', have been announced today in Stockholm, Sweden:

This year's honorary award goes to **Robert Bilott** (USA) for *"exposing a decades-long history of chemical pollution, winning long-sought justice for the victims, and setting a precedent for effective regulation on hazardous substances."*

Bilott commented: *"I hope that this honour helps spread awareness and recognition of the urgent need to take further steps to protect our drinking water, and the ability and power of local residents and communities to ensure that such steps are taken."*

The cash award of SEK 3 million is shared equally by three Laureates:

**Colin Gonsalves** (India) is honoured by the Jury *"for his tireless and innovative use of public interest litigation over three decades to secure fundamental human rights for India's most marginalised and vulnerable citizens."*

Gonsalves commented: *"I am both humbled and privileged by the Award. It comes at a time when India is going through a dark period and human rights activists are under siege. The platform the Foundation provides will help us strengthen democratic resistance at this critical stage."*

**Khadija Ismayilova** (Azerbaijan) receives the Award *"for her courage and tenacity in exposing corruption at the highest levels of government through outstanding investigative journalism in the name of transparency and accountability"*. It is the first time that a Right Livelihood Award goes to a Laureate from Azerbaijan.

Ismayilova commented: *"It is an honour for me to be chosen for such a prestigious award. I happily accept the award on behalf of all journalists and human rights defenders of my country, who continue to work despite difficult conditions."*

**Yetnebersh Nigussie** (Ethiopia) is recognised by the Jury *"for her inspiring work promoting the rights and inclusion of people with disabilities, allowing them to realise their full potential and changing mindsets in our societies"*.



Nigussie commented: *"It is an absolute honour to receive the prestigious Right Livelihood Award. The recognition provides welcome fuel to the disability and development community's ongoing call for inclusion and full participation of people with disabilities in all spheres of life."*

The announcement was made at the International Press Centre at the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs by Ole von Uexkull, Executive Director of the Right Livelihood Award Foundation, and Maina Kiai, Jury member and former UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, following the decision by an international Jury that considered 102 nominations from 51 countries.

Ole von Uexkull commented: "This year's Laureates protect the rights and lives of citizens across three continents. With their courageous work for human rights, public health and good governance, they tackle some of the world's most pressing challenges at their very core. At a time of alarming setbacks for democracy, their successes show us the way forward towards a just, peaceful and sustainable world for all."

Established in 1980, the Right Livelihood Award honours and supports courageous people and organisations offering visionary and exemplary solutions to the root causes of global problems. Today, there are 170 Laureates from 69 countries.

### Contact:

For further information and to arrange interviews with the Laureates, please contact Johannes Mosskin, Director of Communications, mobile: +46 (0)70 43 71 148, e-mail: [johannes@rightlivelihood.org](mailto:johannes@rightlivelihood.org)

Further details on the Laureates, alongside high-resolution photographs and videos are available at: [www.rightlivelihoodaward.org/2017](http://www.rightlivelihoodaward.org/2017)

### About the Laureates



## Robert Bilott

Robert Bilott is one of the world's finest environmental lawyers. With a combination of innovative litigation, scientific understanding, and extraordinary perseverance, he has achieved one of the most significant victories for environmental law and corporate accountability of this century.

In a legal battle lasting 19 years, he represented 70,000 citizens whose drinking water had been contaminated with Perfluorooctanic acid (PFOA) by the chemical giant DuPont. Expanding upon the concept of class-action litigation, he set up a 7-year toxicological study of the 70,000 victims, which contributed significantly to the scientific understanding of the global health risks associated with Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS). This class of substances, which do not break down in the environment or the human body, are ubiquitous in our societies today.

At a time when environmental regulation is under serious threat of being watered down in the United States and elsewhere, Bilott successfully won compensation for his clients and continues to call for better regulation of toxic substances.

Ole von Uexkull commented: "The environmental scandal Robert Bilott uncovered is but the tip of the iceberg of global pollution caused by fluorocarbons. Thanks to his persistent work, the world now knows that this class of chemicals poses a serious threat to public health across the globe and urgently requires regulation."



## Colin Gonsalves

Colin Gonsalves is amongst the most complete human rights lawyers of his generation. He is a Senior Advocate at the Supreme Court of India and the founder of the Human Rights Law Network (HRLN), an Indian national network of public interest lawyers.

Over three decades, HRLN's lawyers have engaged in public interest litigation to hold the government to account and secure a broad spectrum of human rights. Gonsalves' clients have included India's most vulnerable people, such as bonded labourers, ethnic and religious minorities, refugees, slum dwellers, marginalised women and the poor.

Gonsalves' most significant victories in the courtroom include the 2001 "Right to Food" case, which saw India's Supreme Court issue far reaching orders enforcing a free midday meal for all schoolchildren and subsidised grain for over 400 million Indians living below the poverty line.

In 2016 and 2017, Gonsalves obtained landmark judgements from the Supreme Court that ended the longstanding immunity of the Indian Armed Forces from criminal prosecution. This is already having a significant impact in reducing the number of extrajudicial executions occurring in India's Northeast.

Ole von Uexkull commented: "Colin Gonsalves has built a network of lawyers all over India who help the most disadvantaged people access their rights. His famous Right-to-Food case at the Indian Supreme Court, for instance, has given 400 million people better nutrition. At a time when India, like many countries, is becoming more authoritarian, Colin and his lawyers' network play a crucial role in defending the Indian democracy."

## Khadija Ismayilova

Khadija Ismayilova is Azerbaijan's most outstanding contemporary investigative journalist. In the past decade, her investigative reporting has revealed a wide range of corrupt and lucrative business deals involving President Aliyev's family members. She has provided irrefutable evidence of corruption at the highest levels of Azerbaijan's government, which also involved multinational companies like TeliaSonera. Significantly, her articles have uncovered how the wealth of the nation has been plundered, routed abroad and used to influence European politicians.

For publishing articles on government corruption, Ismayilova has been subjected to smear campaigns, harassment and fabricated criminal charges. Despite serving one and a half years in prison, Ismayilova has refused to be silenced, and continues to write. Ismayilova also addresses Azerbaijan's poor human rights record, consistently raising the issue of political prisoners in the country and provided their families with moral and material support.



As the government continues to intimidate and jail journalists with an alarming frequency, Ismayilova remains resolute in courageously writing and speaking out for greater government accountability and good governance in Azerbaijan.

*Ole von Uexkull commented: "Khadija Ismayilova is one of the most courageous and skilled investigative journalists of her generation. Despite imprisonment, threats and smear campaigns, she has not given up investigating the authoritarian Azeri government and ruling elite. Thanks to her dedicated work, we now know how deeply European politicians and businesses are implicated in corruption and bribery related to Azerbaijan."*

## Yetnebersh Nigussie

Yetnebersh Nigussie is an Ethiopian activist working for human rights based on her own experience of being discriminated against coming from a "developing country", being young, a woman – and blind. She is fearlessly pushing for women's and girls' rights, inclusive education and a vibrant civil society. Nigussie is an outstanding advocate for the rights enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

Through her tireless efforts, she has changed perceptions on disability in her own society and internationally with the compelling message: "Focus on the person, not the disability. We have one disability, but 99 abilities to build on!"

Currently a Senior Inclusion Advisor with the international disability and development NGO, Light for the World, Nigussie fights for the inclusion of the 15% - more than 1 billion - of the world's population who have some kind of disability. She strives to create inclusive conditions for future generations by connecting national realities with international frameworks.

*Ole von Uexkull commented: "Yetnebersh Nigussie is a shining star of hope for all, not just for the more than 1 billion people with some kind of disability. With her personal story and her political work as an activist, she makes a strong case for positive social change, based on people's rights and people's abilities. With Yetnebersh Nigussie, we honour a courageous woman who shows the enormous potential of inclusive societies."*

## About the Award:

The Right Livelihood Award is not an award for the world's political, scientific or economic elite, but an award for the people and their work and struggles for a better future. The Right Livelihood Award accepts proposals from everyone through an open nomination process.



The award is named after the Buddhist concept of Right Livelihood, which encourages people to make their living in an ethical way that respects other people and the natural world.

In addition to presenting the annual award, the Right Livelihood Award Foundation actively supports the work of its Laureates, including protecting those whose life and liberty has been put at risk by their efforts.

Previous Laureates include high-profile US whistleblowers Edward Snowden and Daniel Ellsberg, British journalist Alan Rusbridger, the newspaper Cumhuriyet (Turkey), environmentalist Vandana Shiva (India), human rights activists Bianca Jagger (Nicaragua), Jacqueline Moudeina (Chad), Dr Denis Mukwege (DR Congo) and Martín Almada (Paraguay), as well as Swedish children's book author Astrid Lindgren.

[#RightLivelihood2017](#)

[www.rightlivelihood.org](http://www.rightlivelihood.org)

[@rlafoundation](#)