Press Release  
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Ethiopian activist Yetnebersh Nigussie Named 2017 Right Livelihood Award Laureate

Acclaimed Ethiopian activist and advocate for inclusion of people with some kind of disability, Yetnebersh Nigussie, has been announced a Laureate of the 2017 Right Livelihood Award, widely known as the ‘Alternative Nobel Prize’.

Nigussie 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”.

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.

Upon receiving the news, 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.”

Becoming blind at the age of five after a meningitis infection, Nigussie escaped an early marriage and was sent to the Shashemane Catholic School for the blind. The nuns running the school helped her to focus on her capabilities. Nigussie’s activism for human rights is based on her own experience of being discriminated against coming from a “developing country”, being young, a woman – and blind.

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 more than 1 billion people in the world with 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.”

The 2017 cash award of SEK 3 million (EUR 315,000) is shared equally by Yetnebersh Nigussie, the human rights lawyer Colin Gonsalves (India) and the investigative journalist Khadija Ismayilova (Azerbaijan). This year’s honorary award goes to the American lawyer Robert Bilott, responsible for one of the most significant victories for environmental law and corporate accountability of this century.

Ole von Uexkull said: “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.”

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

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

About the Award:
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. In total there are now 170 Laureates from 69 countries. In addition to presenting the annual award, the Right Livelihood Award Foundation also supports the work of its Laureates, particularly those whose lives may be in danger due to the nature of their activities.
About the selection process:

Anyone can propose candidates to be considered for a Right Livelihood Award. Through this open nomination process, the Foundation receives a clear indication of what citizens around the world consider to be the most pressing issues of our time, and the individuals who dedicate themselves to solving them. After careful research by the Foundation’s research team, reports on the current proposals are submitted to the Foundation’s board and international Jury. The Jury meets annually in September to select the Recipients. This year, the jury considered 102 nominations from 51 countries.

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