



Press Release

Stockholm, 24 September 2018

2018 Right Livelihood Award Laureates Announced

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

The 2018 Honorary Award goes to anti-corruption champions **Thelma Aldana** (Guatemala) & **Iván Velásquez** (Colombia) *"for their innovative work in exposing abuse of power and prosecuting corruption, thus rebuilding people's trust in public institutions."*

Thelma Aldana commented: "The Right Livelihood Award is a recognition of the struggle of the Guatemalan people against corruption, and that it is possible to combat these criminal activities. The construction of a true democracy in Guatemala requires an independent and strengthened judicial system."

Iván Velásquez commented: "This prize comes at a particularly dramatic moment in the fight against impunity and corruption. It is very important because it will turn the eyes of the world to Guatemala, and hopefully also provide international solidarity with those who are committed to the transformation of the country."

The three cash awards go to the following Laureates:

The civil and human rights defenders **Abdullah al-Hamid, Mohammad Fahad al-Qahtani and Waleed Abu al-Khair** (Saudi Arabia) share an Award *"for their visionary and courageous efforts, guided by universal human rights principles, to reform the totalitarian political system in Saudi Arabia"*. It is the first time that a Right Livelihood Award goes to Laureates from Saudi Arabia.

The Laureates are all currently in jail. In 2013, al-Hamid and al-Qahtani were sentenced to 11 and 10 years' imprisonment on charges including "inciting disorder by calling for demonstrations" and "forming an unlicensed organisation". Abu al-Khair was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment in 2014 for charges including "disobeying the ruler" and "harming the reputation of the state by communicating with international organizations".

The farmer **Yacouba Sawadogo** (Burkina Faso) receives the Award *"for turning barren land into forest and demonstrating how farmers can regenerate their soil with innovative use of indigenous and local knowledge"*.

Sawadogo commented: "I am very honoured to receive the Right Livelihood Award, which will allow me to persist in my efforts to protect the forest and the wildlife. I hope that the legitimacy provided by this prize will help inspire and encourage many others to regenerate their land for the benefit of nature, local communities and future generations."



The agronomist **Tony Rinaudo** (Australia) is recognised by the Jury *“for demonstrating on a large scale how drylands can be greened at minimal cost, improving the livelihoods of millions of people”*.

Rinaudo commented: “Receiving the Right Livelihood Award is a great honour and I am humbled. Even though this simple, low cost and rapid method of reforestation has had a very significant impact on the lives of millions of people, globally it is little known to national governments, donors, or communities who need it the most. It is my hope that the spotlight now, through this prize, being shone on farmer-managed natural regeneration methods will result in exponential uptake and increase the spread of it globally.”

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 Amelie von Zweigbergk, board and jury member of the Foundation, following the decision by an [international Jury](#) that considered 107 nominations from 50 countries.

Ole von Uexkull commented: “The Laureates’ trailblazing work for accountability, democracy and the regeneration of degraded land gives tremendous hope and deserves the world’s highest attention. At a time of alarming environmental decline and failing political leadership, they show the way forward into a very different future.”

The three cash awards are worth SEK 1 Million (EUR 96,000) each and will be used to support the Laureates’ successful work. The prize money is not for personal use.

The Award Presentation will take place in Stockholm on 23 November, followed by public events and high-level meetings in Geneva, Zurich and Berlin.

Contact

For further information and to arrange interviews with the Laureates, please contact:

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Further details on the Laureates, alongside high-resolution photographs and videos, are available at: rightlivelihoodaward.org/2018



About the Laureates

Thelma Aldana & Iván Velásquez

Thelma Aldana (Guatemala) & Iván Velásquez (Colombia) have been at the forefront of one of the most successful anti-corruption efforts seen anywhere in the world. Since 2014 and 2013 respectively, Aldana and Velásquez have led the Public Prosecutor's Office and the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), an Independent body established by an agreement between the Guatemalan government and the UN. Through their leadership of these institutions, they have spearheaded the campaign to tackle deep-rooted criminal networks and corruption that have plagued Guatemala for decades.

In a country still reeling from the effects of 36 years of internal conflict, Aldana & Velásquez have demonstrated a historically unique model of joint international and local legal action that sets a benchmark for other countries with similar problems. The cooperation between them and the institutions they have represented has resulted in several high-profile and sensitive criminal investigations, most notably the La Línea corruption case, which led to 60 prosecutions, including the arrest of then President Otto Pérez Molina and his Vice President Roxanna Baldetti.

Aldana & Velásquez have played a crucial role in shaping a defining era in Guatemalan history, while also rebuilding trust in public institutions. As a consequence, they have faced sustained resistance and endured great personal risk. Their courageous and exemplary work has so far resulted in more than 60 criminal structures identified, more than 310 convictions, and 34 proposed legal reforms.

After ending her four-year mandate as Attorney General in May 2018, Aldana has been living outside of Guatemala for security reasons. While Velásquez's mandate as CICIG's commissioner runs until September 2019, president Jimmy Morales, on 4 September, banned him from entering the country and urged the UN Secretary-General to propose new candidates for the position. At the moment of this announcement, Guatemala's Constitutional Court and the UN have supported Velasquez as head of CICIG, and tens of thousands of Guatemalan citizens are taking to the streets in protest.

Ole von Uexkull commented: "The work spearheaded by Aldana and Velásquez is a unique model of effective cooperation between the national and UN levels to establish good governance. We urge President Jimmy Morales to allow this Guatemalan success story to continue."



Abdullah al-Hamid, Mohammad Fahad al-Qahtani and Waleed Abu al-Khair

Abdullah al-Hamid, Mohammad Fahad al-Qahtani, and Waleed Abu al-Khair are three of the most prominent Saudi civil and human rights defenders. They have stood defiant in their pursuit for reforms in a country where the royal family maintains a tightly controlled monopoly of power and has joined forces with ultra-conservative Wahhabi clerics to support their totalitarian rule.

The three Laureates have challenged this authoritarian system through peaceful methods, calling for universal human rights and the establishment of a constitutional monarchy. They are demanding the separation of powers and equality for all, including the abolishment of male guardianship which deprives women of their most basic rights. As a consequence of their courageous struggle for a more pluralistic and democratic society, the three men have been sentenced to between 10 and 15 years' imprisonment and all are currently in jail.

al-Hamid and al-Qahtani are academics and co-founders of one of the few Saudi human rights organisations, the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), which is currently banned in the country. Abu al-Khair is best known for his legal defence of prominent Saudi activists like Raif Badawi, and for founding another now-banned human rights organisation, Monitor of Human Rights in Saudi Arabia (MHRSA).

Their visionary and inclusive approach to shaping a positive future for their home country has been, and continues to be, a great source of inspiration for many people in Saudi Arabia and the wider Gulf region.

Ole von Uexkull commented: "As the Universal Declaration of Human Rights celebrates 70 years, it is shameful to see how world leaders side with the repressive ruling family of Saudi Arabia instead of the courageous reformists who are promoting democracy and equality in the country. al-Hamid, al-Qahtani, and Abu al-Khair are a great source of inspiration and hope not only to people in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region, but to anyone who believes in humanity."



Yacouba Sawadogo

Yacouba Sawadogo is known as “the man who stopped the desert”. Starting around 1980 during a phase of severe drought, he has successfully created an almost 40-hectare forest on formerly barren and abandoned land. Today, it has more than 60 species of trees and bushes and is arguably one of the most diverse forests planted and managed by a farmer in the Sahel.

Sawadogo’s remarkable success builds on experimenting with traditional planting pits for soil, water and biomass retention (“zaï” in local language). He has continued innovating the technique over the years, increasing crop yields and successfully planting trees. Despite facing resistance from locals in the beginning – Sawadogo was called a “madman” and saw his forest set on fire – he never considered giving up. Over time, people came to admire his work. Sawadogo has always been eager to share his knowledge, and has received thousands of visitors from the region and beyond. By organising trainings, he has empowered farmers to regenerate their land. As a result, tens of thousands of hectares of severely degraded land have been restored to productivity in Burkina Faso and Niger.

Those who adopt Sawadogo’s techniques often become food secure, as zaï help to conserve rainwater and improve soil fertility. This allows farmers to produce crops even in years of drought. Trees planted together with the crops serve to enrich the soil, produce fodder for livestock and create business opportunities like bee keeping. This helps farmers adapt to climate change, reduce rural poverty and prevent local resource and water related conflicts. Together with other farmer-managed natural regeneration techniques, Zaï could become an important tool to counter forced migration and build peace.

Ole von Uexkull commented: “Yacouba Sawadogo vowed to stop the desert – and he made it. If local communities and international experts are ready to learn from his wisdom, it will be possible to regenerate large areas of degraded land, decrease forced migration and build peace in the Sahel.”



Tony Rinaudo

The Australian agronomist Tony Rinaudo is known as the “forest maker”. Having lived and worked in Africa for several decades, he has discovered and put in practice a solution to the extreme deforestation and desertification of the Sahel region. With a simple set of management practices, farmers regenerate and protect existing local vegetation, which has helped to improve the livelihoods of millions.

Rinaudo has pioneered a technique that involves growing up trees from existing root systems, which are often still intact and which Rinaudo refers to as an “underground forest”. By choosing the right plants, and by pruning and protecting them in a certain way, they soon grow into trees. Rinaudo realised that if it was people who had reduced the forest to a barren landscape, it would require people to restore it. Changing attitudes has been key to Rinaudo's successful work.

Rinaudo’s farmer-managed natural regeneration method has restored 50,000 km² of land with over 200 million trees in Niger alone. It has the potential to restore currently degraded drylands with an area the combined size of India. What Rinaudo has created is much more than an agricultural technique, he has inspired a farmer-led movement greening land in the Sahel region.

Ole von Uexkull commented: “Rinaudo presents a practical solution to counter desertification, famine and despair. If policymakers are ready to support the farmer-managed natural regeneration approach, degraded drylands with an area the combined size of India could be restored.”

About the Right Livelihood Award Foundation

Established in 1980, the Right Livelihood Award Foundation honours and supports courageous people and organisations offering visionary and exemplary solutions to the root causes of global problems. The Swedish Foundation sees its role as being the megaphone and shield for the Laureates, and provides them with long-term [support](#). It seeks to help [protect](#) those award recipients whose life and liberty are in danger. The Foundation has Special Consultative Status with the UN Economic and Social Council.

The Right Livelihood Award is annually presented to four Laureates. Unlike most other international prizes, it has no categories. The award recognises that, in striving to meet the human challenges of today’s world, the most inspiring and remarkable work often defies any standard classification. In total there are now [174 Laureates from 70 countries](#).

About the selection process

Anyone can [propose candidates](#) to be considered for the Right Livelihood Award. After careful investigation 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.

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