

## Imprisoned Saudi blogger Raif Badawi wins 2015 Sakharov Prize

Written by William Louch on 29 October 2015 in News  
News

With the floggings of Raif Badawi set to continue, EU Parliament has awarded him the prize for "exceptional contribution to the fight for human rights".



Saudi blogger Raif Badawi has won the Sakharov Prize, after a decision by European Parliament's group leaders this morning.

The prize, first established in 1988, is awarded to individuals, "who have made an exceptional contribution to the fight for human rights." Previous winners include Nelson Mandela, Kofi Annan and Aung San Suu Kyi.

Badawi is currently serving a 10-year sentence, with 1,000 lashes, for setting up a website that encourages political debate in Saudi Arabia. Saudi courts announced their decision to uphold the

decision in June, despite international outcry.

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Badawi's victory has been praised by leaders across the political divide.

S&D MEP Elena Valenciano, president of the subcommittee on human rights, applauded the decision, saying, "Raif Badawi is a world symbol for freedom of speech. Today, as Sakharov laureate, he speaks out loudly again for all those that are forced to stay silent by oppressive regimes all over the world."

Syed Kamall, leader of the right leaning ECR Group, said, "I am delighted that Raif Badawi has won this prize, I can think of nobody more deserving than a man imprisoned for encouraging open debate in a country where it is not tolerated.

"This prize should send out a strong signal to Saudi Arabia that freedom of speech and thought is a universal right. Saudi Arabia can lock up the man and they can lash him, but they will only strengthen amongst his countrymen the yearning for free speech and debate that he stands for."

Mark Demesmaeker, ECR human rights spokesman, added, "A blogger does not belong in a dark cell and does not deserve lashes. He deserves to be cherished, especially by a country chairing the UN Human Rights Council."

She also called for the, "immediate and unconditional release" of Raif, saying the case stands as a reminder to the EU to, "strengthen the weight of Human Rights in our external relations and particularly in the case of Saudi Arabia."

Guy Verhofstadt, leader of the European Parliament's Liberal bloc, added, "The European Parliament has sent today a strong political and humanitarian message to Saudi Arabian authorities."

The award comes as Badawi's wife, Ensaf Haidar, announced that Badawi's floggings are set to continue.

In a blog piece she said, "I don't exactly know when it will happen. The person [the same source who previously warned her about the last lashing before it took place] called me to say Saudi Arabia would restart the lashings, but I don't know whether it will be this Friday or the next."

The Saudi regime has come under increasing international pressure in recent months over its continued human rights abuses.

The UN's recent decision to appoint Saudi Arabia to chair a key human rights panel prompted much criticism, as has the Saudi government's decision to uphold the conviction of Mohammed Al-Nimr, sentenced to death by beheading and crucifixion, for offences committed while still a minor.

A recent report by NGO and leading human rights campaigner, Human Rights Watch, claims Saudi Arabia continues to "try, convict, and imprison political dissidents and human rights activists solely on

account of their peaceful activities."

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William Louch is an editorial assistant for the Parliament Magazine

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