



PRESS RELEASE

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Syrian Human Rights Defender, Aktham Naisse, winner of 12th Martin Ennals Award

Aktham Naisse, President of the Committees for the Defence of Democratic Liberties and Human Rights in Syria (CDDLHR) is the winner of the 2005 Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders (MEA).

Aktham Naisse is a man who keeps faith in democratic values. Aktham Naisse embodies the soul of the democratic movement in Syria and has been involved in this struggle for over 30 years. He is one of the founding members of the Committees for the Defence of Democratic Liberties and Human Rights in Syria (CDDLHR), created in 1989, and the publication "Sawt al-Dimokratiyyah" (the voice of democracy). Many in the Arab world see this date as the start of the modern human rights movement in Syria. During all these years Aktham Naisse has written articles and courageously spoken out in national, regional and international forums. He was arrested six times for publicly demanding respect for human rights, he was held incommunicado and even tortured. He is currently not allowed to travel abroad. A trial against him will resume on 16 January 2005 and he risks 15 years prison.

The Chairman of the Jury of the MEA, Hans Thoolen, called Aktham "an extraordinary example of a man who has fought for fundamental rights in spite of constant harassment and threats". He stated that "there was complete consensus among all eleven human rights organizations on the Jury that Aktham deserves the award for his long-standing struggle for the defence of human rights, at the risk of his own health and life". The Jury also noted the fact that many Arab human rights organisations and the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network support Aktham in his work.

MEA: the main award of the human rights movement. The Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders (MEA) is a unique collaboration among eleven of the world's leading non-governmental human rights organizations to give **protection** to human rights defenders worldwide. The **Jury** is composed of the following: Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Human Rights First, International Federation for Human Rights, the International Commission of Jurists, World Organisation Against Torture, German Diakonie, International Service for Human Rights, International Alert, Huridocs and DCI. The **previous laureates** are: Lida Yusupova, Russia (2004); Alirio Uribe Muñoz, Colombia (2003); Jacqueline Moudeina, Chad (2002); Peace Brigades International (2001); Immaculée Birhaheka, DR Congo (2000); Natasa Kandic, Yugoslavia (1999); Eyad El Sarraj, Palestine (1998); Samuel Ruiz García; Mexico (1997); Clement Nwankwo, Nigeria (1996); Asma Jahangir, Pakistan (1995); Harry Wu, China (1994).

The ceremony will take place in Geneva next September and several television stations will cover the event. For media contacts and general information on the MEA, please contact Luis Marreiros, Coordinator. Tel: +41 22 809 49 25 (marreiros@martinennalsaward.org) or visit our website: www.martinennalsaward.org