

Abdulkarim Al Khaiwani - Special Award Acceptance Speech

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Al Salaam alaikum - peace be upon you.

It is a great honour for me and my fellow journalists in Yemen to receive this award. I would like to thank Amnesty International and all those here today who are taking part in this ceremony.

I wish I were among you to receive the award and to talk to you face to face but I am now a prisoner in my country after being sentenced to 6 years imprisonment on 9 June by a special court.

The authorities in my country commit systematic violations against journalists and those expressing consciously-held beliefs. What I have been through is only an example of what other Yemeni journalists are facing in terms of attacks for carrying their professional and ethical duties.

The situation of freedom of expression is worsening because of the authorities' efforts to keep the local and international public opinion in the dark about serious crises such as the war that broke out in Sa'da, north of Yemen, and the resulting humanitarian crisis, as well as the peaceful demonstrations of people in southern and eastern provinces against the marginalisation and denial of political, civil, and economic rights.

The independent opposition press, one of the most important instruments for peaceful change and democratic reform, is operating in a tough and precarious environment, especially in the absence of an independent judiciary, lack of respect for the rule of law, widespread corruption and the government control/monopoly over TV and radio.

The authorities have developed repressive measures against journalists, critics, and human rights activists. These methods range from imprisonment, torture and death threats to the use of government-financed press to defame and discredit human rights defenders and opponents of the government, especially independent female journalists and women human rights activists.

Those who believe in freedom, justice, equality, and democracy know that the fulfilment of such human values requires sacrifice, patience and hope, as well as the belief that they are not alone. This award is a strong show of such solidarity.

The authorities have stopped me several times from travelling abroad. I was imprisoned 4 years ago. I was kidnapped and tortured more than once. But I have never been alone because of the solidarity and support from my colleagues and from the human rights movement in Yemen that has never lost hope, and because of the efforts of an influential international human rights movement which has persistently confronted the violations by the Yemeni authorities aimed at isolating me and breaking my will.

I repeat my appreciation for this award and its human and humanitarian significance. I would like to also say that I consider this award an award to all those who deserve it, all those who stood by my side against repression, terror, and a culture of hate. Also to my dear and persevering wife and my beloved children.

Thank you

Abdulkarim Al Khaiwani