

17th Polish Prize of Sérgio Vieira de Mello awarded

2021-02-03

The recipients of this year's winners of the Polish Prize of Sérgio Vieira de Mello, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (2002-03) were announced at the session of the Award Committee held on 15 October 2020.

Participating in the work of the Award Committee were the representatives of the President of the Republic of Poland, Ambassador of the Federative Republic of Brazil to Poland, Ambassador of the Kingdom Sweden to Poland, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Polish Ombudsman for Citizen Rights, the Mayor of Kraków, the US Council General in Kraków, ZNAK Publishing House, and the founders and originators of the prize, as well as the President of the Board and the Director of the Villa Decius Association.

This year more than 30 candidates, both individuals and organisations furthering human rights, and dialogue of religions and cultures, from various corners of the world, notably Poland, Slovakia, Belarus, Somalia, Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria, were proposed.

By the decision of the Award Committee, the 2020 Polish Prize of Sérgio Vieira de Mello was presented to:

- in the category Person: **Husein Koro Ibrahim Al-Qaidi (Iraq)**
- in the category Non-Governmental Organisation: **Viasna Human Rights Centre**
- Honorary Prize: **Marian Turski (Poland)**

The recipients were presented with a statuette by Andrzej Renes, commemorative diplomas, and a monetary prize founded by the Sponsor – ZUE SA Group.

The official award presentation ceremony was held on 10 December 2020 during the Online Gala streamed live on Zoom.

The Gala was followed by a panel discussion with recipients of the prize, organised in cooperation with the New Diplomacy Foundation.

The honorary patrons of the Polish Prize of Sérgio Vieira de Mello, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights are:

- Ambassador of the Federative Republic of Brazil to Poland
- Ambassador of the Kingdom Sweden to Poland
- UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

Recipients:

Husein Al-Qaidi is a Yazidi Kurd born in 1970 in Duhok, in the Iraqi Kurdistan. He graduated in Kurdish Language and Literature from the Salahaddin University in Erbil. Since his student days, Hussein was actively involved in the work of non-governmental and charitable organisations. He served among others in the French organisation Pharmaciens sans Frontières



and the Iraqi Caritas. In 2014, after the capture of the Yazidi lands by ISIS, supported by the Regional Government of Kurdistan, he organised campaigns aimed at finding the missing people, freeing them, and helping to return to normal life and overcome the trauma. In August 2014, he was nominated the head of the Office of Rescuing Kidnapped Yazidis, at whose helm he stands to this day. He is also active in Dimdim Humanitarian Relief Foundation, a local, Kurdish organisation documenting the fates of those saved from ISIS, supporting them materially, and helping to return to normal life. Hussein Al-Qaidi travels all over the world to find support for the Yazidi, bear testimony to what happened in Sinjar in 2014, and convince the international community to recognise the Sinjar massacre as an act of genocide and bring the perpetrators to justice. Hussein Al-Qaidi and the Office of Rescuing Kidnapped Yazidis work with the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), and the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), while his office cooperates with other international Yazidi organisations. Hussein Al-Qaidi also cooperates with the team for investigating ISIS crimes set up by the UN Security Council in 2017, and with Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict Pramila Patten.

Hussein Alqaidi, Photo: Villa Decius Association

The Human Rights Center "Viasna" is a non-governmental human rights organization created in 1996 amid the first anti-Lukashenka protests. It is a nation-wide NGO with the central office in Minsk and local offices in the majority of Belarusian cities. In 2003, Viasna was unlawfully deprived of its registration for its central role in the observation of the 2001 presidential election. However, it continued its work and is now the biggest human rights association in Belarus.

Viasna's priorities include legal assistance to the victims of human rights violations, electoral observation, human rights education and awareness raising, campaigning against the death penalty and monitoring prisons.

For its courageous work exposing human rights abuses on the part of the Lukashenka regime, Viasna has often been targeted by government-orchestrated repression. Many of its members have been arrested and had to stand bogus trials. In 2011, Viasna leader Ales Bialiatski was convicted on trumped-up charges and had to spend three years in prison. In September 2020, Marfa Rabkova, an activist who leads Viasna's volunteers, was arrested amid hundreds of similar cases. In October 2020, Viasna's volunteer Andrei Chapiuk was arrested on criminal charges. Despite all risks, hundreds of new volunteers joined Viasna.

After the rigged presidential election in August 2020, Viasna was among the key domestic human rights groups that focused on documenting the aftermath of what is described as the worst human rights crisis in the history of Belarus. In just three months, Viasna activists helped thousands of people and will continue to do so despite all obstacles for the sake of the rule of law and fundamental rights and freedoms.

Aleś Bialatski, Photo: Villa Decius Association

Marian Turski was born on 26 June 1926 in Druskieniki. An inmate of Auschwitz and



Buchenwald concentration camps, he participated in the Selma to Montgomery March against racial segregation in the South of the US, organised by Martin Luther King in March 1965. A historian and head of the historical division of Polityka weekly, he presides over the Jewish Historical Institute Association: one of Poland's oldest civil organisations cherishing the memory of the history and culture of Jews. He is highly active as the chairman of the Council of the POLIN Museum of History of the Polish Jews and a member of the International Auschwitz Council. He has been awarded the Commander's Cross with Star of the Order of Polonia Restituta, and the Commander's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany for services rendered to the Polish-German relations. He is also a member of the Civil Council operating by the Polish Ombudsman for Citizen Rights. In 2015, Turski received the Merit for the Protection of Human Rights honorary badge. Since 2018 he has been an honorary citizen of the Capital City of Warsaw. His valuable activity contributes to the promotion of the knowledge of Nazi crimes and victims in a warning to the future generations about the crimes committed on racial and religious grounds, against exclusion of minorities, and for sensitisation to acts of hatred and hate speech.

Marian Turski, Photo: Franek Mazur Villa Decius Association

The Prize

Set up in 2003 by the Villa Decius Association, the Polish Prize of Sérgio Vieira de Mello, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (2002–03) is awarded to natural persons and non-governmental organisations for their activity in support of protection and promotion of human rights, and peaceful coexistence and cooperation of societies, religions and cultures. The number of its recipients includes Tadeusz Mazowiecki (Poland), Alaksandar Milinkievič (Belarus), Krystyna Pryjomko-Serafin (United Kingdom), Leyla Ynus (Azerbaijan), Pietro Bartolo (Italy), Basil Kerski (Poland), and Tamila Tasheva (Ukraine). The ranks of institutions honoured with the Prize include Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (Poland), Memorial society (Russian Federation), Halina Nieć Legal Aid Centre (Poland), La Strada – Foundation Against Trafficking in Human Beings and Slavery (Poland), Interdenominational Community of Albania (Albania), and the Amalipe Centre for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance (Bulgaria).

Sérgio Vieira de Mello (1948–2003) was a Brazilian diplomat fluent in six languages, who defended two doctorates in humanities at Sorbonne. In several decades of work for the UN, he served at various posts, including those of UN Secretary General's Special Envoy in Kosovo, East Timor UN Transitional Administrator, 3rd UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (2002–03), and the EU Secretary General Special Envoy for Iraq. While holding that function, he was killed in a bomb raid on the UN headquarters in Baghdad on 19 August 2003. Throughout his life, Sérgio Vieira do Mello actively supported protection of freedom and human rights, intercultural dialogue, fight on terrorism and refugee crisis, and supported compliance to international law.