

Not available for publication
before 1 p.m. on 10
December 2023.
Check against delivery

THE
NOBEL
PEACE
PRIZE

Speech given by

Chair of The Norwegian
Nobel Committee
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Nobel Peace Prize 2023

Oslo, 10. desember, 2023.

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PEACE PRIZE AWARD CEREMONY ADDRESS 2023

Your Majesties,
Your Royal Highnesses,
Excellencies,
Representatives of the Nobel Peace Prize laureate,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” These are the opening words of the first article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Declaration further states, “Everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of person.” Millions of people around the world do not enjoy such basic rights and protections, because they live in states that disregard these standards of international law – law that applies to *all*, no matter the political system that an autonomous state has chosen to govern by.

The law enshrined in this document is unconditional, but sadly, many states have not implemented it. Fortunately, the vitality of these norms is held up by people who care and stand up for their rights. We are gathered in this room to celebrate a brave individual who has done exactly that: she has defended fundamental rights for herself, and for all people.

The Norwegian Nobel Committee has decided to award the Nobel Peace Prize for 2023 to Narges Mohammadi for her long and courageous battle against oppression of women in Iran and her struggle for freedom and liberty to all.

By focusing on women’s rights, Narges Mohammadi is highlighting the universal right to equality. She has fought restrictions imposed on women such as the forced wearing of the hijab and other covering garments as well as prohibitions involving sport, dance and movement in general. In all aspects of life, the rights of Iranian women are inferior to those of men.

Her activism for human rights and freedom has come with a substantial cost. She has been denied a career as a physicist and an engineer. For decades she has been harassed, and has been arrested 13 times. Her “crime” has been to speak out for human rights and against the use of the death penalty in Iran. Since 2003, she has worked for the Defenders of Human Rights Center in Tehran. She assumed a prominent role there when the organization’s founder – the Nobel Peace Prize laureate Shirin Ebadi (who is with us here today) – had to go into exile. Ms Mohammadi has continued Ms Ebadi’s work by writing, fighting, demonstrating and speaking up on every possible occasion, with no fear of the consequences.

In 2015 she started to serve a sentence of 10 years and 153 lashes. She is imprisoned, but not silenced. She continues her activism from behind the walls. She engages her fellow inmates in education, dancing, singing, and protests. She has organized protests against the sexual violence and torture experienced by prisoners in the women's ward. In September 2022, she took natural leadership of the "Woman – Life – Freedom" movement that erupted when 22-year-old Mahsa Jina Amini was killed while in the custody of Iran's morality police. Large crowds of women and men echoed the UN Charter when they chanted "Zan – Zendegi – Azadi" (Woman – Life – Freedom). Millions of outraged citizens took to the streets in a cry for liberty and against oppression.

In a recent interview with Time Magazine, Ms Mohammadi paid homage to Mahsa Jina Amini, saying: "When I heard I had received the Nobel Peace Prize, the name Mahsa Jina Amini emerged from the depths of my being. This movement is adorned with her beautiful name, and I dedicate this award to her."

Narges Mohammadi has not been released to come to Oslo to receive her Nobel Peace Prize. I am confident, however, that she is with us in her thoughts at this very moment. She is represented today by her children and by a portrait placed behind her empty chair on the stage. She has asked us to use this particular photograph, which expresses how she wants to lead her life – looking happy in colourful garments, exposing her hair, and with a steady gaze towards us.

Ms Mohammadi lives with the pain of not having seen her children and her husband, Taghi Rahmani, for almost eight years. They are forced to live in exile in France.

Our laureate has requested that her daughter Kiana and her son Ali should represent her during this ceremony. The twins, 17 years old, have taken a heavy burden upon their young shoulders. Shortly they will read to you the Nobel lecture written by their mother, and receive the gold medal and diploma on her behalf. I thank you, Kiana and Ali, for carrying out this important task.

In awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to Narges Mohammadi, the Norwegian Nobel Committee is recognizing her life-long struggle in support of human rights and a strong civil society. No punishment has stopped her. She pinpointed her position in an article published by the New York Times on the first anniversary of Mahsa Jina Amini's killing, stating: "The more of us they lock up, the stronger we become."

While incarcerated, Ms Mohammadi has had several serious health issues. Recently she was offered much-needed medical help at a hospital on the condition that she wore a hijab when leaving the prison. She refused and initiated a hunger strike. Finally, she was taken to hospital for a brief examination under tight security – but not wearing a hijab. Her resolve is unshakable. When everything has been denied her, she still mobilizes the willpower and courage to make a statement.

The Nobel Peace Prize for 2023 goes to Narges Mohammadi for her courageous fight for freedom and human rights over three decades, and for taking leadership when a new wave of protests swept over Iran.

This year's Peace Prize recognizes all the brave women in Iran, and around the world, who fight for basic human rights and for an end to the discrimination against and segregation of woman.

By her work, Ms Mohammadi has contributed to the advancement of fraternity between peoples in Iran and in the world at large, thereby fulfilling the terms of Alfred Nobel's will.

This year's Peace Prize falls within a long tradition of Nobel Peace Prizes awarded to non-violent freedom fighters, including Martin Luther King Jr. Narges Mohammadi's struggle is also comparable to that of Albert Lutuli, Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela, which took place over a period of more than 30 years before the apartheid system in South Africa came to an end.

In Iran, women have been fighting against segregation for more than 30 years. Eventually, their dream of a brighter future will prevail.