

The jury's justification for the Ossietzky Prize 2021

21. October 2021

The Ossietzky Prize 2021 is awarded to Afghans who have promoted freedom of expression in Afghanistan, represented by poet, author and journalist Samay Hamed. They receive the prize for their outstanding efforts to promote freedom of expression and their contribution to Afghan civil society over the past 20 years.

The prize is awarded to activists, journalists, writers, poets, filmmakers, editors, photographers, artists and others who, by peaceful means, have promoted freedom of expression in Afghanistan. They are people from across the country, regardless of gender, age and ethnicity, and from urban and rural areas.

The diverse and engaged Afghan civil society has been in the forefront to promote democracy and human rights for the past 20 years. Consequently, freedom of expression has been strengthened by book publications, magazines, newspapers, radio and television channels, and social media. They have built a more tolerant, open and inclusive society. Their courage, determination and effort have strengthened Afghan's identity, cultural understanding, knowledge, worldview, critical thinking, as well as access to information, intellectual property and literature across the country.

Afghanistan has been ranked the most dangerous country worldwide for journalists, and since 2004 more than 80 journalists has been killed, reports show. This imminent danger also applies to others who actively promote freedom of expression. Both before and after the takeover by the Taliban in 2001, thousands of people promoting freedom of expression were threatened, persecuted, tortured, imprisoned and/or killed. Following the Taliban's coup in August 2021, the situation for people promoting freedom of expression is more dangerous than ever.

For the past 20 years, women have broken down social, political and economic barriers for women and girls across the country, as activists, journalists, TV personalities, midwives and teachers. The same women fear being raped, kidnapped and/or killed in present-day Afghanistan. The number of women killed is now at its highest since 2009. The number of female journalists in Afghanistan has been reduced by a third in the last seven years. Since the Taliban came to power in August 2021, the number has been further reduced from as many as 700 to just 100 in Kabul.

Samay Hamed: A pioneer

Abdul Samay Hamed is one of Afghanistan's most famous writers and cultural figures, and a pioneer of freedom of expression. He is a doctor, but he is primarily known for his work as a journalist, cartoonist and author, especially in poetry – the dominant genre in Afghan literature. Hamed was behind the establishment of PEN Norway's sister organization Afghan PEN and the Writers' House in Kabul, a leading center for literature and freedom of expression in the country. Afghan PEN has for several years received support from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. With his important contribution to freedom of expression and culture in Afghanistan, Hamed is a commendable representative for activists, journalists and others who promote freedom of expression in the country.

The Award money is earmarked the work of activists, journalists and other who promotes freedom of expression.

The Ossietzky Prize ceremony 2021 will take place on 15 November 2021 at the House of Literature in Oslo.

About the Ossietzky Prize

The Ossietzky Prize is awarded annually to a person or institution that, over a period of time, or in connection with a particular case or event, has made a special contribution to freedom of expression. The prize winner should have a connection to Norway, personally or through the case in question.

About the jury

The jury consists of PEN Norway's board. Everyone can nominate candidates for the Ossietzky Prize. All candidates will be presented to the jury, in which duties are to evaluate the candidates and identify the prize winner.