



Press Release

Stockholm, 26 September 2017

India's Human Rights Lawyer Colin Gonsalves Named 2017 Right Livelihood Award Laureate

Colin Gonsalves, one of the most notable human rights lawyers of his generation, has been announced a Laureate of the 2017 Right Livelihood Award, widely known as the 'Alternative Nobel Prize'. Gonsalves is Senior Advocate at the Supreme Court of India and the founder of the Human Rights Law Network (HRLN).

Colin Gonsalves is recognised by the jury *"for his tireless and innovative use of public interest litigation over three decades to secure fundamental human rights for India's most marginalised and vulnerable citizens"*.

The announcement was made today at the International Press Centre at the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs by Ole von Uexkull, Executive Director of the Right Livelihood Award Foundation, and Maina Kiai, Jury member and former UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association.

Upon receiving the news, Gonsalves commented: "I am both humbled and privileged by the Award. It comes at a time when India is going through a dark period and human rights activists are under siege. The platform the Foundation provides will help us strengthen democratic resistance at this critical stage."

Over three decades, HRLN's lawyers have engaged in public interest litigation to hold the government to account and secure a broad spectrum of human rights. Gonsalves' clients have included India's most vulnerable people, such as bonded labourers, ethnic and religious minorities, refugees, slum dwellers, marginalised women and the poor.

Gonsalves' most significant victories in the courtroom include the 2001 "Right to Food" case, which saw India's Supreme Court issue far reaching orders enforcing a free midday meal for all schoolchildren and subsidised grain for over 400 million Indians living below the poverty line.

More recently, in 2016 and 2017, Gonsalves obtained landmark judgements from the Supreme Court that ended the longstanding immunity of the Indian Armed Forces from criminal prosecution. This is already having a significant impact in reducing the number of extrajudicial executions occurring in India's Northeast.



Ole von Uexkull commented: "Colin Gonsalves has built a network of lawyers all over India who help the most disadvantaged people access their rights. His famous Right-to-Food case at the Indian Supreme Court, for instance, has given 400 million people better nutrition. At a time when India, like many countries, is becoming more authoritarian, Colin and his lawyers' network play a crucial role in defending the Indian democracy."

The 2017 cash award of SEK 3 million (EUR 315,000) is shared equally by Colin Gonsalves, the investigative journalist Khadija Ismayilova (Azerbaijan) and activist Yetnebersh Nigussie (Ethiopia) who is promoting the rights of people with disabilities. This year's honorary award goes to the American lawyer Robert Bilott, responsible for one of the most significant victories for environmental law and corporate accountability of this century.

Ole von Uexkull said: "This year's Laureates protect the rights and lives of citizens across three continents. With their courageous work for human rights, public health and good governance, they tackle some of the world's most pressing challenges at their very core. At a time of alarming setbacks for democracy, their successes show us the way forward towards a just, peaceful and sustainable world for all."

Contact:

For further information and to arrange interviews with Colin Gonsalves or other Laureates, please contact Johannes Mosskin, Director of Communications, mobile: +46 (0)70 43 71 148, e-mail: johannes@rightlivelihood.org

Further details on the Laureates, alongside high-resolution photographs and videos are available at: <http://www.rightlivelihoodaward.org/2017>

About the Award:

Established in 1980, the Right Livelihood Award honours and supports courageous people and organisations offering visionary and exemplary solutions to the root causes of global problems. In total there are now 170 Laureates from 69 countries. In addition to presenting the annual award, the Right Livelihood Award Foundation also supports the work of its Laureates, particularly those whose lives may be in danger due to the nature of their activities.

About the selection process:

Anyone can propose candidates to be considered for a Right Livelihood Award. Through this open nomination process, the Foundation receives a clear indication of what citizens around the world consider to be the most pressing issues of our time, and the individuals



who dedicate themselves to solving them. After careful research by the Foundation's research team, reports on the current proposals are submitted to the Foundation's board and international Jury. The Jury meets annually in September to select the Recipients. This year, the jury considered 102 nominations from 51 countries.

[#RightLivelihood2017](#)

www.rightlivelihood.org

[@rlafoundation](#)