



2021 Nuremberg International Human Rights Award

On Sunday, 28 February, 2021, the jury of the Nuremberg International Human Rights Award, chaired by Marcus König, Lord Mayor of the City of Nuremberg, held a digital meeting and came to the following decision concerning the 14th Nuremberg International Human Rights Award:

The award winner is Ms Sayragul Sauytbay from China

The award will be presented in Nuremberg Opera House on Sunday, 15 May 2022.

The jury gave the following reasoning for its decision:

By presenting Ms Sayragul Sauytbay with the 2021 Nuremberg International Human Rights Award, the City of Nuremberg honours a human rights activist whose fate in many aspects is exemplary for that of the ethnoreligious minorities in China. Sayragul Sauytbay is a Muslim Kazakh from the Xinjiang region in West China. Former Eastern Turkestan is the homeland of many Turkic peoples, such as the Uyghurs, Kazakhs and Kirghizes. After the turn of the millenium, there was increasing discrimination against the resident native population, aiming at cultural assimilation. Since then, people have disappeared in so-called “vocational training centres”. Human rights organisations such as Human Rights Watch estimate that up to a million Muslims are being forcibly held in camps in China. Officially, the term for this is “re-education”. The conditions in these camps are inhumane: brain washing, torture and rape, also forcing prisoners to take drugs and medicines which make them apathetic and poison them.

Sayragul Sauytbay was a civil servant and head of several preschools in this region. After her husband and their two children had already emigrated to Kazakhstan for fear of repression, she has been under permanent surveillance, has been interrogated and threatened. In November 2017, she was forcibly recruited as an instructor for one of these camps and interned there. During her imprisonment, she got an insight into the innermost workings and into secret documents of the camp system, and had to suffer torture. In March 2018, she was released unexpectedly only to return to the camp shortly afterwards – this time as a prisoner. She succeeded in escaping to Kazakhstan, but even there she and her family were not safe from the grasp of the Chinese secret service. Since June 2019, the Swedish government has granted them asylum.

She now speaks up in public as a whistleblower, reporting on the top secret inner structures of the camps, as well as on Beijing’s long-term plans for the undermining and subjugation, also of western democracies. Her book “The Chief Witness” for which she gave numerous interviews to author, Alexandra Cavelius, is a report about the inconceivable crimes committed on a daily basis against Muslim minorities in China’s re-education camps in the Xinjiang region. In spite of permanent threats and intimidation attempts by the Chinese Communist Party which is trying to silence her, she bears witness: “The world needs to know what happens in those camps and what the party is really planning.”

The jury hopes that the public attention the award will bring, will also give Ms Sauytbay the necessary support and protection so that she can continue her work in safety. With this award, the jury also wants to re-affirm that human rights are indivisible and universal.

Nuremberg, 28 February 2021

