

Nuremberg International Human Rights Award

Award Ceremony
September 14, 2003 in Nuremberg Opera House

Words of Greeting by the Bavarian Government
Dr. Edmund Stoiber, Minister President of Bavaria

Ladies and Gentlemen,

it is a particular pleasure for me today to take part in the presentation of the Nuremberg International Human Rights Award of 2003. I would like to congratulate the jury on their choice. With Ms Teesta Setalvad from India and Mr Ibn Abdur Rehman from Pakistan you are honouring two outstanding personalities today.

Both of them have been committed for many years with exemplary personal courage to the protection of human rights in their home countries and committed to peace between India and Pakistan. In this work they have taken considerable personal risks, and in doing so, have suffered hostility, threats and intimidation.

But this won't change their minds. They will continue fighting with peaceful means against hatred and violence, against prejudice and discrimination. In this they can only rely on their personal integrity and on the power of words. This amount of moral courage deserves our admiration.

When we as Germans look back to our past, we are aware of one thing: A humane and peaceful state order which respects and protects the fundamental rights of the individual and of minorities is not self-evident. It is based not only on laws and institutions but also on the commitment of people who, at personal risk, stand up for justice and peace.

With our conditions of the democratic rule of law, we can hardly imagine how much courage is needed to oppose injustice and suppression. In Germany and the European Union today the protection of human rights is comprehensively safeguarded. And particularly for this reason it is our responsibility to contribute to the implementation and safeguarding of those universal rights all over the world as far as is in our powers.

Dear Ms Setalvad, dear Mr Rehman,

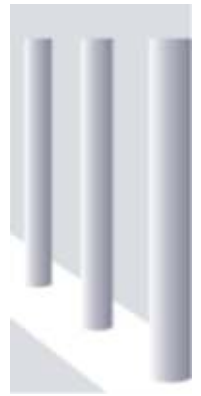
as the Prime Minister of the Free State of Bavaria I would like to thank you for your achievements and I would like to congratulate you on being honoured with the Nuremberg International Human Rights Award.

We have seen how important and necessary work for peace and human rights is in south Asia. We have seen this particularly in the past days and weeks in a rather dramatic way. Several terror attacks, the last of them the bomb attack in Srinagar killed and severely injured numerous people. This has further escalated the Kashmir conflict fought for many years.

This development threatens peace in the region and the existence of people who live there. Furthermore, it endangers stability in Asia and world peace.

In the past fifteen years, more than 60,000 people lost their lives in this conflict, among them many innocent civilians, men, women and children. Behind this horrific figure there is not only unimaginable human suffering, but also a vicious circle of violence and counter-violence, of crime and retaliation.

In the recent past, other crises and other violent conflicts were given priority over the Kashmir conflict in the interest of the world public. But we cannot remain indifferent if at one particular point in the world, the circle of violence is forever escalating. A further



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escalation would be extremely dangerous, far beyond this region. We must not let things get this far!

The community of states must continue and intensify its efforts to influence the conflict parties so that they start negotiating again. It would be irresponsible to stand by idly, helplessly resigned to the fact that this conflict has been going on for a long time and has already killed so many people or made them destitute. There can't be any quick solution in such a muddled situation, least of all one imposed from the outside, but we must never cease in our efforts to bring about peace.

The events in the Kashmir region also show the close link between human rights and peace because this conflict is not just about fertile land, about natural resources and about political power, but it is also a conflict between ethnic majorities and minorities as well as between members of different religions.

The respect of human dignity and human rights is the prerequisite for peace, security and stability. Without them, there can't be any lasting positive economic and social development. Peace and justice are indivisibly linked. Places where human beings are suppressed or persecuted only because they speak a different language or adhere to a different faith, those places will always be ruled by conflict and violence.

Modern means of transport and communication have brought people closer together. The safeguarding of peace and the respect for human rights on all continents will therefore be increasingly important in the future. Thus it cannot be left to the discretion of those in power to decide whether or not to respect and protect those rights.

This conviction is increasingly shaping international law. No ruler of any state today can refer to the principle of sovereignty and to the principle of non-interference when violating or tolerating the violation of human rights. The community of states has the right, even the duty in the interest of world peace, to enforce respect for elementary human rights all over the world.

We are not talking here about Western imperialism of values. We must respect other cultures with their values and legal systems. But there is a universal, natural right, a core of human rights. These rights are valid independent of different cultural traditions and they are written down in the Charter of the United Nations and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They are written down as international law. They have higher priority than any law given by nations. Human dignity must be inviolable and sacrosanct for everybody in the world!

But peace and justice cannot be imported. They can only be established and safeguarded in all countries of the world when people in those countries themselves stand up for these values.

Our two awardees from India and Pakistan are today presented with the International Nuremberg Human Rights Award because for decades they have had the courage and the strength to criticise human rights violations in their home countries, to assist disadvantaged persons and minorities and to fight for peace.

I hope, Ms Setalvad and Mr Rehman, that this award will be a sign of encouragement and an incentive, not only to you, but also to many other people all over the world who are fighting for peace and justice.

In this sense I would like to congratulate you on behalf of the Bavarian state government and of all citizens of Bavaria. The City of Nuremberg has to be commended as the founder of the International Human Rights Award and I would like to thank the City of Nuremberg for its great commitment.