**Nobel Peace Prize 2018**

**Honouring human rights defenders**

**(by Michel Forst, UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders)**

**Paris, 26 September 2018 - On 5 October, the members of the Nobel Committee will reveal the name of the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize winner. This year, the year of the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights[[1]](#footnote-1) and the 20th anniversary of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders[[2]](#footnote-2), there is a candidacy with a growing number of supporters: that in favour of human rights defenders.**

**Who are human rights defenders?**

Defenders are women and men who, individually or in association with others, act peacefully to promote and defend fundamental rights. Human rights defenders work to ensure that public policies, corporate activities as well as activities by other non-state actors are rethought to ensure that the fundamental rights of each individual are respected. In many countries, they do so at great risk to their lives. Many are victims of intimidation, repression, arbitrary arrests and torture. Since 1998, more than 3,500 defenders have been murdered[[3]](#footnote-3).

Some human rights defenders make the headlines when they are targeted and their situation deteriorates dramatically. Such is the case for filmmaker Oleg Sentsov, currently imprisoned; activist and female politician Marielle Franco, who was murdered last March; Helena Maleno, prosecuted for helping migrants; and nine environmental activists arrested last February on charges of spying. Most defenders are ordinary citizens. They are not necessarily people who have had a career in the legal field or who work for non-governmental organizations. They are often individuals or collectives who have stood up against injustice and inequality, and who have decided to act in solidarity and in humanism. In France, defenders of sexual and gender diversity, whistle-blowers or people mobilising for the protection of migrants are among the activists who often take courageous positions and recall the French State's commitments in the field of international law.

**Why the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize?**

Twenty years after the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, the situation is alarming. Many states are increasingly seeking to suffocate civil society; placing its activities under surveillance, stigmatizing human rights activists and increasing reprisals against them. As these people are precisely the ones who protect us from attacks on democracy and individual freedoms and from the destruction of the environment, it is urgent to recognize their collective role for peace.

While in the past, prominent human rights defenders have been awarded this dignified prize, it has never been awarded to a community of individuals. However, it is very often entire communities that mobilize to defend their rights, dignity and freedom, thus highlighting the collective dimension of the struggle for human rights.

In an open letter[[4]](#footnote-4), more than 220 organizations around the world, including all major international human rights organizations, called for support for this candidacy. A petition is also circulating on the change.org website[[5]](#footnote-5).

If the Nobel Peace Prize is awarded to the community of defenders, Michel Forst, together with Mrs. Hina Jilani and Mrs. Margaret Sekaggya, the two previous UN Special Rapporteurs, will collect it on their behalf.

**Who is the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders?**

The role of Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders was established in 2000 by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (replaced by the Human Rights Council). Since June 2014, this position has been held by the Frenchman, Michel Forst.

Acting independently, the Special Rapporteur's main tasks are to provide information on the risks and threats faced by defenders, to intervene directly with Governments when they are in danger, and also to make recommendations to better protect them.

Since taking office, Michel Forst has made himself accessible to defenders, in particular through numerous visits to different countries and his work on social networks[[6]](#footnote-6).

From 29 to 31 October 2018, and with the participation of the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders, Michel Forst, more than 200 human rights defenders from all over the world will gather in Paris for the 2nd World Summit of Human Rights Defenders. A delegation from this summit will then take the defenders' message to international bodies, including to a high-level meeting at the General Assembly in New York on 17 December 2018.

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1. [www.un.org/fr/universal-declaration-human-rights/](http://www.un.org/fr/universal-declaration-human-rights/) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Defenders/Declaration/declaration\_fr.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Defenders/Declaration/declaration_fr.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [www.amnesty.ie/remembering-killed-defending-human-rights/](http://www.amnesty.ie/remembering-killed-defending-human-rights/) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. https://peacebrigades.org.uk/open-civil-society-letter-support-nobel-peace-prize-human-rights-defenders [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. [www.change.org/p/human-rights-defenders-for-the-nobel-peace-prize?recruiter=899168509&utm\_source=share\_petition&utm\_medium=email&utm\_campaign=undefined](http://www.change.org/p/human-rights-defenders-for-the-nobel-peace-prize?recruiter=899168509&utm_source=share_petition&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=undefined) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See in particular the website dedicated to his mandate www.protecting-defenders.org/fr and his twitter account @ForstMichel. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)