

Welcome speech at the ceremony  
of the 2020 Olof Palme Prize in Stockholm

A warm welcome to you all to this first-ever digital ceremony of the Olof Palme Prize.

A very special welcome to **Patrisse Cullors**, co-founder of *Black Lives Matter* together with Alicia Garza and Opal Tometi, and today you are the Executive Director of the *Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation*.

1.

The struggle against racism and xenophobia, antisemitism and islamophobia, and for civil and equal rights and human dignity for all is deeply anchored in the history and action of the Olof Palme Memorial Fund, ever since its creation in 1987.

Let me give a few examples of recipients of our annual Prize, who were all in the frontline for human and civil rights.

The first recipient of the Olof Palme Prize, 34 years ago, was **Cyril Ramaphosa** Secretary General of the National Union of Mineworkers of South Africa, today South Africa's president. Three years later the Prize went to the French activist **Harlem Désir** and his organization **SOS Racism**. It continued with one of the first Chinese human rights advocate **Wei Jingsheng** and **a group of Swedish antiracists**. In 2000 we honoured **Bryan Stevenson**, the Alabama-based lawyer and founder of **The Equal Justice Initiative**. Later came the Palestinian fighter for human rights **Hanan Ashrawi** and the Russian human rights activists **Ljudmila Aleksejeva**, **Sergej Kovaljov** and **Anna Politkovskaja**, followed by **Kofi Annan** at the UN, the Iranian democrat and feminist **Parvid Ardalan**, and human rights lawyers **Radhia Nasraoui** in Tunisia and **Waleed Sami**

**Abu al-Khair** in Saudi Arabia. Waleed is **still** languishing in a Saudian hellhole.

Over the last years, we honoured the artist and Roma people defender **Rosa Taikon** and two Holocaust survivors , **Hedi Fried** and **Emerich Roth** for their life-long and exceptional educational work against Nazism and racism

And let us not forget the very latest ones, **Daniel Ellsberg** and **John Le Carré**.

Ellsberg, who saved tens of thousands of lives during the Vietnam war by revealing the dreadful secrets of the Pentagon and CIA, and Le Carré, who in his much read “spy novels” exposed the cynical power games of the major powers and the alarming rise of fascism and xenophobia in Europe and the United States of America.

Today, one year later, we mourn and honour John Le Carré, who passed away last December.

2.

Olof Palme himself was in that same frontline. His first political action, according to himself, was in 1946 when he donated blood, at the age of 20, in a solidarity campaign for students in apartheid South Africa.

Two years later that his solidarity matured into politics and laid the ground to a lifelong engagement in the cause of social justice. After graduating at Kenyon College in the United States in 1948, he hitchhiked through thirty-four states, taking odd jobs when he could. And he was chocked by the poverty and racism in the world’s self-proclaimed foremost democracy.

In 1970 he returned to Kenyon for a guest lecture. Young Palme spoke about pollution, unsafe working conditions,

growing military spending, gaps between rich and poor. “These issues”, he said, “cannot be resolved by politicians alone. They can only be overcome with the organized help of the people”. He continued: “To defend the status quo means to regress from bad to worse. Stability can be gained only by social change.”

15 years later in 1985 he spoke at a rock gala in Gothenburg, Sweden, in support of the South African liberation movement ANC. Palme quoted the imprisoned Nelson Mandela, who had refused to be released from his cell with the argument: “I don’t want to be set free on white men’s conditions, I want to be free on my own terms, on the conditions of the black people”.

Palme finished by reminding the public and the assembled elite of Swedish rock: “Sweden has supported the ANC for over 20 years. And that will continue”.

Palme’s last ever speech, took place at a meeting of the *Swedish People against Apartheid*, on 21 February 1986. His final words were: “Apartheid only exists because it gets support from abroad. If the world decides to eliminate apartheid, then apartheid will disappear”.

3.

Dear Patrisse Cullors,

The fact that the former regional super power, in apartheid South Africa, the racist regime could be resisted and overcome, is an indication that the illusion of white supremacy in the United States will also disappear in all its ignominy, as it will world-wide if we so decide.

For this to happen important social and economic changes must be introduced so that the citizen at large will feel that the system is working for all in an equitable and just way.

As Olof Palme said: “Stability can be gained only by social change.” This goes also for Sweden of course.

In your country organizations like yours have a key role to play. Your struggle has been long and hard. After four dark, horrible years we may hope for a new dawn. There is a hill to be climbed. If we did not see it ourselves, a 22- year old poet on the steps of the Capitolium just reminded us of that:

*”For there is always light, if only we’re brave enough to see it. If only we’re brave enough to be it.”*

Therefore, dear Patrisse Cullors, creator of the#BlackLivesMatter hashtag in 2013, these words are for you:

*The 2020 Olof Palme Prize is awarded to the international civil rights movement **Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation**, with roots in the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement founded by Patrice Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi in 2013.*

*Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation is working for peaceful civil disobedience against police brutality and racial violence all over the world. The BLM movement at large has in a unique way exposed the hardship, pain, and wrath of the African- American minority at not being valued equal to people of a different color.*

*Black Lives Matter had its great national and international breakthrough in the summer of 2020, in connection with a number of cases of extreme brutality. In the United States alone, an estimated twenty million people have taken part in Black Lives Matter protests, and millions more have made their voices heard all over the world. This illustrates that racism and racist violence is not just a problem in American society, but a global problem, including Sweden. That the all*

*powerful raised voices of African Americans resonate so strongly also internationally, shows that this in essence is about global threats to human dignity and fundamental human rights: BLACK LIVES MATTER!*

<http://www.svenskatal.se/19851130-olof-palme-tal-om-nelson-mandela-pa-angalan-1985>)

<http://www.svenskatal.se/19860221-olof-palme-anforande-vid-svensk-folkriksdag-mot-apartheid>

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