

Welcome speech Olof Palme Prize 2023

Dear friends,

It is my honour to welcome all of you to the 2023 Olof Palme Prize ceremony. Of course, we extend a special welcome to the three award laureates.

- Marta Chumalo - present in person,
- Eren Keskin attending via link and
- Narges Mohammadi, who cannot attend - she is in prison because of her struggle for women's rights. Narges is represented by her husband Taghi Rahmani.

In different ways all three laureates are with us here today, we are glad and honoured by your presence. A warm welcome!

The Olof Palme Memorial Fund for International Understanding and Common Security was established by Olof Palme's family and by the Social Democratic Party to honour his memory.

The Fund's purpose is, on one hand through scholarships and grants,

- to give opportunities to young people for international exchange and for studies of peace and disarmament.
- to support work against racism and xenophobia, and
- to encourage work for international understanding and common security.

The other purpose is an annual Olof Palme Prize, awarded for an outstanding achievement in the spirit of Olof Palme, to be chosen by the Fund's Board. The Prize consists of a diploma and 100.000 US dollars.

I am very proud to have been elected chairperson of the fund, last year, after Pierre Schori who held the position for an impressive 25 years!

I had the privilege of meeting Olof Palme twice:

- In 1981 the 50-year memorial ceremony of the shooting of workers in Lunde, Ådalen. A young shy trade unionist handed over a paper and asked for an autograph - and got it.
- In 1985 when Olof Palme visited the enterprise I worked at and I had the honour of being our trade unions representative during the visit.

He has been an inspiration to me for more than 50 years. To this very day and in the future a remarkable man who will continue inspiring people. Both for all that he did domestically but not least because he took Sweden out into the world **and** the world into Sweden.

Both the prize **and** scholarships are important as a gratitude to the recipients - but it's even deeper than that. It is also symbols of the legacy that is our responsibility to cherish. It shows the importance of one person's life's work, something we still are inspired by and will continue being inspired by. Olof Palme is still important to us.

The Fund's scholarships that I just mentioned contain some key words:

- **Racism** reminds of how important it is to always stand up for the equal human value, not least in a time when racism has become a stronger threat.
- **Common security** reminds us of Olof Palme's contribution to security policies in the world with his UN report with the very same title.
- **Youth** reminds us of the importance to engage the generation that will be handed the torch and the responsibility for the future.

Dear friends,

Today's ceremony addresses a very important cause that it's somehow strange that we still must address as something that is far from a reality – girls' and women's rights. Let reality speak for itself:

- 178 countries maintain legal barriers that prevent women's full economic participation, according to the World Bank's Women, Business and the Law 2022 report.
- In 86 countries, women face some form of job restriction and 95 countries do not guarantee equal pay for equal work.
- Globally, women still have only three quarters of the legal rights afforded to men.
- Around half of the countries in the world have achieved gender parity in primary education.

And the gap widens in higher education - in upper secondary school only about a quarter of the countries have achieved gender parity.

- About one in three women worldwide have been subjected to physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime.

And we can now witness women's rights being limited and/or attacked even further by governments in several countries.

The protests and activism for women's rights in Iran after the murder of Mahsa Jina Amini are ongoing, showing courage and determination.

A UN policy paper last September showed that the impact of the war in Ukraine is affecting women and girls disproportionately. The raping and sexual violence alone is terrifying.

Turkey hosted the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention in 2011 but was the first country to leave the treaty. The violence against and murdering of women is increasing.

All this can be summarised in two words: fundamental inequality, and it is a disgrace to our world. Oppression, violence, restricted freedom, limited future dreams, limited lives.

That is the direct consequences for so many of our fellow human beings. It is indeed a shame. So, this is a moral issue, an ethical issue and that is why women's rights are human rights!

Another perspective we need to highlight, beside the moral perspective, is that inequity is a serious disadvantage for the whole world, for both men and women, because when the potential of half of the world's population is so limited, we miss so many opportunities in our societies, economies, in our communities.

According to the World Bank, long-run GDP per capita, on average would be almost 20% higher if gender employment gaps were closed. Studies estimate economic gains around 5-6 trillion USD if women started and scaled new businesses at the same rate men do.

Closing gender gap in the agricultural sector can support food production and empower women. In a country like Tanzania alone it would mean 80 000 more people adequately nourished!

All this should be easy to see, to recognize and be fully understood. As Malala Yousafzai have said: "I raise my voice – not so that I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard. We cannot all succeed when half of us is held back".

This very ceremony is therefore both a sincere appreciation of three brave women in a tireless fight for women's rights, but also a cry out to the world for devoted and systematic common efforts in the struggle against oppression of women and struggle for real equality, for a world where women and men are standing side by side in community.

This prize ceremony is a statement that the Olof Palme Foundation is standing right next to the girls and women of the world. Just like Olof Palme did, just like he would have wanted us to do. His never-ending struggle for equal rights of all people included the gender perspective in an obvious way. He was a feminist.

In 1972 he made a historic speech at the Social democratic party's congress, stating "We want to remove the obstacles that have always existed and still exist for women's equal rights and equal opportunities". It is sad that we still have so much to do to accomplish that, and it also challenges us to never give up that fight, not until it is achieved. Women's rights are human rights!

Dear friends,

The Olof Palme Prize 2023 is awarded to:

Marta Chumalo, Ukraine,

Eren Keskin, Turkey and

Narges Mohammadi, Iran.

For their efforts in the fight to secure women's freedom, in an age when human rights are threatened by war, violence and oppression. Throughout their lives and through their actions, these three women, along with many of their sisters in struggle, have inspired others and paved the way for courageous young women and men to continue fighting for the fundamental human rights of all people.

Marta Chumalo is a feminist, gender expert and psychologist. As one of the founders of the centre “Women’s Perspectives”, she has been working to support women exposed to violence for twenty years.

Since 2014, and especially since Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Marta Chumalo has been heavily involved in raising awareness about the effects of the war, and in addressing the needs of its victims. Amongst other things, Marta Chumalo is demanding an effective implementation of the Istanbul Convention to support victims of sexual violence in the war.

Eren Keskin is a human rights lawyer who has spent decades defending those discriminated against in her country: ethnic minorities, LGBTQI+ people and refugees. She has been subjected to accusations and death threats, as well as hundreds of prosecutions. She has also been imprisoned for her beliefs, with Amnesty International declaring her a prisoner of conscience.

By establishing The Association of Legal Aid Against Sexual Violence, she has succeeded in having several senior military and authority figures prosecuted over the years.

Narges Mohammadi is a journalist and human rights activist who has been a central figure in the struggle for women's rights and freedom of speech in Iran. She is one of the founders of the Iranian National Peace Council and a figurehead in organisations such as Defenders of Human Rights Centre and Legam (the Campaign for Step-by-Step Abolition of the Death Penalty).

Her involvement has led to her repeated arrest, and she has served several prison terms. Since November 2021, she has been incarcerated in the infamous Evin Prison, convicted of "propaganda activity against the state."

These are the motivations expressed by the board of the fund and it is now my pleasure to give the floor to the board's vice chairperson who will conduct the awarding. Please Joakim Palme!