

## Human rights defenders from Russia, Afghanistan and Balkan region shortlisted for 2015 Václav Havel Prize

Strasbourg, 25.08.2015 - Veteran Russian human rights defender Ludmilla Alexeeva, the grassroots NGO Women for Afghan Women and the Balkan NGO Youth Initiative for Human Rights have been shortlisted for the 2015 Václav Havel Human Rights Prize, it was announced in Prague today.

The 60,000-euro annual prize honours individuals or organisations judged to have undertaken "outstanding civil society action in defence of human rights in Europe and beyond". Now in its third year, the prize is sponsored by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), the Czech Government, the Václav Havel Library and the Charta 77 Foundation.

The three shortlisted nominees, presented here in alphabetical order, will be invited to attend a ceremony on the opening day of the Parliamentary Assembly's autumn plenary session in Strasbourg, Monday 28 September, when the final selection of this year's overall prizewinner will be announced.

The selection panel, made up of six independent human rights experts and chaired by PACE President Anne Brasseur, met today in Prague to choose the three from among dozens of nominations submitted from around the world before the 30 April deadline.

Speaking at a press conference today at Prague's Kampa Museum, Ms Brasseur said: "The panel was deeply impressed by the courage and dedication of all three of this year's shortlisted nominees, who work in very difficult conditions. We want to show our solidarity with them, and our support for the values they strive to uphold. They all do outstanding work, and it will be no easy task to choose a final prizewinner in September."

- [Ludmilla Alexeeva](#), now aged 88, is a veteran human rights defender in her native Russia. In her youth, she gave up a promising academic career to join the Soviet dissident movement, going on to become a founding member of the Moscow Helsinki Group. Forced to emigrate to the US in 1977, she returned to Russia in 1989 to continue her work, becoming President of the International Helsinki Foundation and later joining the Russian President's Commission on Human Rights. She has worked relentlessly for the protection and promotion of the rule of law.
- [Women for Afghan Women](#) is the largest shelter-providing NGO in Afghanistan, working in 11 provinces to protect the rights of disenfranchised Afghan women and girls. A grassroots organisation, it has helped young women who have suffered mutilation, torture, attempted murder and rape, among others. Its activities include running womens' shelters, family guidance centres, children support centres and "halfway houses" for women leaving prison.
- [The Youth Initiative for Human Rights](#) works to re-establish bonds between young people in the Balkan region, protecting victims of human rights abuses and promoting transitional justice. Projects managed by its different regional organisations include organising youth exchanges, helping activists in isolated communities, facilitating dialogue on human rights issues, and working to demystify the recent past and build mutual trust.

[Prize website](#)  
[Announcement](#)

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PACE contact: Angus Macdonald, tel. +33 3 88 41 34 39

Václav Havel Library contact: Marta Smolíková, tel. +420 603 89 75 82

Charta 77 Foundation contact: Julie Ruzicková, tel: +420 702 001 962



The Assembly brings together 324 members from the national parliaments of the 47 member states.  
President: Anne Brasseur (ALDE) - Secretary General of the Assembly: Wojciech Sawicki.  
Political groups: EPP/CD (Group of the European People's Party); SOC (Socialist Group);  
EC (European Conservatives Group); ALDE (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe);  
UEL (Group of the Unified European Left).