

IPA Prix Voltaire, 2016
Acceptance speech by Ensaf Haidar (delivered in Arabic)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have travelled to be here with you from Quebec, carrying in my heart and mind one thought – one burden: to defend my beloved husband Raif Badawi, who is spending his fourth year in prison for doing nothing more than exercising his right to expression.

I have left three innocent little children behind me. They long for their beloved father, and the pain they endure because of his absence defies words.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Raif Badawi is merely a peaceful thinker: he refused to be part of the herd that follows a clergy that lives in a bygone era and ruling with a law of injustice and tyranny. He is a symbol for all in the Middle East and North Africa who wish to express their opinions peacefully and exercise their rights to freedom of thought, religion, and consciousness.

If you'll allow me to read from an article my husband wrote and published before his imprisonment – he said:

“The freedom of Expression is the air that any thinker breathes and is the fuel that ignites the fire of his/her ideas. And through the ages, nations and societies have only been able to progress through their thinkers: because it is through what they present of philosophy and thought that people were able to choose the appropriate intellectual style, develop and improve it to allow them to attain the seas of science, progress, civilization and prosperity.

“Many human rights organizations and societies across the globe are calling on Arab regimes to introduce more reforms in the field of freedom of expression. They are doing that because they believe that it is a simple human right: you are human, then you have a right to express and think as you wish; you also have the right to publicly express what you believe in; you have a right to believe and to think, just as you have a right to love or to hate.”

Because of these words and others, my husband was sentenced to 10 years in prison, 1,000 lashes, and a 10-year travel and media ban. What he demanded was not a revolution. It was merely a simple unwavering conviction that change is possible – that change is necessary in his beloved country.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank you sincerely for awarding Raif Badawi your distinguished prize. This great prize is number 16 of the international awards Raif has received in less than two years, in addition to his nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize.

This important support and recognition goes beyond the issue of Raif Badawi. It tells him and other activists that they do not stand alone. It tells him and others that their demands for freedom of expression and the peaceful desire for reform in the MENA region are legitimate demands.

You honour us by awarding Raif the International Publishers Association's Prix Voltaire. I remain grateful and indebted to you. Thank you. Thank you.