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Official Records

President: Ms. Espinosa Garcés. (Ecuador)

The meeting was called to order at 12.10 p.m.

Agenda item 74 (continued)

Promotion and protection of human rights

(b) Human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms

Award ceremony for the United Nations Prize in the Field of Human Rights for 2018

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour for me to preside over the award ceremony for the United Nations Prize in the Field of Human Rights for 2018.

The adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on 10 December 1948 was a stellar moment in world history and, undoubtedly, one of the best gifts from the General Assembly to humankind. The Prize was established to celebrate the extraordinary demonstration of brotherhood and solidarity on the part of the men and women who endured two world wars and resolved to spare future generations from a recurrence. The Prize was awarded for the first time in 1968 on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Declaration. Since then, every five years more than 60 individuals and organizations from all regions of the world that have excelled in various spheres of human rights have been awarded for their contribution to maintaining the ideals of freedom, peace and justice throughout the world.

All prize winners share the vision that a better future is possible. Their work covers the rights of women, children, migrants, refugees and persons with disabilities; the abolition of slavery; the fight against racial discrimination; the call for truth, justice and reparations following forced disappearances and incidents of torture; the eradication of poverty and hunger and the condemnation of other forms of socioeconomic injustice; and the tireless quest for answers concerning human rights crimes and violations, even at the risk of their own lives and safety. Eleanor Roosevelt, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Malala Yousafzai, the International Committee of the Red Cross and Amnesty International are just a few of the well-deserving recipients of the Prize.

The Prize is being awarded for the tenth time as we celebrate the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration and pay a well-deserved tribute to those who have made it possible. I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the seamless process conducted by the special committee responsible for selecting the prize winners, under the leadership of the former President of the General Assembly, Mr. Miroslav Lajčák, to whom I pay tribute.

The Prize we award today serves not only to recognize the work of Rebeca Gyumi, Joênia Wapichana, the Front Line Defenders organization and Asma Jahangir, who, regrettably, is no longer with us; it also serves as a thank you to all human rights defenders, wherever they are located, because their sacrifice and constant generosity help us to advance towards societies that are less unjust and unequal. We

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would like to convey our support and admiration to those human rights defenders. Their efforts prove that action matters and a difference can always be made.

As President of the General Assembly, I would like to congratulate in particular those who will receive 2018 prize and urge them not to lose faith or give up. I know that the path they have chosen is the most difficult because it calls for them to fight every day. Although their victories may at times be temporary, their efforts are worth it. Such victories are necessary because they have the potential to change the fate of the world. The prizewinners are part of that hope and, for that reason, we will always be grateful to them.

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. António Guterres.

The Secretary-General: As we celebrate the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it is important to recognize the human rights defenders working to uphold the Declaration and make human rights a reality for all. Today, we recognize the outstanding contributions of three individuals and one organization chosen as the recipients of the United Nations Prize in the Field of Human Rights for 2018, which has been awarded every five years since 1968.

I would like to pay tribute to Rebeca Gyumi of Tanzania, an activist for education rights for girls; Asma Jahangir of Pakistan, the late human rights lawyer; Joênia Batista de Carvalho, Brazil's first indigenous woman lawyer; and to Front Line Defenders of Ireland, working to protect human rights defenders at risk. Their work and that of other human rights defenders around the world is essential for our collective efforts to sustain peace and ensure inclusive sustainable development and respect for human rights for all.

Often their work is dangerous. We regularly hear of abuses against human rights defenders — murder, disappearances, torture, arbitrary imprisonment and other attempts to silence them. Yet, those courageous individuals and groups remain committed to shining a light on the dark corners of the globe wherever human rights violations occur.

Human rights defenders give voice to the voiceless and shield the powerless against injustice. They stand for all rights — economic, civil, political, social and cultural. They support the rule of law or work peacefully to change laws so that women and girls, indigenous communities, minorities and other marginalized

groups can exercise their rights. They work to empower people through education and they help to protect other human rights defenders from harassment, intimidation or arrest.

We salute them all. Tonight's awardees share that honorary Prize with other notable defenders who have received it during the past 50 years. As the President has said, they include Eleanor Roosevelt, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Jimmy Carter, Malala Yousafzai and this year's Nobel Peace Prize winners, Denis Mukwege and Nadia Murad, as well as organizations, such as Amnesty International and the International Committee of the Red Cross. They join a prestigious list and I congratulate them. The international community is grateful for their efforts to promote all human rights for all people and thanks them for their essential role in advancing peace, sustainable development and human dignity in our world.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

In accordance with decision 73/509 of 28 November, I now give the floor to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Ms. Bachelet (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights): It is an enormous pleasure and honour to welcome the recipients of the 2018 United Nations Prize in the Field of Human Rights. I am moved, not only by their great courage and tenacity but also by the impact of their achievements. Defending human rights is not just a novel act in itself but an essential part of how resilient societies solve problems, right wrongs and advance towards peace, inclusion and sustainable prosperity.

When Asma Jahangir founded Pakistan's first legal aid centre in 1968, its defence for the rights of women, children, religious minorities and the poor helped strengthen the rule of law as a force for better governance. She inspired a generation of human rights defenders well beyond the borders of her country. When we lost her, an entire community mourned deeply.

Rebeca Gyumi's work has helped to change the laws on child marriage in Tanzania — an immeasurable benefit, not only to generations of young women but also to the economy and society as a whole. Her work on girls' empowerment and education continues to drive awareness of human rights and the commitment

of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to leave no one behind.

Joênia Wapichana is the first indigenous lawyer to argue a case before the Supreme Court of Brazil. Her successful advocacy has protected the rights of the Macushi, Wapichana, Ingarikó, Taurepan and Patamona people to their ancestral land and cultures. She stands for an inclusive approach to development, based on human rights and social justice, which can facilitate the peaceful coexistence of peoples in Brazil.

Front Line Defenders is an organization that brings rapid and practical support every year to more than 2,000 human rights defenders at risk. Its support ranges from protection grants, training and capacity-building in physical and digital security to an emergency communications hotline and constant campaigning. We honour and commend the principled and courageous support it brings to the defence of human rights defenders, who often operate in a climate of growing restrictions and under the threat of violence, stigma, legal punishment and even death.

The recipients and the global community of human rights defenders to which they belong are an inspiration. The impact of their struggle for greater justice, dignity and equality extends across their communities and countries. It also extends to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, which I am honoured to lead, and to the United Nations as a whole. We are eager to hear their concerns and advice. We welcome their achievements.

The United Nations Prize in the Field of Human Rights is one of the oldest and most distinguished awards of its kind. It was established by the General Assembly in 1966 to recognize outstanding contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Both the President of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General have mentioned many of the previous recipients.

The Prize is an opportunity to give public recognition to their struggle and to send a clear message of support and gratitude to human rights defenders all over the world. It reminds us all of the high stakes and deep value of their work, which is also our work. Standing up for the human rights of our fellow human beings builds stronger societies, which are based on justice instead of fear, dignity instead of exploitation and respect instead of humiliation, contempt and discrimination. I extend my heartfelt congratulations

to the 2018 recipients of the United Nations Prize in the Field of Human Rights for their tremendous work and achievements, which inspire all of us present here today and many more around the world.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with resolution 2217 (XXI) A, adopted by the General Assembly at its twenty-first session on 19 December 1966, four prizes are to be awarded this year to three individuals and one organization that have made outstanding contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The award recipients for 2018 are the following.

First, Rebeca Gyumi is the founder and Executive Director of the Msichana Initiative, a Tanzanian civil society organization that aims to empower girls through education and addresses challenges which limit girls' rights to education. Ms. Gyumi has worked for more than eight years with a youth organization, as a television personality and youth advocate. Ms. Gyumi challenged the constitutionality of articles 13 and 17 of the Law of Marriage Act of 1971 that allowed girls to marry at the age of 14 and 15 with parental consent or with the court's sanction. She won the case before the High Court of Tanzania in 2016.

Secondly, Asma Jahangir is receiving the award posthumously. She was Pakistan's leading human rights lawyer. For three decades, she defended the rights of women, children, religious minorities and the poor. Having founded the first legal aid centre in Pakistan in 1986, Ms. Jahangir courageously took on and won very complicated cases. She was threatened, assaulted in public and placed under house arrest for defending human rights. Ms. Jahangir was elected as the first female President of the Supreme Court Bar Association of Pakistan and co-founded and was the first Chairperson of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. Ms. Jahangir also served as United Nations Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, arbitrary or summary executions, then as the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief and, subsequently, as the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Thirdly, Joênia Wapichana is the first female indigenous lawyer in Brazil and a member of the Wapichana tribe of northern Brazil. After taking a land dispute to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Ms. Wapichana became the first indigenous lawyer to appear before the Supreme Court of Brazil.

In 2013, she was appointed as the first President of the National Commission for the Defence of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Fourthly, Front Line Defenders or The International Foundation for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders is a human rights organization founded in Dublin in 2001 to protect human rights defenders at risk. The organization works to address the protection needs identified by defenders themselves and to enable them to continue their work without the risk of harassment, intimidation or arrest.

I will now present the awards. I kindly request delegations to reserve their applause until the last award has been presented.

I now call to the podium the first recipient, Ms. Rebeca Gyumi, to receive the award.

Ms. Rebeca Gyumi was escorted to the podium.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the United Nations, this award is presented to you in recognition of your outstanding contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

I now call to the podium Ms. Munizae Jahangir, who is receiving the award on behalf of her mother, the late Ms. Asma Jahangir.

Ms. Munizae Jahangir was escorted to the podium.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the United Nations, this award is presented to Ms. Asma Jahangir in recognition of her outstanding contributions

to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

I now call to the podium the third recipient, Ms. Joênia Wapichana, to receive the award.

Ms. Joênia Wapichana was escorted to the podium.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the United Nations, this award is presented to Ms. Joênia Wapichana in recognition of her outstanding contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

I now call to the podium the fourth recipient, Ms. Maryam Alkhawaja, who is receiving the award on behalf of Front Line Defenders.

Ms. Maryam Alkhawaja was escorted to the podium.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the United Nations, this award is presented to Ms. Maryam Alkhawaja in recognition of the outstanding contributions of Front Line Defenders to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The winners of the United Nations Prizes in the Field of Human Rights for 2018 are hereby presented to the members of the General Assembly.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now declare closed the award ceremony of the United Nations Prizes in the Field of Human Rights for 2018.

The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 74.

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.