

Article – Sakharov Prize: 2018 laureate Oleg Sentsov receives his award



The Ukrainian film director and human rights activist was able to collect the [2018 prize for Freedom of Thought](#) after being released from jail on 7 September as part of a prisoner exchange deal between Russia and Ukraine. He was imprisoned for protesting Russia's annexation of his native Crimea on Independence Square in Kyiv.

Awarding the prize, Parliament President David Sassoli said: "You have clearly stood by your principles and convictions, Mr Sentsov, for which you have paid a very high price of freedom. No person should ever pay for that."

Sassoli praised the courage of freedom fighters who speak up when human rights are being violated. "Mr Sentsov had been released but many others, including bloggers and journalists like Stanislav Aseyev, are still held hostage in Eastern Ukraine. We call for them to be freed."

Receiving the prize, Sentsov said: "It is a huge honour and a huge responsibility to receive this prize. I accept and take this prize not as a personal honour, but as a prize to all Ukrainian political prisoners that have been in Russian prisons and to all that are still there." He praised the EU and its democratic values and criticised Russia's "militarist" practices.

About Oleg Sentsov

[Sentsov](#) is a Ukrainian film director, sentenced to 20 years in prison for “plotting terrorist acts” against Russian de facto rule in Crimea. Amnesty International has described the court process as “an unfair trial before a military court”.

He has become a symbol for the approximately 70 Ukrainian citizens illegally arrested and given long prison sentences by the Russian occupation forces in the Crimean peninsula.

Sentsov was on hunger strike from mid-May until 6 October 2018, when he ended it under threat of being force-fed.

Watch our [video](#) to find out more about him.

The 2018 finalists

Find out more about the other finalists for the 2018 prize – the NGOs protecting human rights and saving migrant lives across the Mediterranean Sea; and Nasser Zefzafi, the leader of Hirak, a mass protest movement in the Rif region in Morocco – in this [article](#).

More on the Sakharov Prize

The Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, named in honour of the Soviet physicist and political dissident Andrei Sakharov, has been awarded annually since 1988 to individuals and organisations defending human rights and fundamental freedoms.