**In support of human rights and democracy**

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In today’s article I shall focus on the important work of human rights organisations, generally, and in countries with limited democracy and freedoms, prompted by this year’s Nobel Peace Prize awarded to human rights and democratic organisations. Well over half of the world’s close to 200 countries are listed as democratic, while twenty to thirty are autocratic, and the rest, fifty-sixty countries are mixed, with some democratic features and other autocratic ones.

Even in the most democratic countries, such as Scandinavia, there is still a need for outside control of government and private institutions, organisations and companies to see how well they do as regards human rights and other issues, how well they follow regulations and intentions and letters of the laws. Labour unions and employers’ organisations are important to reduce and avoid the exploitation of workers. In the social sectors, education, health, and so on, it is important that there is insight and control from watchdogs. As regards special education and the rights of all people with special needs, there are often huge discrepancies between goals and the actual situation.

[PTI's Azam Swati arrested in prohibited funding case](https://www.nation.com.pk/13-Oct-2022/pti-s-azam-swati-arrested-in-foreign-funding-case)

In all societies, there is a need for independent organisations to keep an eye on what goes on. The governments, too, evaluate and monitor activities, but independent and neutral organisations are also needed. The more developed a country is democratic, the better the control and openness. Often, there is consensus on goals but there is a lack of implementations.

Human and democratic rights are the foundations of developing good and lawful societies for all. The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights from 1948 provides the overall guidelines. But there is a need for detailing and concretising the fine words and good intentions, and there must be control of implementation. Observance of human rights is part and parcel of democratic development in all countries.

The Nobel Peace Prize for 2022 was awarded to human rights and democratic organisations. The winners were announced last Friday by the Norwegian Nobel Committee. The world’s most prestigious prize, as it is often called, is shared by three winners, one individual and two organisations, from Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine. The prize winners represent the human rights and democracy movements in their countries. In a broader sense, the prize is also observing the important role of interest and civil society organisations in all countries.

[Another alleged audio of PM Shehbaz Sharif leaks online](https://www.nation.com.pk/13-Oct-2022/another-alleged-audio-of-pm-shehbaz-sharif-leaks-online)

It is certainly time to focus on these issues in the three countries at a time when there is war in Europe. Russia has invaded Ukraine and a terrible war has raged since 24 February this year. The US and Europe provide weapons and other support to Ukraine, and some will say some of that fuels the war. Four or five million people from Ukraine have fled to other countries, and as many are displaced within Ukraine. Belarus is an ally of Russia, and the country has had political unrest related to its questionable elections and autocratic rule. Several thousand members of the political opposition and human rights movement are imprisoned, including this year’s winner of the Nobel Prize.

The chair of the Norwegian Nobel Committee Berit Reiss-Andersen said that she wished that the distinguished laureate from Belarus, Ales Bialiatski (60) of the ‘Viasna Human Rights Centre, and also affiliated with other human rights and pro-democracy groups, would be released from his detention without trial so that he could attend the award-winning ceremony in Oslo on 10 December. The winner’s wife hoped for that, too, but both she and Reiss-Andersen said it was perhaps an unrealistic hope. Ales Bialiatski, called the pillar of human rights and democratic development in Eastern Europe, has been imprisoned twice, first from 2011-2014, and this time from 2021.

[World 'more united’ after UN vote condemning Russia: Biden](https://www.nation.com.pk/13-Oct-2022/world-more-united-after-un-vote-condemning-russia-biden)

In the home countries of the prize winners, there is a major lack of freedoms, democracy and human rights, now and in the past. Although the prize winners are certainly deserving and good choices, we should also know that many other individuals and organisations could also have been chosen in those countries, and other countries in Europe, America, and the rest of the wide world.

The Nobel Peace Prize this year can be seen as a way of criticising Russia and the autocratic culture there, as well as in Belarus and Ukraine. Yet, it is also a much wider call for democracy and observance of human rights in all countries in the world. When the Nobel Peace Prize was announced, Berit Reiss-Andersen was asked by a journalist if the prize was against President Putin. She said it was not, and she went on to stress that the Nobel Committee would generally not award prizes against someone, rather it would award prizes that could give support to positive work of people and organisations.

[Pakistan abstains as UN demands Russia to reverse illegal annexations in Ukraine](https://www.nation.com.pk/13-Oct-2022/pakistan-abstains-as-un-demands-russia-to-reverse-illegal-annexations-in-ukraine)

The Russian prize-winning organisation, ‘Memorial’, was established in 1987 during the time of the Soviet Union, focusing its work on documenting the state’s abuse of power against individuals at that time. Earlier, President Putin honoured the organisation through his presence at events. But last year, the Memorial was closed by the Russian government. Still, the work has not ended entirely but continues informally by the organisations’ members. It has also established an office in Vilnius, Lithuania.

It is interesting to know that the Memorial was established by people who became famous for pro-democracy and human rights activism before the fall of the Soviet Union. The widow of Boris Yeltsin, Russian President from 1991-1999, sent congratulations to Memorial when this year’s Nobel Prize was announced.

Let me suggest that human rights organisations are respected by most people, even those who are criticised, but they also fear and dislike such organisations if criticism affects them. In Ukraine, some top officials have this year criticised the Nobel Committee for having included a Ukrainian organisation among the winners, notably the ‘Centre for Civil Liberties’. The organisation, founded in 2007, focuses its work on documenting human rights abuses, this time with a focus on war crimes in the ongoing war. If it does its work well, as I am sure it does, that would most likely also lead to criticism of the Ukraine government, but most likely more so of the Russian attacker.

[Supreme Judicial Council approves regularization of 11 LHC judges](https://www.nation.com.pk/13-Oct-2022/supreme-judicial-council-approves-regularization-of-11-lhc-judges)

I believe that everyone admires the brave and important work of the people behind this year’s Nobel Peace Prize, even those who are criticised for their work. Those who benefit from their work would certainly be grateful. Somehow, we should open our hearts and give room for opposing political views in society, and civil society organisations. We should thank those who stand on the barricades, bringing life and politics ahead, often at a high price for themselves.

The Belarusian Nobel Peace Prize laureate Ales Bialiatski is not only a great leader of human rights and pro-democracy work, which he has championed since the beginning of the 1980s but he is also said to be a particularly good human being, humble and decent in all ways, showing the way and teaching all of us to be as good human beings as we can, thus contributing to creating a better world.