

The Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought 2024

María Corina Machado and Edmundo González Urrutia are the 2024 winners of the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought.

María Corina Machado, the leader of the democratic forces in Venezuela, and Edmundo González Urrutia, President-elect, represent all Venezuelans inside and outside the country fighting to restore freedom and democracy.

María Corina Machado won the primary elections in 2023, which should have allowed her to run as the candidate of the democratic opposition in the 2024 presidential elections. However, after she was arbitrarily disqualified from holding public office by the Venezuelan regime, Edmundo González Urrutia became the candidate.

In the lead-up to the July 2024 elections, there was widespread repression, including political disqualifications, arrests and human rights violations. Venezuela's incumbent president, Nicolás Maduro, declared victory in the elections, but the results were contested by independent observers, including the UN. The European Parliament recognised Edmundo González Urrutia as the legitimate president of Venezuela in a resolution in September 2024.

Amid protests and political repression, María Corina Machado went into hiding, fearing for her life. On 2 September 2024, a Venezuelan court issued an arrest warrant for Edmundo González Urrutia, drawing international condemnation. He moved to Spain, where he was granted asylum.

The other two finalists were: the Israeli association Women Wage Peace and Palestinian association Women of the Sun and their co-founders, whose goal is to promote peace in the Middle East; and Dr Gubad Ibadoghlu, an Azerbaijani academic and anti-corruption activist, who was arrested in 2023 after criticising Azerbaijan's oil and gas industry and creating a charity to return stolen public resources.

The Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought was set up in 1988 to honour individuals and organisations defending human rights and fundamental freedoms. It is named in honour of Soviet physicist and political dissident Andrei Sakharov and the prize money is 50 000 euro.

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