

Seán MacBride Prize Ceremony May 24 2022 in honour of the AAPP Myanmar – Speech by Phillip Jennings

Dear Friends,

It is a particular honor for me to address this Sean MacBride Prize ceremony today to honor the Assistant Association for Political Prisoners Burma and their courageous work for the victims of brutal repression in Myanmar.

In February this year the doomsday clock stood at 100 seconds to midnight the closest to midnight since it was first published in 1947.

In Myanmar that clock already struck midnight on February 21 2021 when a brutal military coup lead by a corrupt military junta decided to wage war against its people and extinguish the flame of this young democracy.

In those 15 months we have seen unrelenting brutality against the people.

Over 1600 killed.

12,500 detained.

440,000 displaced.

14 million in need of humanitarian assistance.

The regime declared war against its people.

They have committed crimes against humanity.

Mass killings, burning of villages, torture, victims found dead with hands and feet tied.

The UN has confirmed this war against the people is planned, coordinated, systematic.

The junta seeks to end the democratic changes that took place in the country during the last decade

A change brought by the people, lead by the people, desired by the people.

The country was being transformed.

As each year ticked by a sense that there was no turning back to military rule that had scarred the nation for over 50 years.

The commitment to democracy had taken root in the hearts and minds of the people.

The people refused to submit to the military jackboot.

A national protest movement emerged and surged and challenged military rule.

People from all walks of life demonstrated bravery, courage, resistance, to fight back.

The human cost has been enormous it has become a nation peopled by prisoners of conscience.

The human toll extraordinary and yet the struggle continues.

The work of the AAPP is critical. Registering the political prisoners, the status of trials and sentences, providing support to released prisoners and their families.

Since the coup they are unique in documenting every death and persons arrested.

They are a lifeline to people, hold the junta accountable, inform the world of atrocities, they tell the human truth, provide comfort and solace to families whose loved ones have disappeared, been detained, tortured, murdered.

In pursuing justice for the victims they are a spark of hope that will not be extinguished.

The AAPP brings the dignity of memory ,that there is a human life that must not be ignored or forgotten and must have access to justice.

You are worthy winners of the Sean MacBride prize.

This is a prize that marked the IPB Centenary when it was launched in 1992.

The motive was and remains to recognize people and movements who have campaigned for peace, agitated for disarmament and toiled to win respect for human rights.

We recognize those who have made good trouble for peace, that have taken a stand.

It is the highest honour that the IPB can award, it brings our global IPB family together and in these covid days we are together virtually but our spirits are entwined.

Sean MacBride passed away in 1988 and the parallels of his life and achievements and work of the AAPP are woven together.

His father was executed in the struggle for Irish independence from colonial rule.

As an adolescent he joined the struggle for Irish independence.

He was as imprisoned for his work and in his adult life continued the struggle for Irish independence.

The loss of his father, his part in the struggle provided the basis for a life dedicated to peace, disarmament and human rights.

He reached high office nationally and globally from the United Nations to the Council of Europe.

He was Secretary General of the International Commission of Jurists.

He drafted the first constitution of the Organisation of African Unity and those of African nations upon their independence.

He received both the Nobel and Lenin peace prizes.

He was the Chair and President of the IPB from 1968 to 1985.

A founder and Chair of Amnesty International from 1961 to 1975 an organization whose roots were embedded in the need to protect prisoners of conscience, political prisoners

Throughout his life he saw the fundamental relationship between peace and respect for human rights. He was one of the architects of the European Convention on Human Rights, UN Disarmament initiatives, successfully challenging the legality of nuclear weapons.

In a parallel with the AAPP MacBride was a trustee of the International Prisoners of Conscience fund.

A fund that continues to provide support to the victims of the junta in Myanmar.

In awarding MacBride the Nobel Peace prize in 1974 the Nobel Committee stated

‘He mobilized the conscience of the world in the fight against injustice’.

His Nobel acceptance speech was themed the Imperatives of Survival and reflected his feeling of despair -

‘Because we are living in a world where war, violence, brutality and ever increasing armament dominate the thinking of humanity; but, more so, because humanity itself gives the appearance of having become numbed or terrified by its own impotence in the face of disaster’.

We are once again a world in crisis.

The war in Ukraine, threats of nuclear annihilation, militarization, the crushing of human rights, pandemics, inequality and the existential threat of climate change.

MacBride, the IPB and our members have not given into despair and neither has the AAPP.

We remain solid in our solidarity with the people of Myanmar.

The UN Secretary General has called for a global ceasefire.

We want a cessation of the war against the people in Myanmar.

There must be an arms embargo.

No Myanmar general should profit from war and repression.

There must be no seat at the regional or international table for this odious regime.
The world must recognize the National Unity Government.

They must be held accountable for their crimes against humanity.

In closing MacBride would rejoice with the recognition of the AAPP today. He recognized the essential role of civil society he said they are the -

`The only bodies that will have the necessary independence and initiative to restore some faith and idealism in our world`.

AAPP you play that essential role, you have not submitted to despair, you bring hope, bring essential aid to victims and shine a global light on this most violent oppression.

The people of Myanmar resist, they are resilient, they have not given up on the struggle to return the nation to democracy.

I congratulate you as worthy winners of the Sean MacBride prize.

Phillip Jennings was elected Co President of The IPB in October 2019. He spent over 40 years first in the UK and then the global trade union movement where he occupied key leadership positions for 30 years. He was the founding General Secretary of UNI Global Union and served in office from 2000 -2018. The creation of Uni Global Union was one the biggest changes in global union structures in a generation uniting four internationals from the broad private services sector into one organisation. The commitment to peace, disarmament, anti-violence and against nuclear weapons were key principles of UNI Global Union. Philip was one of the most influential global union leaders of his generation.