

Sunhak Peace Prize 2017 awarded to Gino Strada and Sakena Yacoobi

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Washington, D.C., United States -- The 2017 Sunhak Peace Prize has been awarded to two figures who have devoted their lives to helping the world's refugees.

On November 29, 2016, the recipients of the second Sunhak Peace Prize were revealed at an awards banquet held during an International Leadership Conference (ILC) in Washington, D.C.

The awards program was presented by Dr. Thomas Walsh, chair of the Sunhak Peace Prize Foundation, who explained the background of the prize and its vision to inspire “living with a sense of responsibility that envisions making this world better for future generations.”

An informational video introduced the founders, the vision, and this year's theme of the Sunhak Peace Prize: the global refugee crisis. The video presented alarming statistics, notably that one in 113 people in the world today is a refugee, and that over half of refugees are children.

Dr. Il-Sik Hong, chair of the Sunhak Peace Prize Committee, announced the 2017 laureates: Italian doctor Dr. Gino Strada and Afghan educator Dr. Sakena Yacoobi, who were chosen from a pool of 225 nominees from 76 nations.

Dr. Gino Strada has provided medical and surgical care to the victims of war and poverty and to refugees around the world. His achievements in advancing medical and surgical aid over the past 28 years are widely known. His work and compassion for humanity have taken him beyond national borders, even into the epicenter of conflict in Afghanistan, the Middle East, and Africa. His work has brought healing and

relief to 8 million people around the world. Dr. Strada maintains that “the right to be cured” is a basic and inalienable human right, and, on that basis, in 1994 he established the international humanitarian organization known as Emergency, which has been operating more than 60 emergency medical facilities in 17 nations.

Dr. Sakena Yacoobi developed an innovative solution to the refugee settlement problem through education. She has been widely recognized for developing educational programs linked to refugee resettlement, working especially in Afghan refugee camps that are put under additional stress by years of war. Dr. Yacoobi is a committed educator who has devoted herself to women’s education. She has developed an innovative vision for education in the Islamic world, based on her belief that “educating girls is educating future generations.” In order to establish a stable refugee education system, in 1985 she founded the Afghan Institute of Learning (AIL), providing education and health services for more than 13 million refugees. She also operates more than 80 underground schools in hopes of improving the rights and social status of women in Islamic society, working even at the risk of her own life. Presently she is actively assisting the international community, including the United Nations, as an expert in countering refugee crises. Her achievements led to her being nominated for the 2005 Nobel Peace Prize.

Dr. Hong said, “Today, facing the largest refugee crisis since World War II, the citizens of the world must remember the value of each human being, which binds us together. Through solidarity and cooperation we need to solve this problem together.”

Hon. Dan Burton, a former U.S. congressman from Indiana, led the audience in applause to recognize the founders and the selection committee of the Sunhak Peace Prize, and spoke on the impact of this year’s award. “This world is in real turmoil right now,” he said. “We’ve got millions of people that have left their homes in fear for their lives.” He continued, “These two people who have been nominated tonight have gone way above and beyond to care for those who have become refugees. ... It’s our responsibility to help these refugees around the world. It’s a tragedy, and we’re all involved.”

The prize includes a cash award totaling 1 million U.S. dollars. According to Dr. Walsh, “Both recipients have indicated that they will roll their prize money directly into their organizations and their work.” The awards ceremony will be held on February 3, 2017, in Seoul, South Korea.

