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## At the cost of courage

The 2022 Martin Ennals Prize rewards journalist Pham Doan Trang, doctor Daouda Diallo and activist Abdul-Hadi Al-Khawaja, all three of whom are paying dearly for their fight for human rights.

**MONDAY, JANUARY 24, 2022** **BENITO PEREZ**



City of Geneva

**HUMAN RIGHTS** The Martin Ennals Prize has multiplied. Three laureates now share the famous distinction co-awarded each year since 1992 by the eponymous foundation and the City of Geneva. Announced virtually on

Wednesday January 19, the 2022 laurels go to Vietnamese journalist Pham Doan Trang, Burkinabé doctor and activist Daouda Diallo and Bahrain political prisoner Abdul-Hadi Al-Khawaja. The official ceremony will take place on June 2 in Geneva. In the meantime, the organizers are announcing several support actions for the winners, who will each receive 20,000 to 30,000 francs in reward, depending on the success of the fundraising.



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There will therefore no longer be any "finalists" and "winner" of the Martin Ennals Prize. "The jury made this decision faced with the impossible mission of choosing a more 'deserving' finalist among human rights defenders who all face sometimes extreme threats", explains the spokesperson. of the Martin Ennals Foundation, Cloé Bitton.

## **Censorship in Vietnam**

As if to illustrate this point, the 2022 Prize rewards three paths, three extremely different personalities, but who follow, with the same obstinacy, an ideal of freedom and respect for the human person. "Courage is what they have in common," describes Hans Thoolen, president of the jury for the Martin Ennals Prize, which is made up of ten major human rights NGOs.

Thus Pham Doan Trang, journalist and democratic activist, founded and directed several independent media in a country, Vietnam, "where freedom of expression is considered a threat", notes Phil Robertson. Long in hiding, she has been imprisoned since October 2020. Last month, the journalist was sentenced to nine years in prison for "propaganda against the state". "Pham Doan Trang is a source of inspiration for many of his other activists and journalists in Vietnam," continues the deputy director of the Asia division at Human Rights Watch, and member of the Ennals Prize jury.

The foundation says it is "deeply concerned" for his state of health. According to relatives, Pham Doan Trang was beaten by the police and "has no access to a doctor or a lawyer".

## **Violence in Burkina**

Several thousand kilometers away, <sup>Dr.</sup> Daouda Diallo faces the merciless war waged by Islamists, self-defense groups and the government of Burkina Faso. Founder and secretary general of the Collective against impunity and stigmatization of communities (CISC) since 2019, this pharmacist by training documents the violence committed against civilians, supports victims and advocates national reconciliation.

## **Repression in Bahrain**

His organization, which benefits from the support of the ICRC, has recorded some 1,000 extrajudicial executions. "D<sup>r</sup> Diallo questioned the widespread impunity of those responsible for human rights violations, whether Islamist factions, state security forces or paramilitary groups", says Silke Pfeiffer, member of the jury and program manager at Bread for the World. An action that earned him "threatened by all these actors in the conflict" and forced him to live in hiding.

Third winner, Abdul-Hadi Al-Khawaja is one of the figures of the pro-democracy movement in Bahrain. Activist for social equality, slayer of corruption, defender of minorities, Mr. Al-Khawaja had co-founded the very famous Bahrain Center for Human Rights on his return from exile. Kingpin of the popular movement of 2011, the activist was arrested, kept incommunicado and tortured, before being sentenced to life imprisonment.

Abdul-Hadi Al-Khawaja has since gone on several hunger strikes to improve his conditions of detention. “There are very serious concerns about his physical safety in prison,” the jury wrote. His daughter says she fears reprisals after obtaining the Martin Ennals but is pleased that her father's fight has not been forgotten.