

To the European Parliament
Strasbourg, France 2002

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude for your having invited me to the European Parliament in commemoration of the anniversary of my having received the Sakharov Prize in 1994. I am proud to be one of the winners of the Sakharov Prize. Receiving this esteemed prize has helped greatly to give me the inspiration and courage to go on with my struggle for the equality and justice for everybody, whatever their religion and gender.

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought. This, of course, is a basic human right. But, shockingly, few people in some countries enjoy this freedom. They are not encouraged to think differently, not allowed to do things differently.

I came from a country where religious fundamentalists, including governmental authorities, denied my freedom to have thoughts that are different from their own. As a punishment, they demanded my execution by hanging. I was forced to leave my own country. I had to pay heavily for the sole reason that I believe in human rights and freedom of expression. For more than a decade, I have been struggling to help people understand the importance of the freedom of thought, which is the essential part of human rights as well as of democracy. Like me, thousands of fellow sufferers have had the same struggle. Some are in prison, some in exile.

The fundamentalists are increasing. People, afraid to oppose those fundamentalists, shut their mouths. It is really very difficult to make people move against a sensitive issue like religion, which is the source of fundamentalism. Probably we will not be able to see any dramatic change in the Muslim society, for it is in the back yard of modern history. But we should not give up. We have to fight the fundamentalists to create a better world.

Those religions that are oppressive to women are also against democracy, human rights, and freedom of expression. So in the West, we see the separation of state and church. But most of the Muslim countries still have the 7th century's Sharia law, in which women are oppressed, human rights are violated, and freedom of expression is not respected. Now, Islamic countries urgently need to become secular, to place into force secular, not religious, education. Effecting any needed changes militarily is not the solution. I am not a pessimistic person. I believe that if the silent majority were to protest against those who believe in irrational blind faith - who want to go backwards instead of forward, who are for tradition not innovation, who oppose individualism and plurality of thought - then the world would become a truly civilized world in which to

live. To eradicate poverty and illiteracy, to get rid of dogma, bigotry, and all kinds of obscurantism, to bring light to the darkness, what is urgently imperative is an increase in the amount of worldwide enlightenment.

Freedom of expression for some is not enough. We must work for the freedom of expression for all. Human rights for some is not enough. We must work for the human rights of all.

Justice for some is not enough. We must work for justice for all.

Peace for some is not enough. All must be free from violence and aggression.

Come what may, I will not be silenced. Come what may, I will continue my fight for equality and justice without any compromise until my death.

Come what may, I will never be silenced.