

Stockholm Human Rights Award Ceremony

29 November 2011

Honored Laureates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very proud and tremendously honored to have the privilege, on behalf of the International Legal Assistance Consortium, the International Bar Association, and The Swedish Bar Association of presenting the Stockholm Human Rights Award 2011 to the president of the Open Society Foundations, Mr Aryeh Neier, and the chairman of the Open Society Foundations, Mr George Soros. They have both individually and jointly made outstanding contributions to development of democracy and the promotion of rule of law and human rights. They have played a global leadership role in making governments accountable and transparent to citizens.

The number of democracies across the world has increased.

Repressive and authoritarian leaders are thrown out. Today we see that people demand transparency, accountability and freedom of expression even in countries with long history of dictatorship.

Societies need support not only in establishing but also in upholding the democratic values. History and today's development has learnt that an open society is built on the possibility to have and freely pass information.

The need for support in establishing democracy was in a way the very origin of The Open Society Foundations being established by George Soros starting in 1984. The aim was to help countries make the transition from communism to democracy. The activities have since then grown to encompass the United States and more than 70 countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Over the last 30 years, the Open Society Foundations have given away more than \$8 billion to promote the rule of law and respect for human rights. The accomplishments over the past three decades are substantial.

The organization has helped establish the principles and practices of open society in support of justice, human rights, public health,

media, governance, and education in a large number of countries across the world.

They have supported organizations working on revenue transparency and helped to launch new institutions, such as the Revenue Watch Institute just to mention one. As a result, there is now a worldwide movement promoting transparency and accountability for natural resource revenues and advocating for using the money to benefit the public good.

They have participated in developing the International Criminal Court and assisted in the work of other international tribunals in Cambodia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and the former Yugoslavia.

The Open Society has also led the way internationally in providing legal assistance to criminal defendants and reducing the arbitrary use of pre-trial detention, often for long periods, of persons not represented by counsel. They are promoting legal empowerment of the poor in civil matters, including support for paralegal programs.

Minorities are often the victims of unfair and ineffective legal systems. Mitigating the effects of such discrimination in law enforcement, education, health care, and other sectors of society is central to the Open Society Foundations work.

In the United States, they have focused on empowering minorities, including immigrants, whose lives have been affected by the discriminatory policies and practices of the criminal justice system and other government agencies.

In Central and Eastern Europe, they have addressed the immediate harms and the long-term consequences of discrimination against the Roma minority.

In Russia, and also in Western European countries, Open Society has focused on ethnic profiling and initiated efforts to secure legal remedies. In recent years, the problems of discrimination against Muslims in some Western European countries also have been monitored. The Open Society has brought attention to the denial of citizenship or nationality to certain ethnic groups in African nations and elsewhere.

The Open Society has in addition engaged in a wide range of activities to mitigate discrimination, including support for education programs from early childhood to postgraduate training and access to health care for Roma; debate programs in schools attended by minorities throughout the world; and programs in the United States that assist immigrants in becoming citizens. They have created legal programs and directly engaged in precedent-setting litigation to challenge discriminatory practices; conducted training programs for local officials on governance of multiethnic communities; sponsored arts programs to promote cultural expression by minorities; supported minority media; and initiated economic development programs focused on minorities.

The Open Society's commitment in diminishing discrimination against minorities is based on the fact that an open society can only exist when everyone is treated equally.

Aryeh Neier, the president of Open Society Foundations, was born in [Nazi Germany](#) 1937. He became a refugee as a child when his family fled in 1939 when he was two years old. Prior to joining the Open Society Foundations in 1993, he served for 12 years as executive director of Human Rights Watch, of which he was a founder in 1978. Before that, he worked 15 years at the American Civil Liberties Union, including eight years as national executive director. He served as an adjunct professor of law at New York University for more than a dozen years.

Mr Neier is a frequent contributor to the *New York Review of Books*, and has published in periodicals such as the *New York Times Magazine*, the *New York Times Book Review*, and *Foreign Policy*. For a dozen years he wrote a column on human rights for *The Nation*. He has contributed more than a 150 op-ed articles in newspapers including the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Boston Globe*, and the *International Herald Tribune*. Author of six books, including his most recent, *Taking Liberties* (2003), Aryeh Neier has also contributed chapters to more than 20 books.

He has lectured at many of the US's leading universities. He is the recipient of several honorary degrees and including the American Bar Association's Gavel Award and the International Bar Association's Rule of Law Award.

In Wikipedia Mr Neier is described as an [American human rights](#) activist. I would say it is a correct description in the very good sense. During his time as executive director of the ACLU, he helped grow the organization's membership from 140,000 to 200,000. Our laureate was criticized for his decision to have the ACLU support the [National Socialist Party of America](#), a [Neo-Nazi](#) group, in its efforts to march in [Skokie, Illinois](#) despite the presence of large numbers of Jews and Holocaust survivors. The ACLU's representation of the group resulted in 30,000 members who ended their ACLU membership. In his 1979 book, *Defending My Enemy: American Nazis in Skokie, Illinois, and the Risks of Freedom*, Aryeh Neier defended his actions in support of the Skokie march, arguing that Jews are best protected by ensuring that the [rule of law](#) allowing minorities to speak out is afforded to all groups. A very wise, and from a principal point of view important statement, that is even more controversial and valid today. The fight for freedom and expression is necessary to keep up also in democracies.

He also led the ACLU's efforts to protect the civil rights of prisoners and those in mental hospitals. He already then fought for the abolition of the death penalty and to make abortions available to those who need them.

Aryeh Neier has led several investigations of human rights abuses around the world, including his role in the creation of the [International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia](#). Mr Neier, the world needs people like you!

George Soros was born in Budapest in 1930. He was the son of a Jewish [Esperantist](#) writer who was a [prisoner of war](#) during and after World War I and eventually escaped from Russia to rejoin his family in Budapest. George Soros was taught to [speak Esperanto from birth](#). He was thirteen years old in March 1944 when [Nazi Germany](#)

occupied Hungary. He survived the Nazi occupation of Hungary during World War II as well as the postwar imposition of Stalinism in his homeland. Mr Soros fled Hungary in 1947 and made his way to England. Before graduating from the London School of Economics in 1952 he studied Karl Popper's work in the philosophy of science as well as his critique of totalitarianism, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, which maintains that no philosophy or ideology has the final word on the truth and that societies can only flourish when they allow for democratic governance, freedom of expression, a diverse range of opinion, and respect for individual rights.

Later, while working as a financial analyst and trader in New York, Soros adapted Popper's thinking in developing his own application of the social theory of "reflexivity," a set of ideas that seeks to explain how a feedback mechanism can tilt how participants in a market value assets on that market.

Thirty years ago George Soros began his philanthropic efforts in pursuit of open society. In 1979, to begin providing financial support for black students at the University of Cape Town in apartheid South Africa. In 1984, Soros created an education and culture foundation in Hungary. He later supported dissident movements in Eastern Europe's other Communist countries, helping people to organize themselves at a time when popular organizations were banned, to voice their opinions when dissonant opinions were considered anti-state propaganda, and to promote tolerance, democratic governance, human rights, and the rule of law when a one-party dictatorship exercised a monopoly on power.

As the East bloc crumbled during the late 1980s and the Soviet empire collapsed in the early 1990s, Soros expanded his funding in an effort to help create open societies in all of the region's countries. He demonstrated his commitment to critical thinking and democratic political development by establishing Central European University in 1991. Over the past three decades, Soros's philanthropy has spawned a network of foundations dedicated to promoting development of

open societies in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the United States.

George Soros has written a number of books on different subjects including *The Crash of 2008 and What it Means: The New Paradigm for Finance Markets* (2009); *The Age of Fallibility: Consequences of The War on Terror* (2006); His most recent book is *The Soros Lectures: At the Central European University* (2010).

Democracy and the cornerstones of democracy need to be fought for every day and everywhere. In order to do so successfully, in a long term perspective, there is a need for financing and most importantly professional involvement. When the two components merge it can make change. The extraordinary contributions to democracy, rule of law and human rights made by each one of Aryeh Neier and George Soros have made substantial difference for democracy and people around the world. We respect your commitment deeply and we are honoured that you have accepted the award.

Please, Mr Neier, can I ask you to come up and receive the award, also on behalf of Mr Soros.