



1.31.2012

CHINA | Tulip Prize jury emphasizes human rights over economic interests

At today's official ceremony to award the Dutch Government's Human Rights Defenders Tulip Prize for 2011 to Chinese legal activist Ni Yulan, the chair of the jury stressed the importance of highlighting China's human rights record in spite of economic considerations.

Ms Cisca Dresselhuys, Chair of the Human Rights Defenders Tulip Award 2011 Jury, said, "Economic interests must never be a reason to close our mouths on human rights. We should rather have one Human Rights Tulip Award than one exported tulip to China."

Ni Yulan was unable to attend the ceremony due to her detention in Beijing, and her daughter, Dong Xuan, was recently blocked from leaving China to accept the prize on her mother's behalf.

Ni was nominated for the Tulip Award by Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) and China Aid. Her work as a housing rights activist, defending Beijing residents whose homes were demolished to make way for the 2008 Olympics, resulted in her being imprisoned on several occasions. She has also worked on a number of high-profile religious freedom cases. Ni Yulan is in a wheelchair due to beatings received in prison, which left her unable to walk and in poor health.

She was put on trial with her husband in Beijing in Dec. 2011 for "creating a disturbance", and gave evidence from a hospital bed while on oxygen. The trial did not reach a verdict. The couple remains detained in Beijing.

The Dutch Government's Tulip Prize is awarded to an individual who has done "exceptional human rights work", in recognition of their commitment to the work and the personal cost to themselves. The award "consists of a statue and 100,000 Euros in funding for a project". Ni Yulan is the first human rights defender from Asia to be given the award.

Ms Cisca Dresselhuys added, "We give the award with pleasure, reverence and joy, but with immense pain in our hearts because she cannot be here."

A video of Ni's life and work was shown at the ceremony, in which she is seen in her wheelchair living in a tent in a park. She says, "In this difficult time the support from others really encourages us. It keeps us alive. I will continue to defend others' rights. We cannot give up."

CSW's Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, "CSW would like to congratulate Ni Yulan on being awarded the prestigious Tulip Prize. Lawyer Ni has suffered immensely at the hands of the Chinese government for defending basic human rights. We hope that the award will send a message of encouragement to all human rights defenders in China, whose work often carries a high level of personal risk."

Notes to Editors:

1. Previous winners of the Tulip Prize include Justine Masika Bihamba (Congo, 2008), Shadi Sadr (Iran, 2009) and Bertha Oliva de Natívi (Honduras, 2010).