

NEWSLETTER JUNE 2013

Rosa Yassin Hassan from Syrien



Rosa Yassin Hassan

Rosa Yassin Hassan was about to finish packing her suitcase, when the Syrian blogger went to sit in front of her computer yet again. "I can't help it. What happens in my country determines my life, even here in Hamburg", she says almost apologetically.

In the past, the 38-year old was well known as one of the most important Syrian writers and women activists. Since the beginning of the civil war, however, she has been under constant threat for her commitment to human rights and democracy and her connections to the Western media. Through her blog "Journal of the Syrian Revolution", which amongst other has been translated and published by the renowned German newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, she confronted the public with unsparing detail of the horrors, fears and deaths currently determining everyday life in Syria. In order to inform the world of

the happenings in her country, she had to breach the information ban imposed by the Syrian regime, thereby putting herself in grave danger. A few months ago and only under the most difficult circumstances was it possible for her to leave Damascus and flee the country with her 10-year old son and her husband.

Despite her profession as an architect, Rosa Yassin Hassan has mostly worked as a literature critic for various Arab magazines. She is also a co-founder of the Syrian association "Women for Democracy" and writer of several stories and novels, of which "Ebony" (2010) and "Guardians of the Air" (2013) have been translated into German and English. Her works have received multiple awards.

Following the last years of unrest and anxiety, a touch of normality has re-entered the life of Rosa Yassin Hassan and her family in Hamburg. Already they have gone on their first sightseeing tour and little Aaram has started school. This peacefulness, however, only prompts the brave writer to make a bigger effort: "From this safe place here in Hamburg, I want talk about everything I've seen and documented in Syria. I want the world to know the truth."

Having barely arrived, she is already in great demand as an interview partner: besides numerous interviews, she has been part of a discussion panel on the topic of "Young Women Are Changing Society" on May 3 at the Protestant Church Congress and also provided insight into the complex situation in her home country by giving a talk about "Inside Views of the Syrian Civil War" on May 26 at the Antikriegshaus.

means – until the Hamburg Initiative for Human Rights became involved with a call for donations. Their efforts secured the Foundation's share necessary to obtain the remaining funds through the Federal Foreign Office.

Editorial



Martina Bäurle

Tragedies such as the Syrian Civil War with its bombs, suicide attacks, its murderous employment of toxic gas and so far more than 70,000 casualties catch our full attention. We have reacted to this Syrian nightmare by inviting the writer and blogger Rosa Yassin Hassan and her family to Hamburg. Our help may only be a drop in the bucket but thanks to the Foundation, this important voice of the Damascene civil society has not been silenced.

Permanent crises, which are often smoldering below the surface, are much less at the forefront of our minds. India, for example, in its own terms the world's largest democracy, is such a case. Only after the brutal rape and tragic death of a student at the beginning of the year things started to change. All of a sudden, the daily occurring and mostly unpunished violence against women, the growing corruption and ruthless destruction of the environment in India have now become a regular topic in our news.

Meanwhile, the story of the young journalist Tongam Rina proves that political persecution is possible even in a seemingly democratic environment. It has always been the Foundation's mission to support not only those mentioned in the media but also all the other persecuted people who get less or no attention. By awarding a fellowship to Tongam Rina, we have once again accomplished our goal. This makes us proud.

Sincerely
Martina Bäurle

Thank you!

Depending on the funds we receive through donations, the Hamburg Foundation for Politically Persecuted People can accommodate up to five guests. In order to be able to offer a fellowship to the Hassan family, we were unfortunately lacking the

Tongam Rina: : Journalist from Northeast India



Tongam Rina

Since mid-April, Tongam Rina has been our guest. In addition to coming to terms with her traumatic experiences, the investigative journalist from the North Indian state Arunachal Pradesh wants to make the most of her fellowship year at the river Elbe and continue her work of uncovering inconvenient truths also from Hamburg.

On June 15, 2012, Tongam Rina was shot in front of the building of the newspaper "Arunachal Times" in Itanagar, several bullets seriously injuring her spine and abdomen. The bullets were an "answer" either to her research on women's rights, state corruption and various political scandals

or to her campaigning against the construction of several reservoir dams along the river Siang.

Only a few weeks prior to the attempt on Tongam Rina's life, one of her colleagues was brutally beaten up. Further, the rooms occupied by the Arunachal Times' editorial staff had been broken into and vandalized. Tongam Rina still receives anonymous threats, which have also "become routine at the newspaper". Similarly, it seems to be routine that police investigations remain without result. That Tongam Rina – following the end of her fellowship – will return to the "Arunachal Times" is a given: "There is still so much that needs to be done." For the time being, we are delighted to be able to support this brave journalist and her cause for twelve months. What Hamburg means to her? "I don't have to be afraid of strangers anymore, who walk past with their hands in their pockets."

We would like to thank all the organizations and individuals that through their donations have made it possible for Tongam Rina to be here. By the way: Tongam is a great soccer fan and loves Jazz.

Information on Arunachal Pradesh, India

Covering only about 84,000 square meters of land, Arunachal Pradesh is one of the smallest Indian states. Its name originates from Sanskrit and means "land of the dawn-lit mountains". Because the People's Republic of China has laid claim to the territory due to its lingual and cultural proximity

to Tibet, foreigners and people of other regions in India may only enter the state with a special permit. This forced seclusion facilitates corruption and leads to the repeated curtailing of political and social rights of its population, i.e. of 1.4 million people.

Sponsors

The Hamburg Foundation for Politically Persecuted People would like to thank the sponsors.



Donation Account

Hamburger Sparkasse:

BLZ 200 505 50 · KTO 1022 250 359
BIC: HASPDEHHXXX
IBAN: DE 5320 0505 5010 2225 0359

Hamburger Stiftung für politisch Verfolgte

Osterbekstr. 96, 22083 Hamburg
Fon: +49/40/42863 5757, Fax: +49/40/42863 5756
Kontakt@Hamburger-Stiftung.de
www.Hamburger-Stiftung.de

Awards

Two awards for Dr. Leyla Yunusova

On May 22, 2013, our former guest received the knighthood of the French Legion of Honor in Baku. Three weeks prior, the Azerbaijan human rights activist had been honored with the Theodor Haecker Prize for Political Courage and Honesty, named after a member of the resistance during the reign of National Socialism. For more than 20 years, Dr. Leyla Yunusova has been heading the Institute for Peace and Democracy in Baku.



© CNP

Ana Lilia Pérez: laudation for the Henri Nannen Prize "Investigative Journalism"

On April 26, 2013, our current guest from Mexico delivered the laudation speech for award recipient Wolfgang Kaes. A courageous journalist herself, Ana Lilia Pérez does not tire of denouncing injustice in her home country, not even in the face of death threats by the Mexican drug mafia.



© dpa

Imprint

Chairman

Olaf Scholz, Erster Bürgermeister der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg

Honory Chairman

Dr. Klaus von Dohnanyi

Executive Director

Ole von Beust

Board of Directors

Dr. Doris André, Prof. Dr. Ulrich Karpen, Elisabeth Lingner, Dr. Christel Oldenburg, Ocke Rickertsen

Managing Director

Martina Bäurle