



## Jailed defender of human rights awarded the Per Anger Prize 2009

**This year, the prize in memory of Per Anger is being awarded to the human rights activist Brahim Dahane, defender of human rights in Western Sahara. He was nominated by the Swedish section of the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ). Swedish Culture Minister Lena Adelsohn Liljeroth will be awarding the SEK 150,000 (EUR 14,500) prizemoney and the silver trophy, which weighs the same as a human heart, at a ceremony in Stockholm on 16 November. Brahim Dahane is currently incarcerated.**

**The jury's reason for its choice: In recognition of having demonstrated unwavering personal courage, employed peaceful means and risked his life in the struggle for human rights during the conflict between Morocco and the Polisario over Western Sahara.**

For the whole of his adult life, Brahim Dahane (born 1965) has, by peaceful means, continued to assert the Sahrawis' right to an independent Western Sahara and been active in the fight for human rights, not least by founding the human rights organisation ASVDH (Asociación Saharui de Víctimas de Violaciones Graves de los Derechos Humanos Cometidas por el Estado Marroquí).

As a result of his dedication, Brahim Dahane has spent long periods in prison. He has been subjected to torture. At the time of writing, Mr Dahane has once again had his liberty taken away. He and other human rights activists were arrested by the Moroccan authorities on 8 October 2009 on their return to Casablanca, following a visit to the Sahrawi refugee camps in Tindouf (Algeria).

“The jury chose Brahim Dahane as the prizewinner back in early September, due to his merits as a defender of human rights, without any thought that he could be re-arrested. In the current circumstances, where it is reported that Brahim Dahane is set to face a military tribunal, we can only hope that he will be given a free and open trial that can be monitored by international observers,” comments Eskil Franck, superintendent of the Living History Forum and chairman of the prize jury.

The work of Brahim Dahane and the ASVDH gives a voice to Sahrawi victims of torture, disappearance and abuse. He has managed to build up good relations with international

organisations and the international press, which has led to statements from ASDVH often being published in above all the Spanish press and on the internet. He has also managed to convince visitors and commissioners to come to Western Sahara, thus breaking the silence surrounding this long-drawn-out conflict.

### **Background:**

Western Sahara is considered Africa's last remaining colony. The territory was colonised by Spain in 1884. In 1975 the Moroccan regime instigated the Green March into Western Sahara, with the military invading at the same time. When Spain left Western Sahara in 1976, Morocco occupied the north and Mauritania the south. That same year, the independence movement Polisario, founded in 1973, proclaimed the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic. Mauritania left the territory in 1979, at which point Morocco seized control of the south. In its fight against the Polisario, Morocco built berms (sand walls) to enclose around 80 percent of Western Sahara's landmass.

A ceasefire has been in force since 1991, monitored by the UN peacekeeping mission MINURSO. Despite numerous UN plans and mediation initiatives, the conflict has yet to reach a solution. In resolutions in the Security Council and the General Assembly, the UN has consistently asserted the Sahrawis' right to self-determination. A large number of Sahrawi refugees continue to live in camps in Tindouf in the south-west of Algeria.

Press photos are available at: <http://www.levandehistoria.se/press/pressbilder/brahim>

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The Per Anger Prize is an international prize, established in 2004 by the Swedish Government to promote initiatives supporting human rights and democracy. The Government has commissioned the Living History Forum to manage the nominations, appoint a jury and organise all the various aspects of the prize. The official award ceremony will be held on 16 November.

The prize is named after Per Anger who, as secretary of the Swedish legation in Budapest, initiated Sweden's work to save as many people as possible from persecution and death during the Second World War in Nazi-occupied Hungary.

The organisations nominated in 2009 were Amnesty International, Diakonia, UNA-Sweden, Civil Rights Defenders (formerly the Swedish Helsinki Committee for Human Rights), the Swedish section of the International Commission of Jurists, Reporters without Borders, Save the Children, the Red Cross and the Church of Sweden.

In previous years the prize was awarded to Archbishop Gennaro Verolino (2004), Arsen Sakalov (2005), Aliaksandr Bialitski (2006), Organización Femenina Popular (2007) and Bishop Sebastian Bakare (2008). Read more about the previous prizewinners at [www.levandehistoria.se/projekt/peranger](http://www.levandehistoria.se/projekt/peranger)