

We would like to express our gratitude to our award ceremony sponsors, the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, the Consulate General of France, and the Istanbul Policy Center.

This year, we lost our esteemed colleague, Professor Dr Fuat Keyman, a faculty member at Sabancı University and Director of the Istanbul Policy Center, who had been a longstanding supporter of our Foundation and the award ceremony, and who contributed greatly to broadening the Foundation's horizons. I would like to remember him here with gratitude.

We also lost our Advisory Board member and close friend of the Foundation, dear Nazar Büyüm; his positive energy and constructive spirit will always remain in our hearts.

I would like to take a moment to recognise our International Hrant Dink Award committee member and dear friend Çiğdem Mater, who has been unjustly deprived of her freedom, as well as the 2020 Hrant Dink Award laureate, the esteemed Osman Kavala. I wish to express our desire for justice for them and for all those who have been unjustly deprived of their liberty.

On behalf of the International Hrant Dink Award Committee, I cordially greet you all. Welcome. Today is Hrant Dink's birthday, and we are here this evening to present these awards for the seventeenth time. The Hrant Dink Foundation and the Award Committee place great importance on institutional integrity and acting under the guidance of universal values, while consciously remaining free from unfolding political pressures, fleeting allegiances, and opportunistic tendencies. The award laureates are selected by an international jury, from among the nominees submitted in response to the open call on the Foundation's website, through an independent decision-making and two-round selection process. We will introduce this year's jury members shortly.

Today, the spirit of the times is authoritarian and even fascist. We are living in a period in which nation-states are raising border walls, and political parties built around **anti-immigrant** rhetoric are either in power or the second-largest party in countries we know as established democracies. Anti-immigrant sentiment has almost become a cross-party policy. Examples include Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, France, Germany, and the United States. Migrants are portrayed as if they were not human beings. We live in a period in which exclusion and humiliation of migrants has almost become normalised. Years

ago, I watched a video by Amnesty International called "**The 4-Minute Experiment.**" In this video, people from different countries—including migrants—gather in a room, and in pairs, sit face-to-face for four minutes, looking into each other's eyes without speaking. And you see that in just four minutes of communication, simply looking into the other person's eyes, allows you to understand that there is a story behind those eyes. So much so that at the end of the four minutes, you see people hugging and conversing.

Those who knew Hrant Dink are familiar with the light radiating from his eyes. As this was about human contact and relates to tonight's awards, I wanted to share **a memory of Hrant Dink** with you. It was September 2005...We were at a conference titled "*Ottoman Armenians During the Decline of the Empire: Issues of Scientific Responsibility and Democracy,*" organised jointly by Istanbul Bilgi University, Boğaziçi University, and Sabancı University. Exactly twenty years ago...Some of you may remember that various obstacles had been put in place to prevent this conference from taking place.

And finally, the conference was held on September 23-25, 2005. At the conference, especially during the first sessions, a female audience member from an institution that had adopted a policy of denying the Armenian Genocide attempted to sabotage the proceedings, loudly shouting phrases such as "you are all traitors" from her seat. Conference participants were even pelted with eggs thrown at them outside the building. It was in such a setting that Hrant Dink delivered his seminal speech, "The water has found its crack." In this speech, after recounting the story of an Armenian grandmother who had travelled from France to visit her village in Sivas, where she passed away, Hrant used the expression in the meaning of "she found her place, let her rest in her village" to her daughter, who was trying to bring her mother's body back to France, and said: "Yes, we Armenians have our eyes on these lands. But do not worry – we do not want to take this land, we just want to come back to this land to be buried deep inside of it."

When Hrant Dink finished his speech, there was complete silence in the hall; like everyone else, I was rooted to my seat... When the session ended for a break, I wanted to go and hug Hrant. Those who knew him will recall the way Hrant Dink would wrap you in a heartfelt embrace...I looked for him with my eyes and was puzzled to see him at the back of the hall. The female audience member who had tried to sabotage the conference by shouting, "You are all traitors," was hugging Hrant. When our eyes met at that moment, Hrant, seeing my astonishment, spread his arms wide as if to say, "Honestly, she came over herself and hugged me." Of course, I was not the only one to witness this moment...Many other participants also saw Hrant Dink's ability to connect with others that day. This scene is also recounted by my dear friend Ayhan Aktar in Tuba Çandar's invaluable biography of Hrant Dink.

Yes, Hrant Dink had an extraordinary gift for communication. When I first met him, we were at a meeting bringing together representatives from various civil society organisations and academia. Hrant Dink spoke about issues faced by Armenians living in Istanbul in their daily lives...As he spoke, I muttered to myself, "so similar to women's issues"... Hrant, having heard me, paused and said: "Exactly, this is it...we must discuss these points of intersection." Hrant Dink was concerned with the **intersections between different identities rather than singular, inward-looking identities**. Yet the period we are living in presents us with tendencies that are the exact opposite of this. Today, **inward-looking tendencies, or autarchy**, are the most prevalent trend, both in terms of individual identity and civil society affiliations, as well as in state policies. The prevailing discourse of autarchy today promotes turning inward, even digging trenches or building walls around oneself. Relationships with others are no longer about building bridges but about bonding with those who are similar and/or think alike, while *cancelling* those who are different. In short, building bridges is "out," or outdated, while digging trenches is "in," or often the preferred behaviour. In a world dominated by autarchy, international institutions that connect states such as the United Nations and the Council of Europe, lose their meaning and *raison d'être*. But there is even more to it. Many grassroots civil society movements are also turning inward. For example, women's movements that completely reject heterosexual relationships are increasingly attracting attention. The climate we live in encourages polarisation and exclusion; permeating everything from individual lifestyles to civil society and state policies.

Today's inward-looking, autarchic mindset is increasingly unable to see those who are different from itself as “human”. That is why the governments —and even some citizens—of the United States and many European countries, **afford to remain indifferent and silent in the face of the genocide taking place in Gaza**; they can even afford to offer unconditional support to the Israeli state. Nevertheless, there are still students risking their education, people leaving their families to bring humanitarian aid to Gaza, doctors, and political actors. They stand as monuments to the fact that we, as humanity, have not yet perished...They are the inspirations of today...

There is darkness on one side, light on the other... We came here this evening to embrace the light, to draw strength and courage from one another. We came here to affirm that we are not done yet, that we are still alive, that our story is not over. We are here to applaud those who do not give up on human connection. In his book *Shame and Necessity* (1993), Bernard Williams notes that there is something worse than slavery. You may wonder what could be worse than slavery... He remarks that what is worse than slavery is defending it—being the advocate of oppressive policies. Of course, Bernard Williams here refers to Aristotle’s rationalisation of slavery. And it is indeed the case. As a general principle, defending slavery, evil, and authoritarian or fascist practices is far worse than being crushed by them...This evening, however, we do the exact opposite: **we defend freedom and courage**.

I work in the field of Political Science. For us, democracy is not a subjective concept (meaning there is no such thing as democracy according to me or according to you); it has very clear definitions in the literature. For example, in Robert Dahl’s book *Polyarchy*, he identifies two intersecting axes. On the horizontal axis is participation, meaning elections, and on the vertical axis is liberalism, meaning fundamental rights. Today, we are living in a period in which democracy is often reduced solely to the horizontal axis—that is, to elections. This is precisely why terms such as “illiberal democracy” are frequently used.

Political regimes that compromise on fundamental rights but still hold elections in which opposition parties can participate are referred to as “**electoral authoritarianism**.” Some argue, “These nuanced definitions are confusing; what difference does it make? In the end, authoritarianism is authoritarianism, whether electoral or not...” However, these

distinctions matter because electoral authoritarian regimes tend to be more durable and long-lasting. Of course, we can no longer speak of electoral authoritarianism in regimes where opposition leaders are imprisoned; there, absolute authoritarianism emerges. Political scientist Adam Przeworski's definition of democracy is remarkably simple and straightforward... According to Przeworski, democracy, in its most basic form, is "a system in which political parties can lose elections." Notice that he says "lose" elections, not "win." For democracy to exist, those in power must change at certain intervals.

Political actors who strike a blow to democracy often do so in the name of democracy itself. I sometimes hear them being portrayed as "monsters." Yet evil has a **certain banality**, a **mundane quality**. Perhaps the person who explains this best is Hannah Arendt. Hannah Arendt went to observe the trial in Jerusalem of Adolf Eichmann, one of the architects of the Holocaust, on behalf of The New Yorker magazine. When she looked at Eichmann, who was being tried behind a glass cage, she realised she did not see a monster, but rather an "ordinary" person. Someone as normal as the neighbour in the next apartment, or perhaps your own uncle...Someone who could go home, play with their children, have dinner in the evening, while simultaneously carrying out policies that orchestrated genocide; someone who could rationalise every act of evil in which they played a part....And Hannah Arendt writes that Eichmann was not a monster; but a person who was *terribly and terrifyingly normal*. Arendt further elaborated that Eichmann was not a monster, yet lacked one quality...the ability to see the world from another's perspective. This suggests that the banality of evil lies in the inability to view the world through the eyes of those who are different from us. This is the greatest evil that comes from closing ourselves off... the more inward we turn, the more susceptible we become to evil.

Tonight's awards highlight two main themes: The first draws attention to how states, by turning inward and erecting border walls to **exclude migrants**, leave us all impoverished... No human being should be condemned to lawlessness. Migration is often a matter of unavoidable imperative. Wars, climate conditions, and other crises force people to take great risks with their own lives and the lives of their loved ones. The second theme is **academic freedom**... Academic freedom is often confused with freedom of expression. Naturally, academic freedom encompasses freedom of expression, but it also has a distinct dimension. Academic freedom underscores the right to conduct original research grounded

in the norms of a given academic discipline, and to share the findings of that research with the wider public. Tonight, we will celebrate those who, around these two themes, inspire and give hope to people to continue the struggle. We will draw courage and inspiration from their example.

Thank you all for not leaving us alone this evening, for being by our side.