

## [Martin Ennals Award | 2021 finalists shine a light on abuses in authoritarian States](#)

18.01.2021

**Three outstanding human rights defenders based in authoritarian States are nominated for the 2021 Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders. In isolated Turkmenistan, Soltan Achilova documents human rights violations and abuses through photojournalism. Imprisoned in Saudi Arabia, Loujain AlHathloul is a leading advocate for gender equality and women's rights. A lawyer, Yu Wensheng defended human rights cases and activists before his conviction and imprisonment in China.**



□□□□□□□□□□

### **Nothing can stop us from celebrating human rights defenders**

Each year, the Martin Ennals Award honors human rights defenders from around the world who distinguish themselves by their strong commitment to promoting our fundamental rights - often at the risk of their own lives. In 2021, the Jury nominated three individuals in distinctly authoritarian contexts. "Every year thousands of human rights defenders are persecuted, harassed, imprisoned, even killed. The Martin Ennals Foundation is honored to celebrate the 2021 Finalists, who have done so much for others and whose stories of adversity are emblematic of the precarity faced by the human rights movement today", says Isabel de Sola, Director of the Martin Ennals Foundation.

### **The 2021 Finalists**

"Authoritarian States tend to believe that by jailing or censoring human rights defenders, the world will forget about them. During the COVID-pandemic, it seemed like lockdowns would successfully keep people from speaking out. This year's Finalists are a testament to the fact that nothing could be further from the truth", says Hans Thoolen, Chair of the Jury.

### **Soltan Achilova**



In **Turkmenistan**, one of the world's most isolated countries, freedom of speech is inexistant and independent journalists work at their own peril. Soltan Achilova, a photojournalist, documents the human rights abuses and social issues affecting Turkmen people in their daily lives. Despite the repressive environment and personal hardships, she is one of the very few reporters in the country daring to sign independent articles.

### **Loujain AlHathloul**



In **Saudi Arabia**, women still face several forms of gender discrimination, so much so, that the Kingdom ranks in the bottom 10 places according to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2020. Loujain AlHathloul was one of the leading figures of the Women to drive movement and advocated for the end of the male guardianship system. She was imprisoned in 2018 on charges related to national security together with several other women activists. Tortured, denied medical care, and subjected to solitary confinement, Loujain was sentenced to 5 years and 8 months in prison on 28 December 2020.

### **Yu Wensheng**



In **China**, more than 300 human rights activists and lawyers disappeared or were arrested in 2015 during the so called 709 Crackdown. A successful business lawyer, Yu Wensheng gave up his career to defend one of these detained lawyers, before being arrested himself. Detained for almost three years now, Yu Wensheng's right hand was crushed in jail and his health is failing.

Last January 2020, ISHR marked the two years since lawyer Yu Wensheng's disappearance by [releasing a timeline of UN and diplomatic action](#) to call for release and to support his family.

### **Online Award Ceremony on 11 February 2021**

The 2021 Martin Ennals Award will be given to the three Finalists on 11 February 2021 at an online ceremony co-hosted by the City of Geneva (Switzerland), a longstanding supporter of the Award. "The City of Geneva reaffirms its support to human rights, especially during these times of crisis and upheaval. Human rights are the foundation of our society, not even the pandemic will stop us from celebrating brave persons who have sacrificed so much", says Member of the executive Alfonso Gomez.

*Photos: Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders*