

# **EU HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AWARDS**

**2018**

## **SPEECHES & INTRODUCTIONS**

### **I. WELCOME WORD - DEPUTY HEAD OF MISSION**

Human rights defenders

Human rights organizations

Government officials

Representatives of civil society

Media

Diplomatic missions

Dear guests

Ladies and gentlemen,

1. Welcome to my house today and thank you for being here so many, accepting the invitation by our Ambassador and our Embassy to attend the EU Human Rights Defenders Award Ceremony 2018.

2. The award ceremony is an annual event and this year Belgium has the honor to host on behalf of all our EU-colleagues and Norway. Our main task this afternoon is to announce the winner of the European Union Human Rights Defender Award 2018 and I already feel the rising tension.
  
3. It is also a very important recognition from the EU Member States and Norway to a local actor whom we believe to be making a vital contribution to human rights in Uganda. Human rights are embedded in our European project and consequently also in our bilateral relation with Uganda.
  
4. In 2016 the European Union and its Member States defined the *Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategy for Uganda 2016-2020*. I still remember a memorable ceremony at the EU Ambassador's residence where the strategy was presented around seven priorities:

- Freedom of assembly, freedom of association, freedom of expression and press freedom
- Accountability and anti-corruption
- Transitional justice
- Human Rights Defenders and abolition of the death penalty
- Children's Rights
- Women rights and gender equality
- Anti-discrimination

5. Belgian foreign policy itself is based on a human rights based approach. And **we strongly believe in the link between human rights and social and economic development.** Countries with a political system or a political elite that does not take into account the voices of its citizens nor feels accountable to its population with regards to delivery and results, will stagnate or deteriorate rather than further develop and prosper. **Human rights are the backbone of the sustainability that determines whether societies fail or survive.**

6. Today's ceremony is somewhat special, dear friends, since we have two award winners this year and we will try to make the event of today a dynamic showcase that aims at providing a platform to their both organizations.
  
7. Let me give you a short overview of today's program and in doing so, I am aware that I am already hinting at both winners.
  
8. First we will have a short theatre play by Blac Anthem, an artistic collective with whom we and the EU have worked in the past. This play is based on the work done by one of the winners, who has made the fight against child trafficking and children sacrifice his mission. After this our Ambassador and I we will announce the two winners of this year's EU Human Rights Defender Awards, after which they will both be given the floor. Then we shall have a short dance performance, also by Blac Anthem, that

will focus on the activities of our other 'winner' who has dedicated her life to giving the victims of landmines and people with disabilities a voice. To conclude, a picture will be taken of the two winners together with all the Ambassadors and Heads of Mission after which we invite you to a buffet where we can further discuss and exchange over some good food and a few or more drinks. For we are Belgians after all.

9. Before giving the floor to Blac Anthem, let me also thank our Embassy team who was involved in the organization of this event – especially the task force Rosemary, Ruthie, Lobke and Saida and last but not least our in house speech writer Sam whom we will miss after the summer - in close collaboration with the EU delegation team, and of course my wife Christine for setting up the ceremony of today.

10. Dear friends, Blac Anthem!

## **II. SPEECH HUGO VERBIST, AMBASSADOR OF BELGIUM**

Dear Colleague-Ambassadors,  
Dear Human Rights Defenders,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

1. First of all, I would like to thank my Deputy and Head of Cooperation Erwin and Christine wholeheartedly for opening up their home for all of us today. Our Embassy, also together with Enabel, can be considered as Team Belgium, which means that we work as one coherent team of which, in football terms', I am the 'coach or manager', a team in which there is a lot of talent, perseverance and flexibility. That's why I thought Erwin's offer, in the same team spirit, to organize this event at his place was excellent. This typical Belgian team spirit will also be the reason why Belgium will become World Champion this year – individual stars finally forming one united team – but let this be the topic of another speech.

2. Belgium is indeed very happy to host once again, 3 years after the last time, this very important yearly EU-event, recognizing the relentless and often unseen efforts of human rights defenders in Uganda. But before I go to the announcement of the first winner, let me first briefly explain the procedure on how we selected this year's winners for the EU Human Rights Defenders Award 2018. Under the able leadership of our colleague Ms. Sabrina Bazzanella and Edith Ochech of the EU Delegation, the EU Human Rights Committee, comprised of representatives of the different EU member states together with Norway, reviewed a list of candidates who were nominated by anyone who reacted to our social media announcement. After careful analysis and individual voting, three candidates were shortlisted and during a final meeting at 'Heads of Mission'-level, it was finally decided to exceptionally select not one winner, but two winners, because of the outstanding work and qualities of both of the candidates.

Ladies and gentlemen,

3. Belgium is very pleased to announce Ms Margaret Arach Orech from the Uganda Landmine Survivor's Association (ULSA) as the first winner of the EU Human Rights Defenders Award 2018.
4. Landmines and the use of weapons against civilians are a very sensitive issue for Belgium, closely linked to our history. Indeed, Belgium can be considered as one of the main battlegrounds in Europe. It is where all great European powers met at one time or another over the past centuries in the struggle for influence and dominance over our continent. According to modern day historians, no less than 300 major battles were fought in the 'Low Lands', as our region used to be called, over the past 1000 years. Some of following places that witnessed the devastation and horror of war might sound more familiar : Waterloo, Ypres and the city of Bastogne in the Ardennes.
5. The Western part of my country is also known as Flanders Fields, '*where poppies grow*'. In this

infamous muddy grounds thousands and thousands of young people, during the First World War 100 years ago, from all over the world, including as far as Senegal, Algeria and India would lose their lives, often only 18 or 19 years old. Even in 2018 farmers in this part of Belgium still find bombs and mines in their fields. It was in Ypres that the world witnessed for the first time the use of a chemical weapon, being mustard gas. But landmines are equally vicious because they are not merely meant to target the military opponents but the entire population of a country, and have consequently a long term, negative impact on communities living in these areas and their livelihood.

6. It is therefore no coincidence that Belgium was the very first country to enact national legislation banning anti-personnel mines. And it is no coincidence that Belgium, together with many other EU-countries here today and in particularly also Norway, has been supporting international initiatives to establish a worldwide ban on the use of (land)mines, chemical weapons and cluster munition. In particular the

personal commitment of HRH, Princess Astrid of Belgium as Special Envoy for the promotion and universalization of the Mine Ban Convention is widely recognized.

7. For all these reasons, I am very honored, as the Belgian Ambassador but also in name of the EU and all its member states, to give the first EU Human Rights Defenders Award of 2018 to Margaret Arach Orech from Uganda Landmine Survivors' Association (ULSA), because she is a person who has been working tirelessly against the use of landmines and for the rights of persons with disabilities who fell victim to these mines. It is hereby the very first time that the EU Human Rights Defenders' Award has been awarded to someone advocating for the rights of persons with disabilities, a particularly vulnerable group in Uganda.
8. There has been lately not much focus on landmines and landmine survivors' rights in Uganda, probably because the country has declared itself mine free in 2012. Yes, landmines are still causing casualties in Northern-Uganda and there are currently more than 2000 land-

mine survivors in Uganda. Margaret Arach Orech, who is a landmine survivor herself, is a strong and relentless force in fighting for the rights of persons with disability. She brought the reality of Ugandan land mine survivors, their families and communities into the board rooms, to the negotiating tables and into the highest places of multilateral decision making. This led to major accomplishments for her and her fellow campaigners of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) and the subsequent Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC).

9. In 1997 the earlier mentioned Mine Ban Convention was adopted in Oslo and signed in Ottawa, now 21 years ago, and in 2008 the Convention on Cluster Munitions was adopted in Dublin and signed in Oslo. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) was adopted by the United Nations in 2006. These treaties would not have existed without campaigners such as Margaret. They were trailblazers! And they were rightfully awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997.

10. Margaret, through her national and international advocacy work, also managed to secure international support to Ugandan landmine survivors. There is a clear link between her advocacy work and the assistance and support given to persons with disability in Uganda. Her organization, Uganda Landmine Survivors Association (ULSA), has supported the development of 14 local landmine survivor groups in Northern and Western Uganda.
11. Although much has been accomplished, the rights of persons with disability have not all been addressed. In Uganda, there are many survivors of landmines who need recognition and assistance. Funding for victim assistance has greatly reduced, since it is not a priority anymore, and yet there are survivors in hard to reach areas which the Ugandan government is failing to reach. That is why we are celebrating Margaret today to thank her for all she has done, not only as an encouragement for her to go on as she has been doing for all these year, but also to put her in the spotlight, so that the

causes she fights for would continue to get the funding it deserves.

Let's give a big round of applause for Ms Margaret Arech Orech!!!

### **III. SPEECH DEPUTY HEAD OF MISSION – ERWIN DE WANDEL**

Ladies and gentlemen,

1. This brings us to the second winner of today. This man has dedicated his work to the fight against child sacrifices and international child trafficking.
2. Although we are aware that this is a very sensitive issue, also in today's Uganda, we are pleased to see that this year the EU Human Rights Defenders Award is also turning the spotlight to this problem.
3. There is an expression, dear friends, that says that '*children are sacred.*' Les enfants sont sacrés. It is an expression that all of us share because children, kids are the most vulnerable members in our society, and at the same time they hold the future of that same society in their

hands. The sacredness of children and their right to grow up in a safe and stimulating environment is something that binds us as humans, from whichever continent or culture we come. When we as a society or as group fail to provide our children with a safe environment, we fail in every way possible.

4. It reminds me of one of the darkest pages in the recent history of my own country, 20 years ago, in October 1996. Following the discovery of an awful series of abuses and killings of children, little girls, the outcry of the Belgian people cumulated in a huge gathering that would become known as the White March in Brussels: 350000 people marched through Brussels, everyone was carrying something white, some had painted their face white, as the color of hope. It was a cry out, a supplication for, not only of better functioning of the justice system, but also and above all for better protection for our children from bodily and psychological harm of any kind.

5. The 'White March' led to important reforms with regards to our police force and the judicial system, but maybe even more, this outrage, this cry for justice and child protection, came from the depths of our own humanity. It showed that children are indeed sacred.
  
6. Against this background it is my honor and my pleasure to announce that the second winner of the EU Human Rights Defenders Award 2018 is Mr. Peter Sewakiryanga of the Kympisi Childcare Ministries (KCM).
  
7. Peter is a pastor active in the fight against child sacrifice practices. His organization provides comprehensive support to children victims of sacrifice, including medical, psychosocial and schooling. KCM works in close cooperation with police, prosecutors and the judiciary to stop both sacrifice practices and child trafficking for sacrifice purposes.

8. Child sacrifices and trafficking are criminal offences that go against the rights of children under the Ugandan constitution but they are too often neglected and they are receiving too little support. The EU Human Rights Defenders Award has never been awarded to someone working on child sacrifice and trafficking.
9. This year's nomination reflects the EU member states and Norway's joint hope and effort to further raise awareness around child sacrifices and child trafficking, in supporting Peter's organization as well as the Ugandan Human Rights Commission and the Ugandan authorities, to continue the fight against these crimes.
10. We believe Kypisi Childcare Ministries (KMC) to be a worthy winner because :
  - The organization lobbies both the Ugandan government and the international community to join the campaign to end child sacrifice.

- It is building a community campus to avoid new victims and to take care of the children who already fell victim to trafficking and abuse.
- KMC conducts research and awareness raising activities and education in communities affected by child sacrifice to reduce the demand and supply of children's body parts for witchcraft purposes.
- Last but not least, the HRD has also been active in international anti-trafficking activities, fighting against mainly labour and sexual exploitation trafficking involving Ugandan adults.

11. We believe that this holistic approach is what makes KCM so effective as an organization and why Peter is worthy of this award.

12. Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends, congratulations and a warm applause for Margereth and Peter and their both organisations.

(sv)

VERBIST – DE WANDEL