

Lord Bonomy, Chair of Selection Committee, Scottish Bar International Human Rights Award

Thank you Dean of Faculty for your welcome.

Earlier this year, I was delighted to be asked to chair the Selection Committee for the inaugural Scottish Bar International Human Rights Award.

The ethos of the Faculty of Advocates is to promote and uphold human rights and the rule of law. We have a long and proud tradition of supporting international human rights initiatives and this award is another example of that support.

This year marks a number of human rights anniversaries– it's 20 years since the Scotland Act and Human Rights Act. It is the 70th anniversary of the signing of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, drawn up after the horrors of two world wars to reaffirm the international community's faith in fundamental human rights, and the dignity and worth of the human person.

2018 also marks the 20th anniversary of the UN declaration on human rights defenders. The Declaration gave international recognition to the right of individuals, acting on their own or in association with others, to be free to protect and promote human rights.

But of course that is not always an easy task. In many countries human rights defenders and their families are victims of violence, intimidation, surveillance, unlawful arrest. Latest figures suggest that more than 300 human rights defenders are murdered each year, often with impunity.

It is critical that we stand together with those working in such challenging circumstances, highlight the importance of the work that they are doing and condemn the breaches of human rights to which they are subjected.

And that is what we hope to achieve with this award.

We received 26 applications from all around the world including Europe, USA, Asia, Central and South America, Africa and the Caucaus region. They came from lawyers, journalists, artists, community leaders, social workers. They included defenders working to promote economic, social and cultural rights, to prevent torture, to protect the environment, and who were tackling government and judicial corruption.

The selection committee was humbled by the quality and depth of the applications. But we unanimously agreed there was one stand out candidate. I will be introducing our winner shortly.

But first, the selection committee also agreed that certain of the applicants should receive a high commendation for their work. There are three of them and I will say a little about each.

Bonface Massah, from Malawi, is national director of the Association of Persons with Albinism. People with albinism face persecution, being hunted and killed for their body parts. As a human rights defender, Bonface strives for social inclusion for persons with albinism. In 2018 at least 23 people with albinism have been killed. Bonface rose to the occasion, lobbying government agencies, the UN and others to facilitate effective investigations and prosecutions of those involved. Following a meeting with the association led by Bonface, the President of Malawi established a National Task Force focused on ending attacks. Bonface has been described by Amnesty International as “a visionary with capacity to remain focused on the goal.” The Scottish Bar is pleased to highly commend Bonface Massah for his work defending the human rights of this vulnerable minority.

Daniel Prado Albarracin is a lawyer and human rights defender in Colombia who has been representing civilian victims of the internal armed conflict for the past 20 years. His work focuses mainly on cases of enforced disappearance. He currently represents victims of paramilitary groups in particular in the 12 Apostles case. In January alone in 2018, 18 human rights defenders were murdered in Colombia. Daniel works under constant personal threat. The Inter-American Commission for Human Rights has granted Daniel special protectionary measures to seek to ensure his protection by the state against the constant threats which he faces. He has been described as “courageous and inspirational”.

We highly commend Daniel for his lifelong commitment to achieving justice for victims of grave human rights violations.

Donald Hernandez from Honduras is coordinator of the National Coalition of Environmental Networks and Organisations of Honduras. He monitors compliance with economic, social, cultural and environmental rights. He focuses on the defence of community leaders being prosecuted for seeking to protect their land from large scale extraction projects by mining, energy and mono-culture companies. There are threats from powerful business interests, from armed agents of the state and from organized crime. Daniel has successfully obtained protection measures from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights for 15 indigenous leaders who, in their struggle to defend their land against mining and hydroelectric projects, were threatened with death and attacked by the National Police. Peace Brigades International have described Donald as having dedicated his life to defence of human rights and call him “an excellent human being”.

The Faculty highly commends Donald for his work protecting those who seek to preserve their land and culture for future generations.

That brings me now to the winner of the inaugural Scottish Bar International Human Rights Award.

Salome Nduta

The selection committee had no hesitation in choosing Salome. Her commitment to the defence of human rights is lifelong.

Salome was born and brought up in one of the largest informal settlements in Nairobi. Living under those conditions, she vowed to do something about it. She was part of the team that formed the federation of settlement dwellers and was the first young person to be elected to the leadership. She became part of a team fighting forceful evictions.

As well as having been a community organizer and paralegal, and then qualifying as a social worker, Salome is an artist. She has used drama and dance to raise awareness of key constitutional and human rights concerns in Kenya and to advocate for change.

Today, Salome works as a protection officer with the National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders in Kenya. She is focused on providing protection and on building strong human rights defender movements throughout the country. She works closely with women human rights defenders aiming to mainstream gender equality in the support systems of her organization.

Amnesty International told us that Salome's "dedication, passion, resilience and expertise in protecting and defending the rights of other human rights defenders is unrivalled."

One of those human rights defenders with whom she has worked in Kenya has simply called her "an amazing soul whose selflessness gives us a sense of peace and safety".

We are delighted to present the Scottish Bar International Human Rights Award 2018 to Salome Nduta.