



Den norske Forfatterforening

It is worthwhile to endure suffering to defend our inalienable right

interview with Normando Hernández González

recipient of The Norwegian Authors' Union's Freedom of Expression Prize 2008

When did you receive the message that you were awarded the price, and how did you react?

When I was in prison, they allowed us to have a few minutes of phone conversations with our families once a week. During one of those calls, my wife informed me that there were visitors at home who wanted to speak with me. To my surprise, it was the President of the Norwegian Writers' Union, Anne Oterholm, and the Board Member and Director of the International Committee, Henrik Hovland. Henrik was the one who spoke with me the most, and informed me about the details of the award. My initial reaction was one of gratitude and a commitment to defending freedom of expression.

Once I returned to the cell where I was imprisoned, I couldn't stop thinking about how to honor such a prestigious recognition from my Norwegian colleagues. At times, I felt somewhat inhibited, searching my memory repeatedly for ways to honor the Freedom of Expression Award, and I always came back to the beginning: "There is no better way to honor an award than by defending what it represents," I would tell myself. And that's exactly what I have been doing to this day.

Has the price influenced your work or situation, and in that case, how?

The Freedom of Expression Award has had a direct impact on my work. In 2012, one year after being exiled, I founded the Cuban Institute for Freedom of Expression and Press (ICLEP), a non-profit NGO that promotes and defends the freedom of expression and press for all

Cubans. Since then, I have not rested in the defense of this inalienable right that every individual possesses.

Would you like to share some of what you are currently working on?

Since 2012, I have been serving as the General Director of the Cuban Institute for Freedom of Expression and Press (ICLEP). Through the institute, we have been able to establish a network of six hyper-local community media outlets within Cuba. These outlets write, edit, design, print, and distribute tabloids containing alternative and public interest information to the communities where we operate, all free of charge.

Additionally, since 2016, we have been monitoring, documenting, recording, and compiling an annual thematic report on violations of press freedom. In that same year, Reporters Without Borders used an ICLEP report as a source and included the Cuban ruler, Raúl Castro, among the 35 Predators of Press Freedom worldwide. In the second half of this year, we began monitoring and recording violations of freedom of expression to include them in our annual report.

If you were to award the next price, who would you like to give it to?

Choosing among so many deserving individuals for the Freedom of Expression Award from the Norwegian Writers' Union is an incredibly difficult task. It's a process that demands extensive research and time. I wouldn't want to mention a specific name because it could be seen as partial.

However, I can assure you that presenting an award to someone who is imprisoned for defending freedom of expression is a way of telling that person that they are not alone, that they should persist, that their struggle has not been and is not in vain. It's telling that person that they are an example to follow. It's telling that person that it is worthwhile to endure suffering to defend an inalienable right that all of us have simply by virtue of being born. It's telling that person that Norwegian writers and God are with them.

Are there questions you would like us to ask or other comments you would like to add?

I would like to add that freedom of expression is a fundamental principle that is not only essential to the work of writers but also to society as a whole. Writing and literature are powerful tools for giving voice to the realities and aspirations of people and for questioning the injustices and limitations that we often encounter. This award is not just a recognition of a writer's work but also a strong endorsement of the importance of defending freedom of expression worldwide.