

MIDDLE EAST

2 Yazidi Women Who Fled ISIS Slavery Receive E.U.'s Sakharov Prize

By SEWELL CHAN OCT. 27, 2016

Nadia Murad and Lamiya Aji Bashar, two young Iraqis who escaped sexual slavery by the Islamic State and became advocates for women's rights, were honored on Thursday with the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, the European Union's top human rights award.

Ms. Murad and Ms. Aji Bashar are among thousands of women and girls from the Yazidi community whom the terrorist group kidnapped, sexually assaulted, enslaved and in many cases killed.

In the summer of 2014, they were enslaved when the Islamic State overran their home village, Kocho, near the northern Iraqi city of Sinjar, a longtime hub of Yazidi life.

Separated from her mother and siblings, who were also captured, Ms. Murad, now 23, fled in November 2014 and made her way to a refugee camp in northern Iraq and then to Germany.

She created a global campaign to draw attention to the plight of Yazidis who are being held in sexual slavery or remain displaced. She was named a United Nations good-will ambassador last month on behalf of victims of human trafficking, and on Oct. 10, she was awarded the Vaclav Havel Human Rights Prize.

Ms. Aji Bashar, who is still a teenager, tried to flee several times before she managed to escape in April with help from her family, who paid smugglers to rescue

her.

As she made her way to government-controlled territory in Iraq, she was chased by Islamic State militants and was severely wounded by a land mine, which left her almost blind; two people she was with were killed. She, too, made her way to Germany, where she was reunited with several siblings who had survived.

“I cannot put into words the courage and the dignity they represent,” Martin Schulz, the president of the European Parliament, said in a statement. “Today, Nadia Murad and Lamiya Aji Bashar have become the voice for the women victims of the Islamic State’s campaign of sexual violence and enslavement.”

Yazidis follow a religion influenced by a medley of faiths, including Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Islam. But the Islamic State regards them as devil-worshipping pagans.

A 2014 article in the Islamic State’s online English-language magazine, Dabiq, argued that, by forcing Yazidi women and girls to marry Islamic State members and become their “concubines,” the group was helping to protect its fighters against committing adultery.

Iraqi Kurdish fighters retook the city of Sinjar last fall, and a major offensive for the city of Mosul has added to the pressure on the Islamic State’s hold on northern Iraq.

The other finalists for the prize this year were the Turkish journalist Can Dunder, who was prosecuted for reporting on allegations of weapons transfers by Turkish intelligence agents to rebels in Syria, and the Crimean Tatar leader and human rights activist Mustafa Dzhemilev. Both live in exile.

The prize, established in 1988, is named for the nuclear physicist Andrei D. Sakharov (1921-89), who led the Soviet Union’s development of the hydrogen bomb and then became a tireless crusader for human rights.

In 2013, the prize went to Malala Yousafzai, a teenage Pakistani activist for women’s rights who went on to win the Nobel Peace Prize. In 2014, it was awarded to Denis Mukwege, a gynecologic surgeon in the Democratic Republic of Congo who

has devoted himself to helping victims of sexual violence during wartime. Last year, it was given to Raif Badawi, a blogger and activist who has been imprisoned and flogged publicly for criticizing Saudi Arabia's religious establishment.

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A version of this article appears in print on October 28, 2016, on page A10 of the New York edition with the headline: Rights Prize For 2 Women Who Fled ISIS.