

Citation for Ms. Maryam Durani by Mr. Ehsan Turabaz.

Freedom of expression is the cornerstone of democracy and peace. It is central to individual freedom, of every man and woman. It stands for the ability of a society to openly discuss its challenges and aspirations. It allows a nation to instigate necessary change whilst preserving stability.

I have the distinct honor to present the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Freedom of Speech and Expression Medal to Ms. Maryam Durani - for her unyielding courage and unbending commitment to freedom of speech and expression in Afghanistan.

Born and partially raised in the ancient city of Kandahar, a city that has been plagued by the violence of war during the past three decades, you have refused to give in to the forces that would deny you and your sisters the right to speak out publicly about the needs and concerns of women. Determined to see to it that women would become part of the political process in the new Afghanistan, you made the courageous decision to run for a seat in the Kandahar Provincial Council in the 2005 elections. At just 21 years of age, your victory in that election brought the twin benefit of providing the Council with both a youthful and a feminine perspective on how this volatile region could put its turbulent past behind it and look forward to future of peace and reconciliation. Since that fateful day, you have not only won re-election to the Council, but have been joined by other women members in making sure that your voices are not only heard, but respected.

Thanks to your efforts, democracy has been strengthened in the region and the rights and concerns of women across the province are slowly gaining greater acceptance among the people.

But your efforts to help the women of the region have not been confined to the workings of government. You have also chosen to work outside of government—to reach out to the people directly. In 2004, you founded the Khadija Kubra association for Culture, a non-profit organization dedicated to gender equality and the inclusion of women in Afghan society. The Association provides literacy and other educational classes for women, as well as child care and public health programs. You also offer training in skills that will generate women's income out of the conviction that greater economic power will not only help women support their families, it will eventually translate into political power.

To make sure that the women of Kandahar have a voice, you also launched Merman—the first and only female owned and managed radio station in the province.

As former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently noted, the establishment of Merman, which translated, means woman, has made it possible for you to amplify and broadcast the concerns of women across the entire region, helping to break down barriers and bring the community closer together.

Still, there is no question that pushing women's rights is a dangerous occupation in Afghanistan.

Many of your fellow activists have been attacked and killed over the years, and you yourself have survived numerous assassination attempts, including a suicide attack that left you seriously injured in 2009.

Eleanor Roosevelt once said that "we must know what we think and speak out, even at the risk of unpopularity.

Your Majesties, Royal highness Honorable Laureates, Your Excellencies and Distinguished guests,

Ms Durani exhibits qualities that make us proud and inspire us. Individuals like her let us believe in a bright future for Afghanistan as the country finds itself at a critical point in time.

Ms Durani,

We are here today to honour you on behalf of the Roosevelt Institute with the Medal for Freedom of Speech and Expression, to pay tribute to you and thank you for your courage and sacrifices; for the change you brought and hopefully will continue to bring to the lives of Afghan women and their sons and daughters who are, as we speak, being raised in the knowledge, awareness, freedom and responsibility to speak and express oneself. We thank you for being such an inspiring example for the next generation that will mould a better future for Afghanistan and for the rest of the world.