

Ladies and gentlemen, my name is Ensaf Haider, and I am the wife of the prisoner of conscience Raif Badawi, who is now serving his seventh year behind dark, cold walls.

Everyone knows that Raif was sentenced to ten years in prison and a thousand lashes and a large fine, but few know that my husband Raif was initially sentenced to death by sword, which is equivalent to the death penalty by hanging in other countries. There is no death penalty by hanging in Saudi Arabia – beheading by the sword is the norm. Different methods and death is the outcome.

The Saudi judiciary sentenced the peaceful activist Raif Badawi to death for the mere fact that he exercised his right to express his opinion peacefully, and said “no” loudly to the suffocating control of the clergy and religious establishment.

That sentence was devastating news to us - to his family. I cannot describe to you how I felt when I heard the news. Nor can I describe how astonished I was when he was sentenced instead with imprisonment and flogging.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Raif Badawi was spared the fate of death by the Sword. There are many other prisoners of conscience, who are sentenced to death in Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and other countries. They are facing death because of their beliefs. If you decide to leave Islam in such countries, death awaits you.

Must I remind you that Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, state unequivocally that the right to freedom of opinion and expression is a fundamental human right?

The fight for this is what landed Raif Badawi and other human rights activists in prison. The charges or names may differ, but the core remains the same: freedom of expression.

I believe we stand in front of two options. Are we ready to stand on the right side of history, or are we leaving our children and grandchildren a shameful legacy – one that tells them “although we could have changed the world to the better, we chose not to remain silent”.

I believe that changing the world to the better is possible. It is a dream shared by many young men and woman in a world torn by wars and human rights violations. And this dream becomes a duty – our human and moral duty to support the freedom of thought and human rights.

This is the lesson I learned from my husband experience. Today I am not defending Raif because he is the father of my children, no. I am doing this now because I also believe more than ever of the right of every human being to the freedom of expression and I will fight for that right even for those, whom I disagree with.

Change will not happen as long as we let the fear silence our mouths. Change will not happen if silence remains our approach.

We all have a responsibility to stand firm in the face of the so-called apostasy laws, and I believe that history will not forgive us for tolerating such barbaric rules. The time has come to insist on the abolishment of such laws and the protection of all those affected starting with Raif Badawi and Pakistani Asia bibi.

Thank

you.