

THE CIVIL COURAGE PRIZE

*For steadfast resistance to evil
at great personal risk*

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Ali Salem, Egyptian Author, Journalist and Outspoken Critic of Islamic Radicalism, Wins 2008 Civil Courage Prize

New York, NY – Ali Salem, the Egyptian playwright, satirist and a voice for peace and reason in the Middle East, will receive the 2008 Civil Courage Prize in London on November 19. The Prize of \$50,000 honors people who have demonstrated steadfast resistance to evil at great personal risk.

Ali Salem, 72, is a devoted advocate for peace between Egypt and Israel, and between Israel and Palestine. He has been an isolated voice for tolerance in the region for many years. As a direct result, his works have been banned in Egypt; he has been expelled from his country's Writers Union; and he has endured a continuing campaign of threats, vilification and censorship. He remains fierce in his denunciation of Islamic radicalism.

In 1994, after the signing of the Oslo accords, Salem drove his 14-year old Soviet-made car across the Sinai into Israel. He spent over three weeks in the country, touring and meeting Israelis from all walks of life. On his return, he published a book, 'My Drive to Israel', which sold over 60,000 copies.

The Egyptian writers union expelled him for "activity aimed at normalizing the relation with the Zionists." He fought the ruling in court and was reinstated, but having won his court battle he then quit the Union.

Due to the censorship of his work Salem has not had a play produced since 1994. He has been ostracized in the Egyptian and Arab media, although he continues to write for the London-based Arab-language newspaper Al-Hayat.

In 1996 he became a co-founder of the Cairo Peace Movement, and he is active in Egyptian and Israeli peace groups. He remains critical of both Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories as well as suicide bombings and entreaties for war by Arabs.

He was arrested and detained by the Egyptian police in 2000 after he wrote a short film encouraging Egyptians to cast their ballots in an upcoming parliamentary election.

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In 2005 he was awarded an honorary doctorate from Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. He has visited Israel at least ten times since his first drive.

Commenting on receiving the Civil Courage Prize, Ali Salem said:

"My first trip to Israel wasn't a love trip, but a serious attempt to get rid of hate. Hatred prevents us from knowing reality as it is. It divides, and ultimately destroys, people. That is why I have argued, and will continue to argue, for tolerance and understanding between Arabs and Israelis, and a peaceful solution to our conflicts. These arguments must be heard and debated; the cycle of hatred cannot continue. I hope that more people will add their voices to the debate, and that understanding will finally prevail."

Commenting on Ali Salem's award, John Train, founder of the Prize, said:

"The Civil Courage Prize exists to recognize heroes of conscience like Ali Salem. He is one of many brave people all around the world who resist intimidation, ostracism and pressure, and risk their lives, to promote freedom and justice. They are not soldiers or politicians, but ordinary people with the courage to do extraordinary things. A healthy society relies on civil courage, and we hope that by recognizing it in people like Ali Salem we can not only support him in his work, but also give others the courage to follow in his footsteps."

Ali Salem has written 25 plays and 15 books as well as many articles. His first play was produced in 1965. Some of his productions have become classics of the Egyptian theater, including *The Phantom of Heliopolis*, *School of Troublemakers*, *The Comedy of Oedipus*, *The Man Who Fooled the Angels*, and *The Buffet*. Salem's plays are renowned for their allegorical critique of Egyptian politics and their deft combination of satire and humor.

The Civil Courage Prize has been awarded annually since 2000 by The Train Foundation (formerly known as the Northcote Parkinson Fund). The American Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Robert Tuttle, will be host at the prize-giving. Douglas Hurd, a senior British statesman – former Foreign Secretary and Home Secretary -- and novelist, will speak.

The 2008 Civil Courage Prize Award Ceremony will be held at the American Ambassador's residence, Winfield House, Regent's Park, London, UK, on November 19 at 6:00 pm. To attend the event as a member of the media, please contact Chris Blundell: cblundell@brunswickgroup.com tel +44 207 404 5959.

For further information about the Civil Courage Prize and this year's winner, please visit: <http://www.civilcourageprize.org>.