



Pakistani campaigner for girls' education Malala Yousafzai, laureate of the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought 2013, today received the award at a ceremony in Strasbourg.

In a speech she dedicated the award to "the unsung heroes of Pakistan" and to human rights campaigners worldwide.

"By awarding the Sakharov Prize to Malala Yousafzai, the European Parliament acknowledges the incredible strength of this young woman. Malala bravely stands for the right of all children to be granted a fair education. This right for girls is far too commonly neglected", said EP President Martin Schulz.

250 million young girls around the world cannot freely go to school. "Malala's example reminds us of our duty and responsibility to the right to education for children. This is the best investment for the future", he added.

Ms Yousafzai, 16, is a student from the town of Mingora in Swat District, Pakistan, known for her women's rights activism in the Swat Valley, where the Taliban regime has banned girls from

attending school.

She gave her first public speech in September 2008, entitled "How dare the Taliban take away my basic right to an education?". When all girls' schools under Taliban control were closed in January 2009, she started a blog for BBC Urdu under the pseudonym of Gul Makai, a folklore heroine. The blog brought fame to Malala and her fight. Threats to her family followed as soon as her identity was revealed, leading up to an assassination attempt in October 2012, when she was shot in the head and neck by Taliban gunmen while returning home on a school bus.

The 50,000 euro (\$65,000) prize is considered Europe's top human rights award.

"I am hopeful the European Parliament will look beyond Europe to the suffering countries where people are still deprived of their basic rights, their freedom of thought is suppressed, freedom of speech is enchained," Ms Yousafzai said. "Many children have no food to eat, no water to drink and children are starving for education. It is alarming that 57 million children are deprived of education... this must shake our conscience."

She began her speech with a famous quote from the 18th Century French philosopher Voltaire: "I do not agree with what you have to say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it."

She said children in countries such as Pakistan "do not want an iPhone, a PlayStation or chocolates, they just want a book and a pen".

MEPs gave her a standing ovation.

The Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, named after Soviet scientist and dissident Andrei Sakharov, was established in December 1988 by the European Parliament to honour individuals or organizations who dedicate their lives to the defence of human rights and freedoms, particularly the right to free expression.

## **Malala Yousafzai receives the Sakharov Prize 2013**

Wednesday, 20 November 2013 00:00

---

Ms Yousafzai joins a distinguished list of winners of the Sakharov Prize that includes Nelson Mandela and Aung San Suu Kyi.