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# The Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarch Honor Yulia Navalnaya with the 2024 Athenagoras Human Rights Award

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The Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarch chose to honor Yulia Navalnaya with the 2024 Athenagoras Human Rights Award. Yulia is a freedom fighter, human rights activist, and the wife of the martyred Alexei Navalny, Russia's opposition leader. Yulia promoted the cause of democracy in Russia with Alexei, and following his tragic death, continues to carry on the fight for a free Russia. Yulia is one of the key figures in the Russian protest movement. She serves as the Chairwoman of the Human Rights Foundation and the Chairwoman of the Human Rights Foundation and the Chairwoman of the Advisory Board of the Anti-Corruption Foundation, truly embodying their message "Do not be afraid, do not be silent." Navalnaya's resilience and dedication have made her a symbol of strength and courage for many Russians.

The program began with the Greek and American National Anthems performed by Constantine Pappas. His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America offered the invocation to the attendees including fellow hierarchs, clergy, and members of the Greek Orthodox Community. Attendees were welcomed by Archon National Vice Commander The Honorable B. Theodore Bozonelis.

Serge Schmemann from the New York Times and Dr. Anthony Limberakis, the Archon National Commander, shared heartfelt remarks commending Alexei and Yulia for their unwavering commitment to advocating for Russian democracy and their relentless determination to persevere. The String Quartet of the Greek Youth Symphony Orchestra delivered a poignant musical tribute in memory of Alexei Navalny.

A powerful video tribute to Alexei Navalny was showcased, highlighting the deep commitment he and Yulia shared for each other and their fight for freedom in Russia. In the video, Navalny declares, "You are not allowed to give up… If they decide to kill me, it means that we are incredibly strong."

Following the video tribute, Archbishop Elpidophoros presented the 2024 Athenagoras Human Rights Award to Navalnaya, eliciting celebratory shouts of “Axia” from the audience. “Amidst the pain and loss of your martyred husband, you have found the way to keep his memory alive for all of us who looked to Alexei as a last best hope for a Russia to be finally free from tyranny. Free from a tyranny that spins countless lies to deceive and entrap the Russian People in a totalitarian nightmare from which they cannot awake. Free from a tyranny that uses violence and war as a tool of personal self-aggrandizement. Free from a tyranny that is threatening the world even as it destroys the Russian Nation from within,” His Eminence remarked.

Navalnaya honored the memory of her late husband and reaffirmed her committment to the values he fought and died for, including a free Russia. “How can we ensure religion in Russia plays the same role it does in western countries? Not as a tool of state propaganda, but as a vital social institution that strengthens community bonds, teaches goodness, and helps people…How can the Orthodox Church regain the trust of the people and find a place in their hearts?…it is up to us to seek the answer to these questions” Navalnaya stated.

In 1986, the National Council of the Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate established the Athenagoras Human Rights Award, named after the late Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Athenagoras I, to honor those who exemplify action, dedication, and concern for the basic rights and religious freedom of all people. Previous recipients include President Jimmy Carter, Archbishop Desmond M. Tutu, and Elie Wiesel.

Archon Skevophylax Constantine G. Caras, Esq. presented the Archon Classs of 2024 at this ceremony

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