

PROFILE of The Week

By Dr. DHANPAUL NARINE

Denis Mukwege and Nadia Murad

Winners of the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize

He has been called the main street of hope while she has led the fight to give more visibility to wartime sexual violence against women. The Nobel Committee awarded the 2018 Peace Prize to Denis Mukwege and Nadia Murad for 'their efforts to end the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and armed conflict. Both laureates have made a critical contribution to focusing attention on, and combating, such war crimes.'

Mukwege grew up in the Democratic Republic of Congo in a religious household; his father was a Pentecostal minister. He would visit victims with his father and came to the conclusion that medical help was just as important pastoral care. The young Mukwege was from a family of nine children and money was scarce. But he wanted to be a doctor. He studied for his medical degree in Burundi and worked at the Christian Hospital in Lemera.

Mukwege studied podiatry but he switched his attention to obstetrics and gynecology after he saw the terrible conditions that affected women. In 1989, Mukwege was stationed at a hospital in Lemera and moved to Bukavu to be close to women patients. The led him to set up a maternity ward with an operating room in Panzi Hospital.

When war broke out in the Republic of Congo in the nineties, Mukwege found that the women victims had something in common. Genital mutilation was used as a weapon of war. In a nine-month period in 2014 a total of 11,769 cases of sexual violence were recorded in various provinces in

the Democratic Republic of Congo. The violence against women was unspeakable and Mukwege did his best to treat them.

He realized that the victims suffered immense psychological scars once reconstructive surgery took place. Mukwege decided to act by hiring a team to treat the emotional and psychological problems. He said, 'We first started by limiting ourselves to pure medical care, but we quickly realized that

him the target of assassination attempts and some of his staff members were kidnapped, tortured and raped. But this only strengthened Mukwege's resolve to continue the work. He spoke at the United Nations in 2012 and called on the world to do more to help.

According to Dr. Mukwege, 'The advances made by our civilization are declining; they are declining through the new barbarities that we are seeing in the Democratic Republic of Congo and in Syria; but also through the deafening silence and the lack of courage of the international community. We cannot silence the truth as it is persistent. We should rather confront it to avoid betraying our ideals.' It is appropriate Dr. Mukwege was rushing to perform another surgery when he was informed of the Nobel Prize.



Dr. Denis Mukwege has helped thousands of women to recover from the effects of genital mutilation

after being treated, the women refused to eat, drink, live and were dying from a form of suicide.'

By being proactive he was able to break the culture of silence and denial and to bring the suffering of women to the attention of the international community. This made

The Nobel Committee made another worthy selection in awarding the Peace Prize jointly to Nadia Murad Basee Taha. Nadia was born in Iraq and is from the Yazidi minority group. In 2014, when she was nineteen, the Islamic State fighters (ISIS) attacked her village and

killed over 600 persons. Nadia's brothers and stepbrothers were killed and she was taken into slavery. Nadia describes her introduction to slavery, 'I'll never forget how my mother looked



Nadia Murad speaks out on sexual violence against women.

that day, her white headscarf pushed back, her hair wild and messy. Without saying a word, she rested her head on my lap. When one of the men grabbed me and tore me away from her,

place was unimaginable. She was beaten, spit upon and burned with cigarettes. She said that the wives of the captors were just as cruel; they stood by and watched as thousands of Yazidi

women were sold into slavery. The captors prayed five times a day, had families, and yet raped and tortured the Yazidi women. Nadia said that they committed crimes to her body until she became unconscious. She prayed that they would kill her but they did not. It appeared that someone had a higher purpose for her.

In November 2004, after more abuse was heaped on her Nadia saw that one of the doors was left open. She made a run for it and arrived at the home of Omar Abdel Jabar. He took her in and hid her from the soldiers. 'It was the right thing to do,' Jabar said. Little did she know that her fate would be tied to that of Jabar's in a strange way. Nadia contacted her brother several miles away in Kirkuk. Jabar volunteered to take her; she would pose as his wife. Passing several checkpoints was difficult but they managed to get to Kirkuk.

Nadia eventually made it to Germany. But life was not that easy for Jabar. He was identified

by ISIS as a traitor and had to flee from Mosul. He left his parents and his pregnant wife behind. Jabar fled to Bulgaria where he was jailed, after which he arrived in Germany and asked for asylum.

In June 2017, Nadia returned to her village in Iraq. It was an emotional homecoming. She has become an international spokesperson on the atrocities of ISIS and with the help of Amal Clooney, and others, Nadia has been able to take her message to the world stage. She won the Sakharov Prize for her efforts to bring the plight of women to the attention of the international community and also addressed the United Nations on the matter.

Nadia has published her story in a book called 'The Last Girl' in which she spoke about her life and the capture and cruelty at the hand of ISIS. How did she feel when she learned that she had won the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize? Nadia says, 'When I received the news the first thing I did was to look at my mother's picture and cry because I felt that I needed her. But not just her, it is also the 80 older women that were all executed just for being Yazidi and for being older women. I feel they will be proud of me.'

We are proud of the work of Dr. Denis Mukwege and Nadia Murad and congratulate them on winning the Nobel Peace Prize. Women should be treated with respect at all times.