

THE HAGUE, 6 November 2024 – “This Award for Natur og Ungdom is a recommendation and a reminder that human rights violations cannot go unresolved,” said Gytis Blaževičius, Leader of Natur og Ungdom, when receiving the 2024 Max van der Stoel Award today.



Paul van den IJssel, Ambassador for International Organisations (left), presents the 2024 Max van der Stoel Award on behalf of the Foreign Affairs Ministry of the Netherlands to Gytis Blaževičius and Elisabeth Regine Myrland of Natur og Ungdom, from Norway, 6 November, The Hague. (OSCE/Arnaud Roelofs) (OSCE/Arnaud Roelofs)

PRESS RELEASE

Human rights violations cannot go unresolved, say youth environmental group Natur og Ungdom, winners of the 2024 Max van der Stoel Award

THE HAGUE, 6 November 2024 – “This Award for Natur og Ungdom is a recommendation and a reminder that human rights violations cannot go unresolved,” said Gytis Blaževičius, Leader of Natur og Ungdom, when receiving the 2024 Max van der Stoel Award today.

“Western countries also have to walk the talk,” he added.

“It is a no brainer that all people, and especially minorities, have to be included and respected in the decision processes regarding the climate transition we have to go through. The transition has to be safe

and just for everyone,” said Natur og Ungdom member and Sámi activist Elisabeth Regine Myrland.

They received the 2024 Max van der Stoel Award on behalf of Natur og Ungdom from Norway (Nature and Youth / Young Friends of the Earth Norway) at a ceremony attended by representatives from governments, civil society and international organizations at the Peace Palace in The Hague.

Presenting the award on behalf of the Foreign Affairs Ministry of the Netherlands, Paul van den IJssel, Ambassador for International Organisations, said “The work of Natur og Ungdom has not only helped safeguard Sámi traditions and culture but has also raised awareness of the vital role the Sámi play in preserving Norway’s natural environment. Their advocacy is a reminder that the protection of cultural heritage and environmental stewardship are interconnected. In protecting the rights of minorities, we protect our shared future.

“So, it is with great pride and admiration that I congratulate Natur og Ungdom for their tireless efforts and remarkable achievements. Their work stands as an inspiring example of what can be accomplished when we recognize the strength in diversity. This work demands patience and resilience, and I wholeheartedly applaud Natur og Ungdom for it.”

Speaking on behalf of the Jury in his capacity as Chair of the 2024 Max van der Stoel Award Jury, former OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Kairat Abdrakhmanov said: “Natur og Ungdom provides an effective platform for young people aged between 13 and 25 from all communities in Norway to participate in public life. They advance the interests of minorities by giving a voice to Sámi youth, empowering them to protect their rights and traditional culture, and raising public awareness about the vital role that Sámi communities play in preserving and protecting Norway’s environmental heritage.”

“I am grateful for the opportunity to congratulate Natur og Ungdom as the first Norwegian recipient of the Max van der Stoel Award,” said Ellen Svendsen, Permanent Representative of Norway to the OSCE. “Their dedication to empowering youth, advocating for the environment, and fostering community engagement plays a crucial role in creating a more viable future. The youth are not just the future, they are the present,” Svendsen concluded.

The Max van der Stoel Award – a prize of €50,000 – has been organized by the office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities and sponsored by the Dutch Foreign Ministry every two years since 2003. It is presented to a person, group or institution, in recognition of their extraordinary and outstanding achievements in improving the position of national minorities across the OSCE countries.

Max van der Stoel was appointed as the first OSCE High Commissioner in 1992 and served eight and a half years in the post. He was twice Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, and held seats in both the upper and lower houses of the Dutch Parliament. He served as Permanent Representative of the Netherlands to the United Nations and was awarded the honorary title of Minister of State by the then Queen Beatrix.

Event material can be found [here](#).

For PDF attachments or links to sources of further information, please visit:
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