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The University of Sydney News

Noam Chomsky, the American linguist, social scientist and human rights campaigner and this year's winner of the Sydney Peace Prize, delivered the City of Sydney Peace Prize lecture at Sydney Town Hall last night.

The prize is awarded by the [Sydney Peace Foundation](#) based at the University of Sydney.

In his talk Chomsky explored the concept of revolutionary pacifism, a concept defined by pacifist thinker and social activist A.J. Muste, who Chomsky considers one of the great figures of 20th century America.

Muste believed that "one must be a revolutionary before one can be a pacifist" and that a pacifist should recognise "the violence on which the present system is based, and all the evil - material and spiritual - this entails."

For Chomsky that violence includes the six million children who die every year because of lack of simple medical assistance and the billion people in the world on the edge of starvation.

Recognising violence includes the violence that occurs in our own country or region. We do not criticise an Iranian intellectual for joining the ruling clerics in condemnation of the crimes of the United States, Chomsky says. Rather "we ask what they say about their own state".

"We honored Soviet dissidents on the same grounds. Of course, that is not the reaction within their own societies. There, dissidents are condemned as 'anti-Soviet' or supporters of the Great Satan, much as their counterparts here are condemned as 'anti-American' or supporters of today's official enemy."

Continuing this discussion of violence and responsibility, Chomsky criticised the assassination of Osama Bin Laden. While Bin Laden's responsibility for the events of 11 September 2001 is hardly in doubt, the act was an abandonment of America's commitment to the important legal principle of presumption of innocence and right to a fair trial.

This abandonment is evident in America's "global campaign of the assassination of suspects" including the campaign of drone strikes in Pakistan. Such action is doing massive psychological damage to the civilian populations in which they take place, Chomsky said.

Bin Laden's assassination contributed to heightening tension in the region and risks major destabilisation and radicalisation of the region.



Professor Noam Chomsky was awarded the Sydney Peace Prize for 'unfailing moral courage'.

In this wide-ranging lecture Chomsky underlines that Muste's revolutionary pacifism emphasises peace with justice. It also asks who, after a war, will confront the victor and their conviction that war and violence pay.

Professor Chomsky will receive the \$50,000 Sydney Peace Prize at a gala dinner to be held at the University of Sydney tonight.

The citation for the award reads:

For inspiring the convictions of millions about a common humanity and for unfailing moral courage. For critical analysis of democracy and power, for challenging secrecy, censorship and violence and for creating hope through scholarship and activism to promote the attainment of universal human rights.

Noam Chomsky first became widely known through his work on modern linguistics especially his theory of a universal grammar. Since the 1960s, when he opposed the Vietnam War, he has forged a reputation as a political activist or "libertarian socialist", especially as a critic of American foreign and domestic policy.

He has written more than 150 books including *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (1988) co-written with Edward S Herman, which received worldwide attention and was turned into a documentary film.

Last year's Sydney Peace Prize recipient was Indian scientist and environmental campaigner, [Dr Vandana Shiva](#). Previous recipients include the Nobel Laureates Professor Muhammad Yunus and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Indigenous leader Patrick Dodson, former Governor General Sir William Deane, diplomat and nuclear disarmament advocate Dr Hans Blix, human rights campaigners such as the Palestinian educator Dr Hanan Ashrawi, the Indian novelist Arundhati Roy and the former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson.