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Stop bombing Afghanistan: Arundhati Roy

Ranvir Nayar in Paris

Booker Prize winning author, Arundhati Roy, at a function in Paris to honour her, criticised the United States-led bombings in Afghanistan and fundamentalism in India and Pakistan. Roy was in Paris to receive the prestigious French Cultural Award on Monday evening after which she addressed an elite gathering.

"I am against the war, not because I am intrinsically anti-American or pro-Taleban. I am fundamentally opposed to violence. I do not believe war can eradicate terrorism," Roy said.

"Millions of ordinary people, who have endured a brutal civil war for twenty years, run the risk of starving to death in the bitter winter in the mountains of Afghanistan."

"So I call upon, I beg the international coalition against terror, to stop bombing Afghanistan," Roy said.

Formed in Paris in 1992 by Nobel peace prize winner Elie Wiesel, the Academie Universelle des Cultures has about 60 select members, including leading scientists, intellectuals and thinkers who aim to defend the values of democracy.

The award is given each year in recognition of work that has contributed to the fight against intolerance, xenophobia, discrimination against women, racism, misery, ignorance and other deliberate degradation of life.

The award carries a cash component of 500,000 French francs (\$70,000). The first was given in 2000 to former Czech prime minister and writer Vaclav Havel. In her acceptance speech, Roy warned that the actual outcome of the war could be genocide. She criticised President George W Bush for his statement "you are either with us or with the terrorists", in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks on the US.

"I don't accept the paradigms of this debate. I believe that all the beauty of human civilisation -- our art, our music, our literature -- lie beyond these fundamentalist positions," Roy said.

Roy dedicated a large part of her speech to developments in India. She renewed her criticism of the government for carrying out nuclear [tests](#) soon after coming to power in 1998.

"Today, of course, the prospect of nuclear war is more real than ever. The nuclear tests led to chilling nationalist rhetoric of the worst kind," she said.

Not sparing her country or its neighbours, Roy said: "In India, it is Hindu fundamentalism, in Pakistan it is Islamic fundamentalism." The gathering received her speech with standing applause.

Roy dedicated the prize money to non-violent movements all over the world. "This money will go to fund, to sustain, to intervene, in as unobtrusive a manner as possible (non-violent movements). But most of all, it will be a way to honour their resilience and refusal to take up arms even in the teeth of extreme provocation."

She will also participate in a two-day international forum on globalisation in eastern Paris, beginning Tuesday.