Literary Scholar and Linguistics Specialist Feryad Fazil Omar Receives Order of Merit

Feryad Fazil Omar, renowned literary scholar, linguistics specialist, Kurdish author, and former Kurdish instructor at Freie Universität Berlin, was presented with the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany on Wednesday, December 21, 2022. The human rights activist was nominated for the award by Executive Vice President of Freie Universität Berlin, Professor Verena Blechinger-Talcott. Ulrike Gote, Senator for Higher Education and Research in the State of Berlin, presented Feryad Fazil Omar with the distinction.

In her laudatory speech, Ulrike Gote made reference to Feryad Fazil Omar’s exceptional commitment to civil society, in particular his dedication to protecting and asserting human rights around the world. “This award pays tribute to your tireless and wide-ranging commitment as a pioneer in researching and teaching the Kurdish language, culture, and history in Germany, as well as your exceptional services as a mediator between German and Kurdish culture,” Gote stated.

Feryad Fazil Omar was born in 1950 in Iraq and has lived in Berlin for almost forty-five years. He began his academic career with a teaching position at Iraq’s first Kurdish university, located in the northern city of Sulaymaniyah. He then left Iraq in 1978 after receiving a grant to carry out research at Freie Universität Berlin, where he studied at the Institute of Iranian Studies until 1982. After completing his studies, he stayed on at the institute, teaching Kurdish language, literature, and history until 2018. Over the years Feryad Fazil Omar held seminars and lectures on the language, literature, history, and politics of the Kurds. He also created several dictionaries and textbooks for those interested in learning more about the Kurdish language and Kurdish literature. Additionally, he has translated several works of Kurdish literature into German and has written his own poetry in both German and Kurdish. Some of his most important publications include a Kurdish (Kurmanji)-German dictionary, first published in 1992, a Kurdish (Sorani)-German dictionary, published in 2005, and a German-Kurdish dictionary, published in 2016. Feryad Fazil Omar received an honorary doctorate from the Salahaddin University-Erbil in February of this year. In May, he was also appointed an honorary member of the Kurdish Academy of Sciences.

Feryad Fazil Omar founded the Institute of Kurdish Studies in Berlin, where he is also the director. From 2012 to 2017, he was the chairman of the German federal board for human rights organization “Society for Threatened Peoples.” In addition to his academic work and dedication to fighting for human rights around the world, Feryad Fazil Omar acts as a politically independent observer and commentator on Kurdish affairs, as well as on ethnic and religious minorities in the Middle East.

The idea to nominate Feryad Fazil Omar for the Order of Merit originally came from his successor at the Society for Threatened Peoples, Jan Diedrichsen, and was supported by many others, including Executive Vice President of Freie Universität Berlin Professor Verena Blechinger-Talcott, former provost of Freie Universität Berlin Peter Lange, and former professor of Iranian studies at Freie Universität Maria Macuch.
Professor Blechinger-Talcott noted that the award recognizes Feryad Fazil Omar’s many years of successful work in the field of Iranian studies, as well as his humanitarian efforts: “His years of enthusiastic teaching at the Institute of Iranian Studies has left its mark on many students. At the same time, the dictionaries and reference works he has published over the years have greatly contributed toward a greater understanding of Kurdish languages, history, and literature in Germany and beyond.” Feryad Fazil Omar has received global recognition for his work and considerably advanced Freie Universität Berlin’s reputation as a unique institution for Kurdish studies on the international stage.

When recommending Feryad Fazil Omar for the Order of Merit, Jan Diedrichsen made reference to the Kurdish studies scholar’s remarkable personal background and professional career. After being persecuted and tortured in Iraq, Feryad Fazil Omar has dedicated his life to advocating for human rights around the globe. At the same time, he has striven to preserve the language and literature of his Kurdish heritage while also giving something back to his new home in Germany through an impressive array of volunteer activities and his commitment to civil society. Feryad Fazil Omar received German citizenship in 1993 and often refers to “the generosity of Germany” that was shown to him. “Feryad Fazil Omar is a human rights activist who was made aware of the injustices of our world and the powerlessness often experienced by minorities through the suffering of the Kurds,” Diedrichsen added.

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