

US President Obama wins Nobel Peace Prize
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US President Barack Obama won the Nobel Peace Prize today for giving the world "hope for a better future" with his work for peace and calls to reduce the global stockpile of nuclear weapons.

The Norwegian Nobel Committee praised Obama for "his extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation between peoples".

"Very rarely has a person to the same extent as Obama captured the world's attention and given its people hope for a better future," the committee said in a citation.

The award of the prize to the US president - only nine months into his presidency - came a shock, after other contenders, such as Zimbabwe's Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai, and freed Colombian-French politician Ingrid Betancourt had been tipped for the award.

The first African American to hold the country's highest office, Obama has called for disarmament and worked to restart the stalled Middle East peace process since taking office in January.

Despite setting out an ambitious international agenda, he has yet to score any breakthrough on the Middle East or Iran's nuclear programme, and faces difficult choices on the conduct of the war in Afghanistan.

Last month Obama chaired a historic meeting of the United Nations Security Council, which unanimously approved a US-drafted resolution calling on nuclear weapons states to scrap their arsenals.

Third senior US Democrat awarded

Nobel Committee chairman Thorbjorn Jagland said the panel had considered what Obama had done during the year, and the prize was not for the future - when asked about challenges facing Obama and the US, in for instance Afghanistan.

Jagland cited that Obama had done most for peace "in the past year," citing the US president's efforts to promote nuclear disarmament.

"There have been positive reactions from Russia and the People's Republic of China to his initiatives," Jagland told reporters.

Jagland, a former Norwegian prime minister and foreign minister, earlier this year took over as chair of the five-member Nobel Committee. He also mentioned Obama's support for international organizations like the United Nations.

"If you look at the history of the Nobel prize, we have tried to enhance what many personalities have tried to do," Jagland said, citing the efforts in the 1970s by West German Chancellor Willy Brandt and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

Obama is the third senior US Democrat to win the prize this decade after former vice-president Al Gore won in 2007 along with the UN climate panel and Jimmy Carter in 2002. The prize worth 10 million Swedish crowns (US\$1.4 million) will be handed over in Oslo on

Dec 10.

There were a record 205 nominations for the 2009 peace prize, of which 33 organizations. Last year former Finnish president Martti Ahtisaari won the peace prize for his mediation efforts.

The peace prize was the fifth of this year's Nobel awards, which are also made for medicine, physics, chemistry and literature. The prizes were endowed by Swedish industrialist Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite.

- *Agencies*

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