

Secularist of the Year 2011

Each year the National Secular Society makes a presentation of the Irwin Prize for £5,000 to a person who has contributed significantly to the secular cause over the previous year. The prize will be awarded at an awards ceremony in London on Saturday 19 March.

Past winners have included Professor Steve Jones for his work on promoting evolution and resisting creationist claims; Maryam Namazie for her work in opposing the oppression of women in Iran; Evan Harris MP and Lord Avebury for their work in abolishing the blasphemy law, and in 2010 the title was awarded to the [Southall Black Sisters](#) for their work providing a secular space where women fleeing violence or injustice — often resulting from religious attitudes — can find a safe haven.

The 2011 presentation will be preceded by a three course lunch at a venue in the heart of London's Soho district on Saturday 19 March with the whole event ending around 4pm.

Tickets are on sale priced £45 each. A special student rate of £15 is also available for students in full time education.

Nominations

And the nominations are....

[Pat Condell](#)

Comedian and video blogger, nominated for being an outspoken critic of religious demands and the dangers posed to society by allowing our freedoms to be restricted by undue respect for religion, particularly Islam.

[Ricky Gervais](#)

Comedian, actor and NSS Honorary Associate. Nominated for being outspoken in his criticism of religion and his defence of freedom of expression.

[Christopher Hitchens](#)

Journalist and writer nominated for his robust defence of free expression and rationalism. His books include *God is Not Great* and *The Portable Atheist*.

[Tim Minchin](#)

Australian comedian and songwriter nominated for being a strong defender of freedom of expression and rational thought as well as criticising the demands of religion.

[James O'Malley](#) and the [Pod Delusion](#) team.

Nominated for providing a weekly podcast for secularists, non-believers and rationalists that is both challenging and entertaining over the last two years. The NSS has featured on it regularly.

[Sarah Palin](#)

The Republican Governor of Alaska. Nominated because “she has done more for the cause globally to ensure Church and State should be kept apart than any other public figure.”

[Pope Benedict](#)

Nominated because “he has turned more people against the Catholic Church this year than any paid-up secularist.”

[Geoffrey Robertson](#)

Human rights lawyer, academic, author and broadcaster. Nominated for his book *The Case of the Pope: Vatican Accountability for Human Rights Abuse* in which he argues that the Vatican is not a state and the pope is not immune to legal action. He was also an active supporter of the Protest the Pope demonstration.

[Salmaan Taseer](#)

Secularist Governor of the province of Punjab. Nominated for speaking out against Pakistan’s blasphemy laws. He was murdered on January 4th 2011.

[Peter Tatchell](#)

Gay rights campaigner nominated for leading many campaigns including defending free speech for homophobic street preachers and seeking to extend marriage rights to gay people.

[Polly Toynbee](#)

Journalist, broadcaster and NSS Honorary Associate nominated for her consistent and passionate defence of secularism.

[Sophie in’t Veld](#)

A Dutch MEP and NSS Honorary Associate nominated for running the European Parliament Platform for Secularism in Politics which promotes secularism in the European Parliament, an institution increasingly influenced by religious bodies.

Previous Winners

2010 - The Southall Black Sisters (presented by Dr. Michael Irwin, accepted by Pragna

2009 - Evan Harris MP and Lord Avebury (presented by Richard Dawkins)

2007 - Mina Ahadi (presented by Joan Smith)

2006 - Steve Jones (presented by Dick Taverne)

2005 - Maryam Namazie (presented by Polly Toynbee)

* No award was presented in 2008, because the event was postponed to February 2009 in order to coincide with the National Secular Society's "200th Birthday Party for Charles Darwin".

See photos from Secularist of the Year 2010