

GERMAN PHILOSOPHER REFUSES UAE PRIZE

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Juergen Habermas

The board of trustees of a high-priced literary award from the United Arab Emirates expressed regret on Monday that prominent German philosopher Juergen Habermas had turned down the prize, reversing his earlier decision.

The 91-year-old German, considered his country's most eminent contemporary philosopher, announced earlier this week that he would not accept the Sheikh Zayed Book Award over its ties "with the existing political system" in the UAE, a hereditarily ruled country long criticised for its suppression of dissent. While describing itself as an "independent" initiative, the prize is administered by Abu Dhabi culture and tourism authorities.

Mr. Habermas' influential writings on human rights, morality and democracy, among other topics, have stirred debate in Germany and beyond.

On its website, the board of the literary award, among the most well-funded in the region, said it "expresses regret" for Habermas' decision "but respects it."

The prize, it added, "embodies the values of tolerance, knowledge and creativity while building bridges between cultures, and will continue to fulfill this mission."

Mr. Habermas was named the Cultural Personality of the Year, a distinction that carries a cash prize of 1 million dirhams.

The award is named after Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the first president of the UAE when the federation of seven sheikhdoms became a country in 1971.

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