

From VOA Learning English, welcome to AS IT IS!

Hello, I'm Steve Ember.

Today, Mario Ritter tells us about how retired Roman Catholic Bishop Paride Taban has served people in Sudan -- sometimes at the risk of his life.

Kelly Jean Kelly tells about the continuing struggle for free speech in Egypt.

And we'll have a tribute to the great American pianist Van Cliburn, who died last week.

Humanitarian bishop Paride Taban helped shelter and feed thousands of people during many years of armed conflict in Sudan. Now the United Nations has awarded the retired Roman Catholic Church official the 2013 Sergio Vieira de Mello Prize. The peace award is named for a former U.N. official who died in a bombing in Iraq in 2003. Mario Ritter has more.

Bishop Paride Taban is being recognized for starting and lending his support to a cooperative village in southern Sudan. He established the peace village in 2004 for people from several tribes, nationalities and religions. And at age 76, the bishop continues to encourage good relationships among all Sudanese people.

Paride Taban was born in 1936 and became a priest of the Catholic Church in 1964. At that time, the first Sudanese civil war was going on, and religious workers had been expelled from southern Sudan. But the clergyman did not flee.

"I remained throughout the war, under bombs, under persecution, and many intellectuals and priests had to leave the country"

Bishop Taban says he got the idea for a cooperative, peaceful community partly from visits to Israel. In that country, he traveled to a cooperative village. Israelis, Palestinian Jews, Christians and Muslims all lived there

together. So he asked himself, why not establish such a community in Sudan?

In 1999, Bishop Taban started a demonstration farm in southern Sudan. At the time, violent cattle raids were taking place there. But he helped change that place of warfare into the peace village of Kuron. His actions earned him the peace prize. I'm Mario Ritter.

You are listening to "As It Is" in VOA Special English.

Egyptians are struggling over whether to set limits on free speech. They won rights to free speech in the country's political unrest two years ago. Kelly Jean Kelly has more.

In the past two years, Egyptians have used free speech in ways considered unimaginable in the past. Ways like online activism and street protests...

But writer Alaa el Aswany says the feeling of freedom is not real. He says the government of President Mohamed Morsi is setting its own policies.

"The formula is the following: you write whatever you want, and I'm going to do whatever I want."

Alaa el Aswany says the problem is that Egypt's current leadership has reduced free speech even more than former president Hosni Mubarak. The writer says President Morsi took legal action against about ten writers over a period of about six months. They were accused of insulting the president. In 30 years, the writer says, Mr. Mubarak did that three times.

It is not just insults to political leaders that have led to a reaction in Egypt. A video insulting Islam's Prophet Muhammad incited an attack on the American Embassy in Cairo. The attack resulted in death sentences for the Egyptians who made the video. Happily for them, they were not present when the sentences were announced.

Safwat al Ghani is with the group Gama'a Islamiya. He

says he believes in freedom that is controlled by what he calls "respect for sacredness and the conventions of Islam." Many Egyptians agree with him. But they do not want freedom of expression for politicians -- or humorists who make fun of the government.

Publisher Rania Al Malki says the government needs to ease restrictions on free speech. And, she says nobody understands parts of the new constitution related to control of the media.

"We have a situation here where the constitution has mandated the creation of two new bodies to regulate the media. But we have no clue what that is going to entail."

I'm Kelly Jean Kelly.

Internationally celebrated American pianist Van Cliburn died Wednesday at his home in Fort Worth, Texas. He was 78 years old.

"You're always hoping to play well. And if you don't play well, YOU are the unhappiest person. So you want to please your audience."

And please his audiences he did.

Van Cliburn was 23 years old when he performed in the famous Tchaikovsky International Competition in Moscow, in April of 1958. This was at the height of the Cold War period between the then Soviet Union and the United States. The Soviets had, only months earlier, launched the first orbiting earth satellite, Sputnik One. The Tchaikowsky competition was intended to also demonstrate Soviet *cultural* superiority.

But Cliburn's performances, including this music, the Tchaikowsky Piano Concerto No.1, had the Russian audience chanting "First Prize! First Prize!"

There was concern about awarding first prize to an American, but when premier Nikita Khrushchev was approached for his permission, he asked "Was he the Best? Then give it to him."

His victory launched a career that made him unusually famous for a classical musician. He also became a hero to music-loving people in the former Soviet Union.

Following the competition, a ticker tape parade in New York's Lower Manhattan, with 100,000 people lining the streets, welcomed him back to the United States.

His RCA Victor recording of the Tchaikowsky Concerto was the first classical recording to gain platinum status by selling over a million copies within a year. It is still available on CD.

Throughout his career, he had a great interest in encouraging young people to take up classical music. He established the annual Van Cliburn International Piano Competition in his home town of Fort Worth.

"It's been so interesting to see the young people come. They meet each other and have friendships and musical correspondences. It's really very exciting. And it's like the same feeling I had when I went to Russia in 1958. The warmth and camaraderie – it carried through all through the years."

He also encouraged the careers of young performers by creating several scholarship programs.

Cliburn continued to perform concerts and solo recitals, but in 1978, he walked off the stage, professionally exhausted. He would play occasionally in the late 1980s and early 1990s, but he mainly lived out his final years outside of the public spotlight.

His death last week, at the age of 78 was the result of advanced bone cancer.

A favorite saying of Van Cliburn was his take on a statement by the great 20th century Russian composer Sergei Rachmaninoff: "Great music is enough for a lifetime. But a lifetime is not enough for great music."

And that's "As It Is" in VOA Special English. I'm Steve Ember. Thanks for joining us.