

Geneva, London, 5 December 2006

Freedom of Expression organisations urge Iranian authorities to decrease levels of censorship

Levels of censorship have reached a new height in Iran. This is why the International Publishers Association (IPA), International PEN and ARTICLE 19 have written to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad today, urging him to lift the Procedural Guidelines for Publication issued by the Ministry of of Culture and Islamic Guidance (MCIG). The MCIG Procedural Guidelines for Publication, which are in direct breach of Iran's obligations under international law, are preventing local writers and publishers from issuing new books, and are creating a counterproductive atmosphere of self-censorship in the areas of art and literature. T

For the text of the letter see below, or click on www.article19.org, or www.ipa-uie.org

For further information, please contact:

ARTICLE 19
6-8 Amwell Street
London EC1R 1UQ
United Kingdom
Tel: +44 20 7278 9292
Fax: +44 20 7278 7660
Website: www.article19.org

International PEN
Brownlow House
50/51 High Holborn
London WC1V 6ER
United Kingdom
Tel: + 44 20 7405 0338
Fax: + 44 20 7405 0339
Website: www.internationalpen.org.uk

International Publishers Association (IPA)
3, avenue. de Miremont
CH - 1206 Geneva
Tel: + 41 22 346 30 18
Fax: + 41 22 347 57 17
Website: www.ipa-uie.org

Letter to :

His Excellency Mahmoud Ahmadinejad
The Presidency
Pasteur Avenue
13168-43311 Tehran
Islamic Republic of Iran

Geneva, London, 5 December 2006

RE: Your assistance in lifting the Procedural Guidelines for Publication

Your Excellency,

ARTICLE 19, the International Publishers Association (IPA) and International PEN are deeply concerned by the Procedural Guidelines for Publication issued by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (MCIG), which are preventing local writers and publishers from issuing new books.

IPA, established in Paris in 1896, represents the publishing industry worldwide through 78 national, regional and specialised publishers associations in 66 countries. International PEN was founded in 1921 in London. It is represented worldwide through 138 centres in over 100 countries. Accredited NGOs enjoying consultative status to the United Nations, both organizations seek to promote and defend the fundamental freedoms to publish, to read and to write, defending the rights of authors and publishers to create and distribute intellectual works in complete freedom. ARTICLE 19 is a human rights organisation with a specific mandate and focus on the defence and promotion of freedom of expression and freedom of information worldwide.

ARTICLE 19, IPA and International PEN condemn the practice of the Iranian Republic whereby the publication and distribution of books requires a permit from MCIG. We understand that such permits are granted following scrutiny by officials who might also demand the removal of materials deemed anti-Islamic, immoral, or politically unacceptable. In our view, this permission system amounts to censorship, which is contrary to Iran's international obligations to protect Freedom of Expression, including under Article 19 of the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), ratified by the Republic of Iran in 1975.

The Procedural Guidelines for Publication—which, according to Minister Hossein Saffar Harandi, seek to purge Iran's cultural scene of “unhealthy products,”—create a counterproductive atmosphere of social censorship, as well as self-censorship, in the areas of art and literature. The exhaustive steps associated with publishing and distributing books in Iran, as set forth in MCIG's Procedural Guidelines for Publication, have forced authors and publishers to wait several months for their new books, novels and political essays to be granted permission to be published. We also understand that MCIG is also demanding that previously published books be resubmitted for approval. We are informed that in the past,

MCIG's Procedural Guidelines for Publication were more or less predictable, enabling publishers to predict which books were likely to face opposition or objection. Publishers and authors operating in the Iranian market now inform us that the situation has become much more unstable and uncertain and that the levels of censorship have reached a new height. This has led to a situation where Iranian authors whose views are not in line with the Iranian government's are facing de facto bans and are forced to publish their books outside Iran or on the Internet. Facing what seems to be a hopeless situation, some renowned Iranian writers have started withholding their works, rather than seeking publication, a form of self censorship.

The Iranian government has repeatedly stated its intention to support books and reading. However, we fear that the stringent MCIG Procedural Guidelines for Publication run counter to this aim, and undermine the very existence of an independent book industry in Iran. The result is that the local publishing industry is under unreasonable pressure, with some publishers facing bankruptcy or have already gone bankrupt. ARTICLE 19, IPA and International PEN representing authors and publishers worldwide, strongly condemn this situation, as it may be jeopardizing cultural diversity in the Iranian written sector.

ARTICLE 19, IPA and International PEN therefore urge that the Iranian authorities implement fair and standardized book policies in line with international obligations. To do so requires the Iranian government to lift the permit system attached to the publication and distribution of books in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The lifting of the MCIG Procedural Guidelines for Publication, which are in direct breach of Iran's obligations under international law, would be seen as an encouraging step in the right direction. We therefore urge your government to lift all guidelines that run counter to the right to freedom of expression.

Yours respectfully,

Agnès Callamard
Executive Director
ARTICLE 19

Ana Maria Cabanellas
President
International Publishers
Association (IPA)

Jiri Grusa
President
International
PEN

CC:

Minister Hossein Saffar Harandi
Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance
PO Box 14155-1555 TEHRAN, IRAN
Azadi Avenue Hajj and Pilgrimage Building, 3rd floor TEHRAN, IRAN