



**Contribution to the Universal Periodic Review Mechanism
7th session of the Working Group of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR)**

A Joint UPR Submission on the Islamic Republic of Iran by the International Publishers Association (IPA), International PEN (NGOs in Consultative Status with ECOSOC) & Index on Censorship

31 August 2009

1. IPA, on behalf of the submitters, welcomes the opportunity provided by the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights to comment on the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran, about which it has had serious concerns for a number of years. This document provides an overview of the current situation for publishers and writers in particular, details how censorship works, and how it impedes cultural production, in particular in the field of literature. This joint submission also includes a set of recommendations whose aim is to improve the overall conditions for freedom of expression and freedom to publish in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

1. Overview of free expression & freedom to publish situation

2. Although freedom of expression is protected in the Islamic Republic of Iran under both national¹ and international² law, the enjoyment of this right has deteriorated drastically under President Ahmadinejad, who seized power in 2005. President Ahmadinejad has been hostile to the country's historically well organized media, including the independent section of the publishing industry.

3. The love for books still exists in Iran, but these days the average print run is around 3000 copies at best, down from 5000 a few years ago. There are many reasons for this, but the main reason is: Censorship. People have lost faith in the content made available to them for when it is available it is likely to have been carved up. Readers want high quality books and the destruction of authenticity by censors devalues the books published in Iran.

2. A Comprehensive and Arbitrary Pre- and Post- Publication Censorship Mechanism

4. Censorship is both comprehensive and arbitrary in Iran. Under the previous regime, before the revolution, politics was the sole taboo subject. Under the current regime the

¹ Articles 24 and 168 of the Constitution

² Including Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

taboos include: Politics, religion, and sexuality. Censorship is both pre- and post-publication. The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (MCIG) acts as the censor.

A two-stage process:

5. In the Iranian context, censorship is a comprehensive two-stage mechanism:

- Stage 1: The publisher sends a copy of the final print of a book to MCIG to obtain a [supposedly] permanent permission to print (A 4 format card – see Annex 1). He or she needs to fill a submission form in which he or she promises not to change anything after getting the permanent permission to print (see Annex 2).
- Stage 2: The publisher sends a copy of the book, once printed, to MCIG to obtain a permission to distribute (See Annex 3). This second stage is aimed at checking that the content of the printed book matches that of the approved version. It takes about a week usually.

6. In the best case scenario, the publisher gets the permission to print quickly. In the worst case scenario, he or she never hears of MCIG again about the book he or she seeks to publish. After two years without any news from MCIG, the book is considered to be fully banned. A publisher or a writer concerned never gets a “no” in writing. It is always given orally. Very often, he or she receives a list of changes (sometimes hundreds of changes are required for a single book) to be made to the text in order to receive the permission to print.

7. In some cases, a publisher gets the permission to print, but never gets the permission to distribute. At times, the book cover explains why the permission to distribute is not issued. At other times, the authorities do not appreciate the printer which has been chosen to print the book. It could also be that the civil servant dealing with the book has changed between stage 1 and stage 2.

8. MCIG sometimes reclaims the (supposedly-permanent) permission to print from the publisher after the second permission was issued and the book is already in book shops. Between two print-runs, MCIG on occasion requires a book to be resubmitted for approval and usually does not issue a permission to either print or distribute in that case scenario.

Book censorship tightened under President Ahmadinejad:

9. Book censorship is even more arbitrary and unpredictable since President Ahmadinejad took power in 2005. Before censorship was more or less predictable, enabling publishers to predict which books were likely to face opposition or objection. When President Ahmadinejad came to power, MCIG demanded that all permanent permits be returned for re-submission. This created chaos. Thousands and thousands of books were stuck in MCIG for re-approval. Publishers and authors now inform us that the situation has become much more unstable, uncertain, and arbitrary. To give one example of such instability, uncertainty and arbitrariness, a film which was on the Iranian screens earlier this year has seen the Ministry requiring more than 10 changes to the script, which a

publisher sought to publish as a book. The contrary can also happen: The script is allowed to be published, but the film is banned.

10. This censorship mechanism is culturally destructive. One of the books of one of the publishers IPA has been in contact with won a prestigious literary award in Iran. The book is now out of print, but still is in the publisher's catalogue. A MCIG representative said to this publisher: "You cannot print this book again". The publisher wanted to know why. S/He even asked which parts of the book s/he had to delete, amend or correct to be able to reprint it again. The Ministry representative answered that he would not tell her/him until he receives a letter from her/him asking this very question in writing, thus confessing that the book as such should not go to print again.

11. The censorship mechanism can also be petty and surreal. IPA has seen a document requiring 66 changes to a given final print about a famous scientist's life. Change number 11 (line 8, p. 98) demanded the deletion of the expression "pork meat" from the final print. Another of the 66 changes demanded the complete deletion of anything describing a "ceremony of Jewish tradition" from page 173 to page 178. The book also described how the scientist discovered that wine was better to stop bleeding than the hot oil which they usually used. The censor ordered the reference to wine to be removed. It took MCIG more than 6 months to produce this list of 66 "Diktats" after the publisher had submitted the book's final print. Sometimes MCIG does the corrections directly on paper.

The consequences of censorship:

12. The comprehensive censorship mechanism at play in Iran has created a counterproductive atmosphere of social censorship, as well as self-censorship, in the areas of art and literature. The exhausting bureaucratic hurdles associated with publishing and distributing books in Iran have forced authors and publishers, in the best case scenario, to wait several months for their new books, novels and political essays to be granted permission to be published. 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. One young writer IPA has been in contact with described himself as a "permanent resident" of MCIG when s/he was seeking publication of her/his works. When s/he heard "Come back when we have a new President", or "Your mind is not suitable for our Islamic Regime" one time too many, s/he finally gave up. Another writer said s/he had destroyed hundreds of pages of his writings "to be able to stay alive".

13. Other writers, rather than seeking refuge in "drawer literature", are forced to seek publication abroad. Sharing the difficulties of many authors the famous writer Mahmoud Doulatabadi has been unable to publish two novels and a collection of essays, as they have not received permission from MCIG. Meanwhile a German translation of one of these novels (*The Colonel*, covering Iran's history during the last century) has been published in German translation by Unionsverlag in Zurich, Switzerland.

14. As for publishers, censorship jeopardizes the investment that private publishers make, thus putting at risk the very survival of private and independent publishers in Iran. It is not only Iranian literary culture that is at stake. Access to the internet is also routinely blocked (see Annex 4). Censorship affects other cultural sectors as well like music, film, theatre or TV. In the film industry for instance it is not uncommon for the Ministry to approve a film only if it can chose part or the entire crew. Some actors are forced to leave the

country. Sometimes the permission to produce a film is granted, but the authorities tell the producers not to produce the film. The same happens to book publishers. “Why do you give your manuscripts to this or that publisher? He or she has got a lot of problems” is a sentence writers often hear.

15. The censor can be creative in its own way, but as a result of his work, Iranian creativity, Iranian fiction, Iranian literature are being severely damaged by this incredibly comprehensive and arbitrary censorship mechanism. Censorship has had a huge effect on creative writing in the last 4-5 years. Several foundations awarding literary prizes decided to not hand awards this year as a way to protest censorship, and those who have accepted to compromise their work.

16. Worse, the censorship mechanism is so comprehensive that censorship has developed into a culture of its own in Iran. Some Iranian authors think that even if MCIG disappeared tomorrow, Iranian creators and their producers would need time and lots of work to change the culture of censorship they have inherited and internalised.

17. Translations are also harshly hit by censorship. To give one example only, in an early translation of *American Hunger* by Richard Wright, MCIG demanded many changes, including the deletion of the terms “beer”, and “whisky” in the following sentence: “We were very poor. All we could afford was beer. We wished we had whisky”.

3. A Book Fair and Publishers under Control

18. The Tehran International Book Fair (TIBF) is a popular event attracting 3 to 4 millions visitors over a 10-day period. The participation range is based on estimates, but it looks quite credible as the exhibition space is huge and the book fair alleys are constantly packed. The Frankfurt Book Fair describes TIBF as the largest book fair in Central Asia and the Middle-East. The exhibition space is the Grand Mossallah Mosque. It is still under construction. Both its original purpose and the state of construction make this venue less than ideal for a book fair. It certainly does not meet key IPA criteria for efficient professional book fairs.

19. The independent publishers’ union, the Tehran Union of Publishers and Booksellers (TUPB), no longer runs TIBF. An official trade association, the Publishers’ Cooperative, has been responsible for the national section of TIBF since President Ahmadinejad came to power four years ago. The international section is directly managed by MCIG.

20. Publishers taking part in TIBF must submit a list of the books they intend to display ahead of the book fair for approval. During the book fair, a book fair security is in charge of enforcing this measure. Even books, which have been given prior approval, can be withdrawn from the stand by the book fair security. During TIBF 2009, IPA has for instance witnessed the withdrawal of a novel by an Iranian author, translated into a foreign language, from a foreign publisher’s stand.

21. Twenty independent publishers were banned from attending TIBF 2009. This measure is particularly harsh as TIBF represents a major income-generating opportunity for independent publishers who cannot rely on important subsidies from the government, unlike governmental and religious publishers, which often belong to the official publisher union (“the cooperative”).

4. Recommendations

22. In order to comply with Iran's international obligations to protect Freedom of Expression under Article 19 of the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), ratified by Iran in 1975, and Iran's domestic Law with regards to Freedom of Expression, in particular Articles 24 and 168 of the Constitution, IPA calls on the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to:

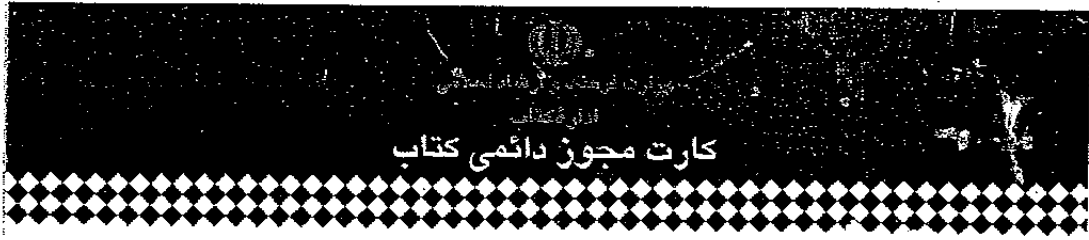
a. Altogether lift the permit system attached to the publication and distribution of books in the Islamic Republic of Iran; *With immediate effect, formalise all administrative measures impacting freedom to publish & enable effective and transparent judicial review of all administrative decisions impacting freedom to publish;*

b. Free all journalists, writers and publishers imprisoned for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression and opinion, in particular those arrested during the course of this summer, including: Reza Nourbakhsh, editor of Farhikhtegan daily (arrested on 4 Aug. 09); and Mehdi Yazdani Khoram, editor at Itmad e Milli (arrested on 4 Aug. 09);

c. Lift the publisher license system and/or grant it to the Tehran Union of Publishers and Booksellers (TUPB); Allow TUPB to manage the Tehran International Book Fair (TIBF), and the Iranian collective stands in international book fairs; Support religious and non-religious publishers equally; End discriminatory practices in this regard; Allow ALL *bona fide* publishers to take part in TIBF; End the practice upon which publishers are required to submit for approval the list of books they will display during TIBF;

d. Issue invitations to the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression and the independence of judges and lawyers.

Annex 1: "Permanent" Printing Permit



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شماره کارت:
شماره کتاب: تاریخ:
عنوان کامل کتاب:
عنوان کتاب به زبان اصلی:
عنوان روی جلد کتاب:

مؤلف یا مؤلفان:

..... ۱ ۲
..... ۳ ۴

مترجم یا مترجمان:

..... ۱ ۲
..... ۳ ۴

سایر موارد: ۵

ناشر: تعداد صفحات: قطع:
شابک: رده دیویی:

امضاء ادارہ کتاب
تاریخ و مهر ادارہ کتاب

Annex 2: Application Form

«بِسْمِ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى»

دبیرخانه هیأت نظارت بر اجرای ضوابط نشر کتاب

فرم قبل از چاپ

تاریخ:

(برگه اطلاعات کتاب)

شماره:.....

عنوان کتاب: عنوان کتاب به زبان اصلی: ناشر:

شماره پروانه نشر کتاب:

نوع اثر: تألیف ترجمه تصحیح و تحشیه گردآوری افسست سایر موارد

زبان کتاب: فارسی رده دیویی: شماره شابک:

با احترام اینجانب: ناشر کتاب یادشده با مشخصات زیر که حروفچینی و صفحه بندی آن به اتمام رسیده است، در نظر دارم آن را به چاپ برسانم لذا خواهشمند است نسبت به صدور مجوز چاپ بر طبق مقررات و ضوابط نشر اقدام فرمایید.

مشخصات کتاب:

تعداد صفحات: قطع: تیراژ: نوبت چاپ:

سال چاپ: چاپخانه: صحافی:

مؤلف و مترجم: ۱. ۲.

مترجمان: ۱. ۲.

مصححان: ۱. ۲.

درباره این کتاب و نکات بارز آن به صورت اجمال توضیح دهید:

در ضمن اینجانب: مدیرمسئول انتشارات:

ضمن آگاهی کامل از مفاد آیین نامه صدور مجوز دائمی چاپ کتاب تعهد می کنم پس از دریافت مجوز از هرگونه تغییر یا اصلاح بر متن کتاب یا روی جلد جداً خودداری نموده و تمامی موارد مندرج در این برگه و آیین نامه فوق الذکر را به دقت رعایت و اجرا نمایم.

نشانی:

نام و نام خانوادگی مدیرمسئول: تلفن:

مهر و امضای مدیرمسئول

نظریه اولیه کتاب:

Access is Denied

بر اساس قوانین جمهوری اسلامی ایران

دسترسی به این سایت مجاز نمی باشد.

در صورتیکه این سایت اشتباهاً فیلتر شده است، آدرس آن را ارسال نمایید.

