The Prix Voltaire is an award given by the International Publishers Association to celebrate freedom to publish champions.


The IPA Statutes declare that the first Objective of the Association is:

“To uphold and defend the right of publishers to publish and distribute works of the mind in complete freedom, provided that in so doing they respect all legal rights attached to these works within their own countries and internationally. It is the duty of the Association to oppose steadfastly any attempt or threat to restrict that freedom.”

Since 1896, the International Publishers Association has worked with its members to support freedom to publish globally.

The International Publishers Association (IPA) promotes the freedom to publish and encourages the adoption of emerging international copyright frameworks. While the IPA has members from nearly 70 countries, it promotes and upholds the freedom to publish globally.

Through its members, IPA represents thousands of individual publishers around the world which account for more than 90% of the global publishing market and serve around 75% of the world’s readers.

For more information on IPA’s Freedom to Publish Manifesto, click here.

ABOUT THE PRIX VOLTAIRE

Violations of the freedom to publish are a daily occurrence. Countries and powerful interest groups continue to engage in censorship, harassment, persecution, and imprisonment of publishers. Increasingly publishers are being punished for exercising their right to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas and for exercising their right to hold opinions and freely express them without interference.

To address these injustices, the IPA established the precursor to the current prize, the Freedom to Publish Prize, in 2005. Renamed the IPA PRIX Voltaire in 2016, the current iteration of the prize honours publishers who advocate for the freedom to publish and access to information globally.

The prize is awarded annually to publishers, defined as individuals, collectives, or organisations, that provide others with the means to share their ideas in written form, including via digital platforms.

Voltaire, who was jailed and sent into exile for views expressed in his published works, was a strong proponent of freedom to publish as an enabler of social, economic, and political progress. This prize is named in his honour and seeks to award publishers for exemplary courage in upholding the freedom to publish.
Through the Prix Voltaire, the Freedom to Publish Committee (FTPC) honours the courage of publishers who defy their would-be silencers by enabling writers to exercise their freedom to publish.

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"IPA’s Prix Voltaire honours and celebrates the courage of publishers who defy their would-be silencers and enable writers to exercise their own freedom of expression. To succeed we need international cooperation and support from many individuals and organisations. The bravery of our colleagues, who regularly stand up against intimidation, legal threats and physical harassment, inspires the IPA to re-double our efforts every year."

"Freedom to publish is one of IPA’s pillars, for good reason. Without this fundamental freedom, we as publishers are impeded from making a livelihood and from fulfilling our mission to contribute to one of democracy’s cornerstones. The Prix Voltaire is a highly respected award worldwide and the best way we can help our colleagues who suffer the hardship of being imprisoned or even killed for what they publish.”
SECURING JUSTICE FOR PRIX VOLTAIRE RECIPIENTS

The IPA mobilises action to promote and defend the freedom to publish by partnering with member associations, international organisations, and non-governmental organisations. With these partners we aim to secure justice for prize recipients and ensure their legacy advances the cause of freedom to publish for all.

Advocacy Partners

SECURING JUSTICE FOR PRIX VOLTAIRE RECIPIENTS

Previous prize recipients are ambassadors for the freedom to publish and forces for collective action for positive and sustainable change. However, some recipients continue to be held against their will and suffer ongoing harassment for their commitment to freedom to publish.
Gui Minhai, Mighty Current Publishing House and Causeway Bay Books

A Chinese born Swedish publisher and author, Minhai disappeared along with five of his colleagues in 2015 while living in Thailand. Minhai was reportedly kidnapped by the Chinese authorities, reappearing a few months later in a video produced by the Chinese authorities confessing to a hit and run that resulted in the death of a student in 2003. He was later accused of sharing state secrets with the Swedish authorities and gave another video confession asking the IPA not to award him the Prix Voltaire.

Incarcerated

2017

Turhan Günay and Evrensel Publishing House

Günay is a book publisher, journalist, and literary critic who led the book publishing branch of the daily Cumhuriyet newspaper and was the editorial director of its book supplement. He was arrested in October 2016 based on false accusations of involvement in terrorist organisations involved in Turkey’s failed Coup. Günay was acquitted on all charges and released in April 2018.

Case Closed

Watch Tuhan Günay’s acceptance speech here.

2016

Raf Badawi, Free Saudi Liberals

Badawi is a Saudi blogger who set up the Free Saudi Liberals forum to facilitate political and religious debate. He was convicted in 2013 for setting up the website which was accused of undermining national security. Badawi was sentenced to 10 years in prison, 1,000 lashes, and a fine of $267,000. He also faces charges of apostasy which carry the death penalty if convicted.

Incarcerated

2014

Ihar Lohvinau, Lohvinau Publishing House

Lohvinau Publishing House was shut down in 2013 for printing a book that contained a photograph of a protester who had been assaulted by the police. His license was revoked under a new law requiring publishing firms to register with the Ministry of Information. In 2014, the publisher was fined $66,000 (his book shop’s annual turnover) for operating a publishing house without a license. He successfully held a crowdfunding campaign to pay the fine.

Released

2012

Jonathan Shapiro (“Zapiro”), Independent Cartoonist

Zapiro is a South African cartoonist who was sued by the President of South Africa Jacob Zuma for defamation. The cartoonist and his publisher were asked to publicly apologise to Zuma as a precondition to dropping the case. Zapiro was given the award for his ongoing support for the freedom to publish through his work during the Apartheid Era and afterward. Winning the IPA award helped raise the profile of the case brought against him which was ultimately dropped.

Case

Withdrawn

2011

Bui Chat, Giay Vun Publishing

Bui Chat established Giay Vun, a publishing house specialized in publishing the works of banned authors and historians. He was arrested and questioned upon his return to the country after receiving the IPA award and his award certificate confiscated.

Released
Israpil Shovkhalov and Viktor Kogan-Yasni, Dosh Magazine

Dosh is a human rights magazine that includes news and analysis on Chechnya and the Caucasus region. The magazine is one of the few media sources with objective reporting on the conflict. Dosh's founders, Shovkhalov and Kogan-Yasni, were abducted by unknown assailants and questioned for their coverage of regional tensions. Released

Sihem Bensedrine, Nezifa Rijba, Mohamed Talbi, Observatory for the Freedom of the Press, Publishing and Creation in Tunisia

The Observatory for the Freedom of the Press, Publishing and Creation was a civil society institution established by Bensedrine, Rijba, and Talbi to highlight freedom of expression violations in Tunisia. It issued an annual list of censored books at the Tunis International Book Fair and repeatedly called for regulatory reform to remove all instances of censorship. The three co-founders were subjected to several defamation campaigns, routinely harassed, their access to internet blocked, and prevented from travelling abroad. Curbs removed

Ragip Zarakolu, Belge Publishing House

A human rights activist and publisher, Zarakolu faced legal harassment and imprisonment for his publications which dealt with controversial topics, including minority rights. Several of the books he published were confiscated and destroyed. Zarakolu was found guilty of insulting the institutions of the Turkish Republic in 2008 and was sentenced to five months in prison. Case Ongoing

2010

Trevor Ncube, Mail & Guardian

Trevor Ncube is a newspaper publisher and entrepreneur who covers corruption and human rights abuses in Zimbabwe. In 2005, he was prevented from leaving Zimbabwe and threatened with removal of his citizenship in an attempt to close his newspapers which were highly critical of Zimbabwe's then president Robert Mugabe. He was also blacklisted by the South African Broadcasting Corporation for his criticism of the Zimbabwean Government. Curbs removed

Shahla Lahiji, Roshangaran Publishing House

Lahiji established Roshangaran Publishing House in 1983, becoming the first female publisher in Iran. Her publishing house provided a platform for female authors to bring their views to the world. She was arrested in 2000 for attending a conference in Germany that brought together Iranian writers living in exile to debate political and social reform. She also received multiple death threats which culminated in a bombing attack on her publishing house. Released

2009

2008

2007

2006

2005
IPA ALSO AWARDS A SPECIAL POSTHUMOUS PRIZE

The prize is awarded in exceptional circumstances to individuals who have lost their lives championing the freedom to publish.

Liu Xiaobo, IPA Posthumous Freedom to Publish Prize Recipient 2018

Liu Xiaobo spent over eight years in prison for his political writings and died on July 13, 2017. “I look forward to [the day] when my country is a land with freedom of expression, where the speech of every citizen will be treated equally well; where different values, ideas, beliefs, and political views can both compete with each other and peacefully coexist; where both majority and minority views will be equally guaranteed, and where the political views that differ from those currently in power, in particular, will be fully respected and protected; where all political views will spread out under the sun for people to choose from, where every citizen can state political views without fear, and where no one can under any circumstances suffer political persecution for voicing divergent political views.”

Faisal Dipan, IPA Posthumous Freedom to Publish Prize Recipient 2018

Faisal Dipan spent his life fighting for the right to publish. He was killed by religious extremists for publishing books with secular themes. “Dipan was murdered and we lost our sunshine. Darkness is deeper when justice is delayed. As his life partner my personal protest was to run his publishing house and establish a book shop cafe in his name. Receiving the Prix Voltaire Special Award is such an honour for Dipan’s family that gives his parents and children great comfort, at least somewhere Dipan has received recognition. IPA inspires me to move forward with positive spirits. I’m grateful.”

- Razia Rahman Jolly, wife of Faisal Dipan.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS: HOW THE PRIXTA VOLTAIRE HELPS AWARD RECIPIENTS FIND JUSTICE

Turhan Günay, Prix Voltaire Recipient 2017

“When I was in prison, even the smallest news about ourselves gave me hope and being awarded such a great award as Prix Voltaire strengthened my will to continue doing what I believe is right. This award also made our stories be heard all over the world and the international support can have a considerable effect on the current situation in our country. Informing the world about what’s going on in Turkey and creating an international solidarity is probably the greatest outcome of this award.”

Trevor Ncube, Freedom to Publish Prize Recipient 2007

“Each one of us here plays a vital role on the issue of censorship. How tolerant are you as an individual to others for you to talk about the tolerance of the government against restriction to free publication? Unless we are able to tolerate the shortcomings of one another and live in peace and harmony, we won’t be able to resolve this issue.”

Liu Xiaobo
Faisal Dipan
Turhan Günay
Eva Bonnier, Owner and Senior Publisher at Albert Bonniers Förlag

“Freedom to publish has ever since 1837 been a vital and important cornerstone in the policy of Bonnier Books, and is so today more than ever. We are proud to be sponsors of the Prix Voltaire which honours and supports the fundamental rights of publishers and brings the importance of freedom of expression and democracy to attention worldwide.”

Bodour Al Qasimi, Vice President of the IPA

“If freedom to publish benefits from collective thought and action. The publishing and creative industries are the single most powerful tool we have as nations, industry associations, and individuals to enable open dialogue between different countries about freedom of expression and to publish. By honouring publishers who advocate for freedom to publish and access to information, the Prix Voltaire is creating ambassadors for positive and sustainable change. This award is critically important for catalyzing dialogues that forge mutual understanding on freedom to publish.”

SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE 2019-2022 PRIXT VolTAIRE

The Prix Voltaire is funded through voluntary contributions from publishers associations, publishers, foundations, and individuals. In return for their support, sponsors have significant opportunities for event branding and high profile marketing and PR in advance, during, and after the prize award ceremony. The annual award ceremony, which takes place at the IPA Congress or on the sidelines of major international book fairs, attracts hundreds of authors, senior executives from publishing houses, government leaders, and representatives of NGOs and cultural organisations.

If you are interested in sponsoring the IPA Prix Voltaire please contact prix-voltaire@internationalpublishers.org
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International Publishers Association, Avenue De France 23, 1202 Geneva, Switzerland

The Prix Voltaire is made possible through the generous support of

Shahla Lahiji (2006)
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Ragip Zarakolu (2008)
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