



**The 2009 IPA Freedom to Publish Prize Goes to
Sihem Bensedrine, Neziha Rejiba and Mohammed Talbi,
Founders of Tunisian Press and Publishing Watchdog, OLPEC**

Sarajevo, Geneva, Oslo- **EMBARGOED UNTIL SAT. 25 APRIL 2009 10:30 A.M. CEST**

The President of the International Publishers Association (IPA), Herman P. Spruijt, announced on 25 April 2009 in Sarajevo that Sihem Bensedrine, Neziha Rejiba and Mohammed Talbi, founders of the Tunis-based Observatory for the Freedom of the Press, Publishing and Creation (OLPEC), were voted joint recipients of the 2009 IPA Freedom to Publish Prize for their exemplary courage in upholding freedom to publish.

The board of the International Publishers Association (IPA) meeting in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, on 24 April 2009 selected Sihem Bensedrine, Neziha Rejiba and Mohammed Talbi, founders of the Tunis-based Observatory for the Freedom of the Press, Publishing and Creation (OLPEC), as Prize-winners from among many highly commendable candidates, announced IPA President Herman P. Spruijt at a press conference held minutes before a round table on freedom to publish in the Western Balkan States organised by IPA and the Bosnian Publishers and Booksellers Association (UIK) at the Sarajevo Book Fair on 25 April 2009.

IPA established the IPA Freedom to Publish Prize to honour a person or persons or an institution that has made an important contribution to the defence and promotion of freedom to publish anywhere in the world. This year's award will be formally presented by IPA President in Oslo, Norway, on 4 June 2009 during the Global Forum on Freedom of Expression (1-6 June 2009). Many important dignitaries will take part in the award ceremony.

IPA President Herman P. Spruijt declares: "The work of the Observatory for the Freedom of the Press, Publishing and Creation (OLPEC) as a press and publishing watchdog has often brought its three founders Sihem Bensedrine, Neziha Rejiba and Mohammed Talbi into conflict with the Tunisian authorities and endangered their personal safety. The Tunisian authorities have consistently denied approval of OLPEC. As a consequence, OLPEC has no legal status in Tunisia and its members must work under extremely difficult conditions. In Tunisia, freedom of expression violations go hand in hand with freedom of association violations. We award the 2009 IPA Freedom to Publish Prize to the three founders of OLPEC in deep respect for their courage, and as a salute to the passion, the integrity, and the steadfastness that they so marvellously demonstrate".

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IPA Freedom to Publish Committee Chair Bjørn Smith-Simonsen adds: "OLPEC, which in a way emerged from the ashes of the Aloes Publishing House in 2001, issues alerts on freedom of expression violations, including an annual list of censored books at the Tunis Book Fair. This remarkable work is incredibly useful and should be honoured. Sihem Bensedrine, Neziha Rejiba and Mohammed Talbi have consistently stood up for the right to freedom of expression and freedom to publish in the face of physical attacks, police surveillance, or horrendous defamation campaigns, among others. We hope that the IPA Freedom to Publish Prize will encourage the three founders of OLPEC and OLPEC to continue their important work highlighting repeated freedom of expression and freedom to publish violations in Tunisia".

The other short-listed candidates nominated by IPA members, individual publishers and human rights' organisations were: Mohammad Ateef Noori (jailed publisher, Afghanistan), Elias Wondimu (publisher, Ethiopia/USA), late Mr. Rajpal (publisher, India), Rosspen (publisher, Russia), and Jonathan Shapiro (Zapiro) (cartoonist, South Africa).

More about OLPEC's three founding members, recipients of the 2009 IPA Freedom to Publish Prize:

The Observatory for the Freedom of the Press, Publishing and Creation (OLPEC) was founded by Sihem Bensedrine, Neziha Rejiba (also known as Om Zied) and Mohammed Talbi in 2001. OLPEC's principal goal is to serve as a monitoring body for all forms of media and literary censorship in Tunisia, and to make these issues public. Despite repeatedly refusing them the right to legal recognition, OLPEC and its members continue fearlessly to highlight censorship in publishing and defend freedom of expression in the face of threats of jail and physical attack.

Bensedrine, Rejiba and Talbi have consistently stood up for the right to freedom of expression and have suffered greatly as a result. Bensedrine for instance was the victim of an extensive defamation campaign in 2005 and this year designed to shed doubt on her credibility as a human rights activist. Both Rejiba and Bensedrine are under constant police surveillance. Their guests are harassed. Their mail is intercepted. Their e-mails are bugged, and their access to the internet is blocked. Bensedrine is routinely prevented from travelling and has been assaulted at Tunis airport as recently as August 2008.

In a way, OLPEC emerged from the ashes of a publishing house, Aloes, established by Sihem Bensedrine. In December 1999, the offices of Aloes were burgled twice and its employees threatened by members of the security forces. Police intimidation and threats and break-ins finally led to the closure of this small publishing house, and the emergence in 2001 of a new group, OLPEC, aimed at defending freedom of expression, including the right to publish. OLPEC has no legal status in Tunisia. The Interior Ministry turned down a request for official NGO status in August 2001, citing the organisation's "unlawful designation". OLPEC filed a complaint for abuse of power but the administrative tribunal has yet to rule on the case. OLPEC's website was operated from Morocco due to Internet censorship in Tunisia. It is currently under reconstruction.

More about the IPA Freedom to Publish Prize:

In 2005, IPA re-established the IPA Freedom to Publish Prize, a prize designed to honour each year a person or an organisation that has made an important contribution to the defence and promotion of freedom to publish anywhere in the world. While the 2006 IPA Freedom to Publish Prize was awarded to Iranian publisher Shalah Lahiji during the Göteborg Book Fair, the 2007 Prize was awarded to Zimbabwean publisher Trevor N'cube at the Cape Town Book Fair. Special Prizes were also given posthumously to

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Anna Politkovskaya (Russia) and Hrant Dink (Turkey/Armenia). The 2008 IPA Freedom to Publish Prize was awarded to Turkish publisher Ragıp Zarakolu during the opening ceremony of an international seminar on neo-censorship co-organised in Amsterdam by Amsterdam World Book Capital 2008 and IPA.

Prize-winners receive the sum of 5'000 CHF. The 2009 IPA Freedom to Publish Prize is sponsored by the Norwegian Publishers Association (DnF). For more, see: www.forleggerforeningen.no

More about the Global Forum on Freedom of Expression and the Award Ceremony of the 2009 IPA Freedom to Publish Prize:

The Global Forum on Freedom of Expression will take place in Oslo from 1 to 6 June 2009. IPA and the Norwegian Publishers Association (DnF) are partners of the Global Forum, which will explore freedom of expression's most pressing issues. Religious intolerance, impunity, technology, and other issues that challenge the way freedom of expression is understood and defended will be the focus of open and productive debate between the various stakeholders. The Global Forum on Freedom of Expression will be the first such global gathering from freedom of expression advocates and practitioners to exchange skills, ideas, and inspiration, while building opportunities for cooperation across borders.

The award ceremony of the 2009 IPA Freedom to Publish Prize will take place on 4 June 2009 from 7 to 10 p.m. on an Island near Oslo as part of the Global Forum program. Important foreign and Norwegian dignitaries, as well as IPA President Herman P. Spruijt, will take part in the award ceremony.

Earlier that day, IPA and NORLA, the foundation promoting Norwegian literature abroad, will gather publishers from around the world for a round table at the National Library entitled: "Moving Ideas: A Roundtable on Publishing Across Borders".

For more about the Global Forum, please see: www.expressionforum.org

More about IPA:

The International Publishers Association (IPA) is the global non-governmental organisation representing all aspects of book and journal publishing worldwide. Established in 1896, IPA's mission is to promote and protect publishing and to raise awareness for publishing as a force for cultural and political advancement worldwide. IPA is an industry association with a human rights mandate. IPA currently has 65 member associations in 53 countries.

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