



Navanethem Pillay
United Nations
High Commissioner for Human Rights
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner
For Human Rights (OHCHR)
Palais des Nations
1211 Geneva 10
Switzerland

21 April 2011

**OPEN LETTER – YOUR ASSISTANCE IN STOPPING THE PERSECUTION OF LEADING
INDEPENDENT PUBLISHERS AND WRITERS IN IRAN**

Your Excellency,

The International Publishers Association (IPA) is deeply concerned about the situation of private publishers in Iran following the issuance of a blacklist of leading independent Iranian publishers and writers earlier this year and their ensuing persecution. In this context, IPA welcomes the appointment by the United Nations Human Rights Council in late March of a Special Rapporteur to look into the situation in Iran, and takes this opportunity to call on the United Nations system, the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and the future Special Rapporteur on Iran to carefully monitor the situation of publishers in Iran. IPA is also seeking your assistance in approaching the Iranian authorities in order to ask them to stop attacking the human rights of their country's independent publishers and writers.

Over the past 18 months, the international community has witnessed an unacceptable deterioration in the human rights situation in Iran, in particular for freedom of expression and freedom to publish. Since the 2009 elections, the Iranian authorities have systematically sought to silence all dissenting voices, through detaining and harassing opposition leaders, human rights activists, lawyers, journalists, writers and publishers.

The blacklist of publishers and writers, issued in January of this year by the I.R.I Soft Strategy Think Tank, a group that is reportedly run by a local Basij force, a paramilitary volunteer militia linked to the Revolutionary Guards, lists among others those publishers who are allegedly attempting to overthrow the "Islamic establishment".

In fact the publishers listed have a very diverse background. They publish books on a wide range of topics, including sociology, philosophy, economics, politics, and religion. They also publish novels, short stories, philosophical works and books dealing with the social sciences. They publish foreign translations. Listing these publishers turns them into potential targets. The goal – to intimidate those independent publishers and to limit their publishing activity- has been achieved.

This blacklist is an unacceptable attack on the fundamental human rights that publishers need to exercise their profession and to serve society through their books. It is the latest and most glaring violations in a series of steps that the Iranian government has taken to intimidate publishers:

Publishers' licences have been suspended. Certain publishers are prevented from exhibiting at the Tehran International Book Fair (TIBF), the most important book fair, which attracts millions of visitors each year. Harassment by tax authorities, or blatant censorship practices conducted by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance¹ (MICG), are further regularly occurring practices that violate the human rights of private publishers.

In conclusion, IPA urges those individuals and agencies within the United Nations that monitor the human rights developments in Iran to take an active interest in the fate of publishers and publishing in Iran. The very survival of independent publishing in Iran is at stake.

We would be delighted to meet with you and to discuss our concerns in more detail.

Thank you for your attention.

Yours sincerely,



Jens Bammel
Secretary General
IPA



Bjørn Smith-Simonsen
Chair
IPA's Freedom to Publish Committee

CC:

Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General

Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

Frank La Rue, UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to
Freedom of Opinion and Expression

More about IPA:

IPA, established in Paris in 1896, represents the publishing industry worldwide through more than 60 national, regional and specialised publishers' associations in 53 countries. IPA is an accredited Non-Governmental Organisation enjoying consultative status to the United Nations. IPA seeks 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. IPA is a trade association with a human rights mandate.

¹ Practices, which IPA documented in the following report :
www.internationalpublishers.org/images/pdf/FTP/PositionPapers/final_iran_report.pdf