



Artist Alert

June 2010

Art, in any form, constitutes a key medium through which information and ideas are imparted and received. Artist Alert, launched by ARTICLE 19 in 2008, highlights cases of artists around the world whose right to freedom of expression has been curtailed and abused, and seeks to more effectively promote and defend freedom to create.

Russia: martyred for their art

In May 2008, Yury Samodurov and Andrei Yerofeyev were accused of inciting religious hatred through their Moscow exhibition – *Forbidden Art*. On Monday, 21 June, Prosecutors demanded a three-year jail term for the two curators, according to the magazine *The Economist*, for “debasing the religious beliefs of citizens and inciting religious hatred.” The verdict is due on 12 July. An ARTICLE 19 source claims that out of 134 prosecution witnesses, only three had in fact attended the exhibition. Samodurov has faced similar charges in the past, having been fined one hundred thousand roubles for his 2003 show, *Caution: Religion!* The *Forbidden Art* exhibition featured many works previously shown in Russia as well as internationally, items of particular controversy included a Jesus figure surmounted with the head of Mickey Mouse and a veiled crucifix covered in sexual slang. The venue for *Forbidden Art* was the Sakharov Centre and Museum, an institution whose core ideology firmly supports the tradition of human rights. The trial continues.

Pakistan: music market bombed

Pakistan Press Foundation - on 26 June, a Lahore market was blasted by two separate explosives in a planned attack on the Plaza’s music outlets. Two shopkeepers and several customers were injured by shattered shop windows, responsibility for which was claimed by the *Nazria Pakistan Group*. In the lead up to the attacks store owners had received threats, demanding that they stop selling western video and music products. Police are investigating connections between the market bombings and previous attacks on cultural events in the Punjab capital.

Netherlands: Snoop Dogg ousted

Calvin Broadus, a.k.a Snoop Dogg, was banned by Dutch authorities from performing at a free festival in The Hague on 27 June, reports the *BBC*. The US Hip-Hop artist’s controversial lyrics and persona were considered at odds with the ‘*open and friendly*’ character of *Parkpop* festival. The Mayor, alongside the police and public prosecutors, , requested his removal from the bill.

Indonesia: a new Islamic Iconoclasm

Authorities in Bekasi, Indonesia, have demanded the destruction of a statue in a private residential complex, following pressure from local hard-line groups. The *Three Girls* sculpture represents a symbol of local West Javan culture, according to the artist Nyoman. Three Sundanese women are depicted in traditional attire, welcoming residents on a three-path intersection of the housing complex in which it stands. The sculpture's creation involved over fifty people and cost an estimated \$260,000, reports *The Jakarta Globe*. Bekasi's Islamic Defenders Front protested that the women were depicted in "tight costumes" and that any artist that attempts to "copy real living human beings" is being anti-Islamic. Accusations that the women's composition reflected the Christian Holy Trinity were also aired. The artist denies any attempt to depict the figures as sexual objects and stated, "people of certain cultures should not force their cultural understanding onto others."

Jordan: director's plea denied

On 21 June, a film documenting the plight of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, missing in the aftermath of war and displacement, was dropped from its premier slot at Jordan's Franco/Arab Film Festival. According to Human Film Inc, *Sons of Babylon*, by Iraqi director Mohammed Al-Daradji, was pulled out of the festival following the organisers' decision to prevent the director's letter being read to an expectant audience. The letter details the film's importance to *Iraq's Missing Campaign*, an initiative striving to help families torn apart by the country's recent legacy of war and disruption. Festival organisers claimed Al-Daradji's message was "political...and not related to cinema."

Japan: dolphin 'bloodbath' banned in cinemas

National Geographic photographer, Louie Psihoyos, had his latest Oscar winning documentary stalled from general release in its country of origin, Japan. *The Cove*, an undercover film infiltrating the coastal town of Taiji, assembled a team of divers, climbers, effects artists and technicians in a bid to document the epicentre of Japan's annual dolphin slaughter. *The Cove* has struggled to find theatres willing to screen it in Japan, due to issues raised around the industry and the graphic nature of the film's finale. The film has faced additional censorship from US sources, including an American Airbase near Tokyo, which prohibited screenings. *ABC News* quotes Psihoyos, a founding member of the Ocean Preservation Society, insisting his message will still be heard, "This kind of information needs to be freed. We're going to get it out there, one way or another."

Germany: no dancing in the streets

On Thursday, 24 June, in Hannover, Germany, a Jewish folklore group was attacked while trying to perform a traditional dance in the city's Sahlkamp district, which has a large immigrant community. Before their performance had even begun, the *Chaverim* dancers were forced to seek shelter in the wake of a stone barrage from the teenage crowd. The attackers were identified as a group of Muslim youths aged from 10 to 20 according to the *BBC*. Charlotte Knobloch, president of Germany's Central Council of Jews, commented, "It particularly saddens me that those anti-Semitic views can already be seen with such vehemence among children."

Malaysia: political cartoons censored

The Malaysian Government has banned three separate cartoon publications that allegedly pose a security threat, according to *ABC News*. The censored works focus on the creations of Zulkifli Anwar Ulhaque, known as Zunar, and other local cartoonists, questioning current events in Malaysia. Subjects include police shootings and the sodomy trial of opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim. The cartoon ban further questions the Government's attitude toward freedom of expression and prohibiting dissenting voices. Zunar describes drawing cartoons as his social obligation and vows to continue his commentary.

Czech Republic: ID artist arrested

A leading member of the controversial Czech art group, Ztohoven, has been arrested following the opening of the Citizen K exhibition in Central Prague. On 18 June, local police stormed the gallery seizing exhibits alongside the group's figurehead, Roman Týc. According to Czech News site Aktuálně, the show was intended to highlight the ease with which people exploit personal information and contained identity cards alongside other phony official documents. The group has previously courted prosecution through installing 'drunk' traffic lights in urban streets and inserting recorded images of nuclear explosions into public weather broadcasts.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- For more information: please contact Oliver Spencer, oliver@article19.org, +44 20 7324 2500
- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.