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ARTICLE 19

Artist Alert
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London: inaugural freedom of expression arts prize awarded

Zimbabwean playwright Mhlanga has won the inaugural freedom of expression art prize and \$50,000 for his repeated challenge of the Mugabe regime through political satire.

The judges also awarded the art prize for an imprisoned artist to Burmese comedian, producer, director, writer and actor Zarganar (the tweezers). Zarganar was sentenced in November 2008 to 45 years imprisonment for “creating disaffection towards state and government” by collecting donations for the victims of Cyclone Nargis, and a further 14 years for other offences under various parts of the criminal code.

‘The American president, the Chinese president and Burma’s leader go to visit God. George Bush asks God, “When will the U.S. become the most respected nation in the world?” God replies, “Not in your lifetime,” driving Bush to tears. Then Hu Jintao asks “When will China become the richest nation in the world?” Same answer from God and tears from the Chinese president. Finally, Burma’s ruler asks “When will Burma have enough water and electricity?” This time, God bursts into tears and says, “Not in my lifetime!”’

Zarganar, Burma

The youth art prize went to City of Rhyme, a 14 strong hip-hop group from northern Brazil, whose lyrics condemn violence.

The ArtVenture Freedom to Create prize was launched in early 2008 by philanthropist organisation ArtVenture in partnership with ARTICLE 19. The prize received 930 nominations from 86 countries.

China: Guns ‘N’ Roses new album banned

Guns ‘N’ Roses first album for 17 years *Chinese Democracy* has been banned from importation into China. The state-owned China National Publications Import and Export Group has warned shops not to import the album, which includes tracks with names such as “Helpless Chinese under an iron fist”. The album has also automatically been censored from Chinese search engines and the album’s official website www.chinesedemocracy.com has also been blocked by the government.

Kuwait: concert ends for kiss and a hug

The Kuwaiti department for monitoring public entertainment ended a concert by an Egyptian singer when a female fan jumped onto the stage, hugged the male singer and gave him a kiss. According to the department head Qanas al-Adwani the fan's behaviour at the concert "defied the conservative traditions" of Kuwait and were in disregard for the strict public entertainment licences that concerts must obtain.

Concerts in Kuwait are permitted by the government provided that the crowd is monitored in order to enforce a strict code that bans standing up and dancing.

Turkey: singer acquitted of criticising military

The singer Bulent Ersoy has been acquitted of charges of criticising the Turkish military after reportedly saying on television that she would not want her own children to join an army that is battling Kurdish rebels. Turkey partially amended a notorious law in 2008 that banned the criticism of "Turkishness", in order to join the European Union.

Egypt: film not "Egyptian" enough

Despite winning the Golden Tauro award for best film at the 54th Taormina Film Festival in Italy, Ibrahim El Batout's second documentary *Ein Shams* (Eye of the Sun) has been banned from screening in Egypt for the crime of not being "Egyptian". The film follows a taxi driver and starts in war torn Iraq before moving focus to the run down and crowded Ein Shams suburb of Cairo.

Burma: guitarist gets six years imprisonment

46 year old Burmese musician Win Maw received a six year sentence for "sending false news abroad". Win Maw's trial took place in a closed court in the notorious *Insein* prison and was part of a number of similar secretive trials carried out by the Burmese military government in the run up to elections in 2010. See ARTICLE 19's recent statement for more details: <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/press/burma-free-speech-crackdown-accelerates.pdf>

Jordan: poet's life threatened for apostasy

The Jordanian poet Islam Samhan's life has been placed in danger after being accused of apostasy by the Jordanian Mufti and Muslim Brotherhood for his first poem "Elegant as a Shadow". Following the accusations the Jordanian public prosecutor also ordered Samhan to be imprisoned for 15 days whilst an investigation of the claim of apostasy was underway.

Tibet: 81 year old painter jailed for printing "prohibited material"

Descended from a family with a long history of printing and publishing Buddhist texts, master printer Paljor Norbu received a seven year sentence from the Chinese

government for printing “prohibited material”. The exact nature of the “prohibited material” has not been confirmed although it is most likely to be Tibetan flags. The judicial authorities at first refused to acknowledge his and many others’ arrests in the aftermath of the Tibetan uprising before the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008, although after the trial a letter confirming the sentencing was delivered to Norbu’s family.

Saudi Arabia: internationally acclaimed poet beaten up

Poet Roshdi Algadir was snatched from his work place in Al-Dammam city and assaulted for three hours before being forced to sign an agreement to never write a blog on the internet again. The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information asserted that the reason behind the attack was the publication of a poem on Algadir’s blog at <http://roshdi.maktoobblog.com> that was deemed to be heretical by extremist religious groups.

Malaysia: books banned for undermining the people’s faith

Malaysia’s Home Ministry censorship board has banned two books stating that they give a “misleading view of the religion” of Islam. The books were the English language “Muslim Women and the Challenge of Islamic Extremism” and the Malay language “Strange but True in Prayers”. Publishers Sisters in Islam criticised the ban explaining that the books were academic works that examined the impact of extremism on women’s lives, and that they had not received a single complaint despite the book having been distributed since 2005.

Lebanon: photos removed from exhibition

Lebanese photographer and filmmaker Jocelyne Saab has been censored in Beirut when government officials removed several photos considered to be too controversial to be shown in Lebanon. The exhibition named “Sense and Sensibility” contained photos of Barbie dolls including the controversially titled “American-Israeli playground” showing Christ on a crucifix surrounded by photos of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah and naked Barbie dolls in the background.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- For more information: please contact Oliver Charles, oliver@article19.org, +44 20 7278 9292
- 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.