



## Artist Alert May 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.**

### **Somalia: Music, sound effects and jingles banned**

Extremist religious groups in Somalia have threatened radio stations telling them to stop playing all music, sound effects and even radio jingles. According to Freemuse, on 3 April *Hisbul Islam* leader Ma'allin Hashi Mohamed Farah gave radio stations 10 days to stop airing music or face undisclosed penalties. In response, on 19 April the leader of the government's regional administration Abdikafi Hilowle Osman threatened to close down any radio stations that acquiesced to the threat. Four stations, *Tusmo*, *Somaliweyn*, *Voice of Peace*, and *Xurmo*, which reside within the government-controlled area of Mogadishu, have come under direct threat of closure from the government.

### **Côte d'Ivoire: Music banned for critiquing government**

Two musicians alleged on 22 May that Côte d'Ivoire's national television station has refused to air their popular music because it contains social and political commentary. Newspaper *L'Expression* quotes musicians Fadal Dey and Lago Paulin as saying that their "subversive" music is seen as critical of President Gbagbo's government. Highlights of some of their tracks include songs forgiving previous governments on the basis that the present government is similarly as corrupt, and others stating that human rights and social securities are absent in the country. Media Foundation for West Africa states that the national television station, *Radio Television Ivoirienne*, regularly broadcasts pro-government music by groups that label themselves "patriot."

### **Burma: Hip-hop defiance**

After studying in London' SAE Institute and inspired by regular visits to the British Library to read about traditional Burmese folk songs, Thxa Soe has become a hugely successful hip-hop artist in Burma, singing about current affairs in the country. According to the UK *Guardian* newspaper, Thxa's concerts are policed by security uniformed and plain-clothed officers, attempting to monitor growing crowds that are using hip-hop to express issues in Burma. Unlike Burmese music and lyrics, which have to be approved by government censors before broadcast, the fluidity, dynamism and underground nature of hip-hop is proving hard

to control. A number of Burmese bands are utilising the growth in new technologies to share un-censored music.

### **UAE: Controversy over Sex and the City 2 filming location**

According to *Time Out Dubai*, the United Arab Emirate (UAE) media council announced that they had banned the film *Sex and the City 2*, released on 27 May, because the “theme of the film does not fit with our cultural values.” A representative from the national media council stated that the film was also banned for attempting to portray that it had been shot in UAE, when in fact it had been filmed in Morocco. According to film company New Line Cinema, the producers had asked to shoot in Abu Dhabi and Dubai in order to highlight the growing importance and modernity of the cities. Their application was refused without reason, which is why they filmed in Morocco. Interestingly, the media council have now removed all reference to the film ban from their website.

### **China: Uighur banned from cultural conference**

Economist and writer Ilham Tohti has been warned not to try to attend a conference on Turkic culture by police visiting his home in Beijing. Ilham Tohti who is an ethnic Uighur had both a visa and official permission to leave China and was due to leave for Turkey on 15 April when police effectively banned him from travel two days prior. According to PEN, Tohti’s case follows a similar restriction on the writer Liao Yiwu who was due to make an appearance at Cologne literary festival but was removed from the aeroplane moments before leaving China.

### **Iran: Tim Burton calls for release of Jafar Panahi at Cannes**

In an interview at the Cannes film festival on X, Tim Burton, head of the film festival jury, called on the Iranian government to immediately free Iranian film maker and Cannes prize-winner, Jafar Panahi. Burton told a news conference: “All of us are for freedom of expression. We fight for that every day and in our lives. So of course one should be free to express oneself.” Iranian security forces detained Panahi along with his wife, daughter and 15 guests on 1 March for allegedly making a film inside his own home on the Green Movement. Whilst his wife, daughter and guests have since been released, Panahi remains in the notorious Evin prison.

### **Egypt/Morocco: Bans and protests for Elton John**

According to the news website *Monsters and Critics*, the Egyptian musicians’ union successfully lobbied authorities to ban the pop star Elton John from performing in a private concert in Egypt on 18 May. The union’s head, Mounir al-Wasimi, claimed that Elton should be banned due to his sexuality, asking: “*How do we allow ... calls for Middle Eastern countries to allow gays to have sexual freedom?!*”

Elton John held another concert in front of 60,000 fans in Morocco on 26 May, despite calls from the Islamist Justice and Development Party to ban his attendance. According to Reuters, Mustapha Ramid stated the ban was because: “*This man - sorry, I should say this person, not this man - is known for bragging about his homosexuality.*”

### **Burma: Poet released five months after sentence finished**

Burmese poet Saw Wei has been freed from detention five months after his sentence had officially run out. Sam Wei had served almost three years in prison because one of his poems was deemed by the government as “inducing crime against public tranquillity”. PEN American Centre states that Sam was detained in January 2008 for the poem titled ‘February the Fourteenth’, a short poem published in *Love Journal* in Burma for Valentines Day. The journal quickly sold out in Rangoon as word spread that the poem’s first letter on each line spelled out “General Than Shwe is crazy with power.”

### **Egypt: Minister attempts to ban Sufi ceremony**

In May, the Egyptian Ministry of the Interior attempted to ban Sufi *dhikr* (a religious group ceremonial activity) from taking place in mosques, following the submission of an obscenity case by lawyers in the country against traditional stories *One Thousand and One Nights*. The government claims that such ceremonies are undermining public morality by allowing men and women to mix in tents and dance in ways that are not officially approved of.

### **NOTES TO EDITORS:**

- For more information: please contact Oliver Spencer, [oliver@article19.org](mailto: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.