



**BANNING BOOKS AND THE SUPPRESSION OF PEOPLES'  
(INDIGENOUS) SPEECH**

COMMITTEE REPORT OF THE CONGRESS OF NATIONS AND STATES  
CULTURE AND SOCIETY AND JUSTICE COMMISSION

## **Banning Books and the Suppression of Peoples' (Indigenous) Speech**

Committee Report of the Congress of Nations and States Culture and Society  
and Justice Commission

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## I. Introduction

This report by the CNS Culture and Society Committee and Justice Commission is concerned with the deliberate restriction or prohibition of certain forms of expression and communication, including books, social media content, journalism, radio broadcasts, television programs, and entertainment such as games and movies. Speech suppression has virtually, if variously, replaced weapons for underwriting regime control. This practice aims to control or limit ideas, narratives, or perspectives that are deemed threatening to the state and society. Collaborative research for this report exposes the scale of suppression, its consequences, acts of resistance, and opportunities for supporting an open and secure polity.

This report is specifically concerned with speech suppression in global regions inhabited by Peoples (this report defers to research by Rudolph Ryser who argues for the term “Peoples” instead of “indigenous,” the term governments use.) Peoples are descendants of those who inhabited a territory or a geographical area before other groups arrived through conquest, colonization, and other means of invasion.

Being closely connected to the land in which they are live these communities have a culture and belief system unique to them. They live directly with nature and evolved unique languages and knowledge systems.

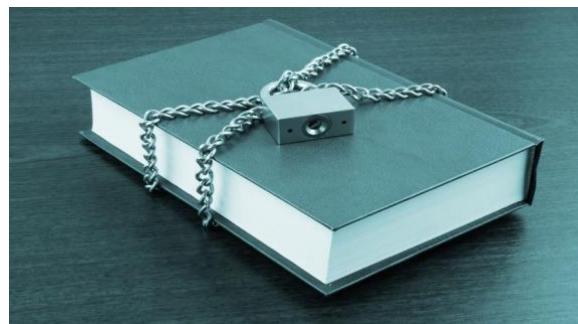
Peoples are vulnerable to suppression because they lack representation. Conventional wisdom fails to acknowledge, let alone account for Peoples’ abjection, including identity erosion, discrimination, and the lack of access to social welfare schemes. The aim of the present report is to call attention to the ubiquity of Peoples’ suppression and the reasons for and consequences of suppression in order to mobilize support for accommodating Peoples’ expression.

Though this report is devoted to defining the invidious consequences of speech suppression, we should note that book-banning within clearly demarcated limits is sound policy. There are subjects that are simply inappropriate if they assault prized values that, among other benefits, sustain communities. Subjects that pointlessly use profanity, are gratuitously volatile, or seek to erase proven and productive religions and policies are sometimes so incendiary or subversive that they are said to incite violence or degrade entire groups. The problem is the intentional or inadvertent deployment of measures that inhibit or suppress points of view – viewpoints that instantiate Peoples’ cultures with the potential of benefiting society at large.

For the sake of clarification, following is an overview of expressive channels and their suppression.

**Books:** Book banning involves prohibiting the publication, distribution, or access to specific books or literary works. This can occur for various reasons, such as political censorship, religious marginalization, or concerns about controversial, destabilizing content. Banned

books often encompass a wide range of genres, including fiction, non-fiction, educational materials, and even classic literature.



**Academic and educational materials:** Certain academic materials, textbooks, or educational resources have been subjected to censorship or restrictions, particularly in authoritarian regimes. Governments may seek to control or manipulate educational content to promote specific ideologies or suppress dissenting viewpoints.

**Social Media:** With the rise of digital platforms, social media have become an important conduit for expression and information sharing. However, authorities may attempt to censor or suppress certain viewpoints or discussions on platforms like Facebook, X (formerly, Twitter), Instagram, and YouTube. This can involve blocking or removing content, suspending user accounts, or implementing restrictive policies.

**Journalism:** Governments or powerful entities may seek to control the narrative by targeting independent journalism. This can include censorship, intimidation, harassment, or even imprisonment of journalists who report on sensitive topics, criticize those in power, or expose corruption or human rights abuses. Press freedom and the ability to report truthfully are crucial for a well-informed society.

**Radio and Television:** Broadcasting media, including radio and television, are often subject to regulation and control. Authorities may restrict certain types of programming, control content through licensing requirements, or enforce censorship guidelines to prevent the dissemination of specific ideas or opinions.

**Entertainment (games, movies, etc.):** Entertainment media such as video games, movies, and other forms of creative expression can also be subject to censorship or content restrictions. This can occur to protect cultural values, maintain public order, or prevent the dissemination of content deemed inappropriate or harmful. Controversial topics, salacious content, or politically sensitive themes are often the focus of such restrictions.

Suppression can take various forms, including forced assimilation, cultural appropriation, religious conversion, land dispossession, and restrictions on language and cultural expression. These actions have severe consequences for Peoples' communities, often resulting in the loss of cultural heritage, social disintegration, and the erosion of self-identity.

In an international context, banning expression is a violation of human rights.

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) guarantees to all the right to freedom of opinion and expression. This right includes the freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through media regardless of frontiers. Some scholars call this “thick” freedom to distinguish it from “thin” freedom, which is a freedom from government interference protecting property rights and unfettered commercial trade.

Censorship also violates Article 2 and Article 7 of the UDHR, declaring that “all are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law.”

Additionally, Article 27 of the UDHR emphasizes that everyone has the right to participate in cultural life, enjoy the arts, and share in scientific advancement and its benefits. Banning or suppressing Peoples’ books and literature inhibits Peoples’ cultural participation and expression, undermining their right to preserve, develop, and transmit their cultural heritage.

Efforts to reverse this trend focus on promoting cultural revitalization, Peoples’ rights, inclusive policies, and fostering understanding and appreciation for Peoples’ cultures.

## II. A Taxonomy of Suppression

Every year some countries show indicators of improvement regarding the freedom of expression while other countries show indicators of decline. According to the non-profit organization “Freedom House” the research for 2022 reveals that in comparison with 2021, 34 countries showed indicators of improvement of the state of freedom of expression while 35 countries showed indicators of decline. In its 2023 World Report, Freedom House marked the 17th consecutive year of net global freedom decline.

Causes for such decline appear to be foreign military occupation, international armed conflict, internal armed conflict/civil conflict, successful coup d'état, unsuccessful coup d'état, authoritarian regimes, and societies with weak rule of law institutions.

Sources of the causes appear to be, *inter alia*, the drive to control more land, obtaining more power, incompetent leaders, corruption, and religious views. Restricting freedom of expression contributes to forced ethnic change or obeisance to religious norms.

In order to survey the persistent global freedom decline, this report is sensitive to historical and regional variation. Expression that is targeted for banning or suppression can vary depending on the cultural, political, and legal contexts of different countries and regions. The motivations behind these actions range from political control, cultural preservation, religious sensitivities, national security concerns, or the maintenance of social order. Nazi Germany is the most dramatic and dissected example of suppression in our time: the Nazis implemented widespread book burnings to suppress dissenting opinions and promote their ideology. Books written by Jewish authors, political dissidents, and those deemed "un-German" were specifically targeted. The Soviet government under Joseph Stalin was also rigorously engaged in censorship and book banning to control the flow of information. Writers and intellectuals who expressed views contrary to the state's ideology or the government-controlled Academy of Sciences faced persecution, and their works were banned or suppressed.<sup>1</sup>

But suppression has a long, endemic pedigree.

In societies where writing first developed, proto-banning took the form of restricting literacy and, therefore, access to the written word in order to preserve the authority of priests and bureaucrats, a practice surfacing in our time with the criminalization of attempts at teaching slaves to read. In the Western world, codified suppression has a long pedigree. When the Catholic Church was under attack by the incipient Protestant movement in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Church published the Roman Index (1559) and banned books for spreading ideas that it deemed dangerous. The most commonly seized and burned books were translations and vernacular adaptations of Scripture that distorted, or so it claimed, the unmediated Word of God. It wasn't until 1757 that relatively unlearned and impoverished Italians were authorized to read the Bible in their own language. Only in 1966 was the Congregation of the Index itself suppressed.

From the 19<sup>th</sup> century on, book-banning has been integral to the colonial enterprise, inspiring ascendant postcolonial repudiation from the end of World War II to the present. *The Wretched of the Earth* by the Franchophone Afro-Caribbean political philosopher Frantz Fanon, an iconic 1961 work addressing the struggle for liberation and decolonization in colonized societies. It has faced challenges and bans in certain Middle Eastern countries due to its revolutionary ideas and potential to incite political dissent.

Following is a breakdown of banning by continent and country. It is meant to convey the global phenomenon of speech suppression; no significance is implied by the number of examples provided for each region or by the regions selected for illustration.

#### *Asia*

India: *The Invention of Dalit Literature* by Joshil K. Abraham, a book that examines the emergence of Dalit literature in India, discusses the experiences and perspectives of marginalized communities. It has faced challenges and bans in certain Indian states due to its potential to challenge existing power structures. Also threatening the Indian state is a reinvigorated Sikh separatist movement in the Indian state of Punjab called Khalistan. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has called for action against this threat to national unity, including internet and messaging services restrictions in Punjab and the banning of political expression.

China: The democracy movement in China has also been virtually suppressed, although its resistance to Xi Jinping's novel attempts at eliminating independent organizations and expression - what Xi brands as nihilistic - has been extraordinary given the state's ruthless response in the name of "patriotic education." One arena for resistance is social media and other forms of digital communication, which have broadcast what dissidents call the lasting values of Chinese civilization: freedom of thought, righteousness, and the Confucian virtues of loyalty to authority when it deserves obedience. As Ian Buruma recently noted, the power of the movement to spread their ideas pales in comparison to the power of authorities to exploit new technology for the sake of Communist hegemony. But it is noteworthy and profoundly suggestive that dissenters believe their moral example forms the basis of national

renewal once the occupation comes to an end. The Chinese government continues to maintain strict control over the media and literature, often banning books and suppressing expression that is critical of the ruling Communist Party or promotes ideas deemed sensitive or subversive. The Great Firewall of China also restricts access to certain foreign websites and online platforms. Imprisonment of citizens is the consequence for critical or satirical social media posts.<sup>2</sup>

**Myanmar (Burma):** The military junta in Myanmar has a long history of suppressing freedom of expression and imposing censorship on literature and media. Books and publications that criticize the government, advocate for human rights, or promote democracy have been banned or restricted.

**North Korea:** The totalitarian regime in North Korea tightly controls information and expression. Books, media, and the internet are heavily censored, and the government determines what content is accessible to its citizens. The regime promotes state propaganda while limiting access to alternative viewpoints.

**Nepal:** In 2017 The Jharkhand Government banned a book named the *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* by Hansand. The book was a work of fiction depicting the helplessness of the Santhal community who were deprived of their land and were economically stranded. The work portrays Talamai, a Tamil woman, who agrees to indulge in sexual activity with a non-Santhal policeman in exchange for essential food. The book was banned on the grounds of depicting Santhal women as immoral and promoting pornographic content.

**Vietnam:** From 1975 on, when the communist regime assumed power, the Dega People (Rhade tribe), residing in the Central Highlands, have been victims of land deprivation, language (Rhade) depletion, and book banning. Attempts at speaking out against this assault have been spirited.

### Australia

The Australian policies of forced removal of Peoples' children from their families, known as the Stolen Generations, involved the banning and confiscation of books and cultural materials. It resulted in the loss of Peoples' languages, culture, and knowledge. Intense opposition has led to efforts at reconciliation.

### Middle East

**Iran:** The Iranian government exercises significant control over freedom of expression and has banned numerous books that are considered to be critical of Islam or the state. Writers, journalists, and bloggers who challenge the government's policies or express dissenting views often face censorship and persecution. Media freedom is severely limited both online and offline. Newspapers and magazines face censorship and warnings from authorities about which topics to cover and how.<sup>3</sup>

**Iraq:** With the Kurds' new found power since the fall of Saddam in 2003, the Kurdish government, zealous for an independent Kurdistan, have vigorously suppressed Yazidi speech whenever Yazidis advocated for autonomy and a separate government. The Kurdish government has also appropriated territories disputed by Yazidis and other minorities.

Saudi Arabia: The Saudi Arabian government exercises strict control over freedom of expression, particularly regarding political and religious matters. Books and publications that are critical of the government, challenge religious norms, or promote ideas deemed contrary to Islamic values are banned or heavily restricted.

### *Africa*

Kenya: In *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986) the Kenyan author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o discussed the importance of Peoples' languages and cultural preservation. It has helped to establish the author as a leading voice theorizing the "language debate" in postcolonial studies. The work has faced challenges and bans in some African countries due to its criticism of neo-colonialism and finance capital that, in the words of critic David Cook, has disrupted "the entire fabric of the lives of its victims: in particular their culture, making them ashamed of their names, history, systems of belief, languages, lore, art dance, song, sculpture, even the colour of their skin. It thwarts all its victims' forms and means of survival, and furthermore it employs racism."

South Africa: During the apartheid era in South Africa, the government banned Peoples' literature written by Black South Africans in order to control and silence voices advocating for equality and justice. The policy led to resistance against the oppressive apartheid regime, which eventually led to the regime's replacement.

Egypt: In Egypt, the government maintains strict control over media and has banned or censored books that are critical of the state or promote ideas deemed to be against the national interest. For example, books by political dissidents or human rights activists, such as works by Alaa Al-Aswany or Nawal El Saadawi, have faced bans or restrictions. In recent years, there have been reports of authorities confiscating books and shutting down bookstores that carry works critical of the government or discuss sensitive topics like human rights abuses or political dissent. For a bottom-up perspective, see this report's section "Insights from an Insider."

Eritrea: The assault on the Afar nation in this East African country has been relentless. In addition to speech suppression, the Afar have faced efforts to displace them from their homeland.

### Central America

Guatemala: During the Guatemalan Civil War (1960-1996), Peoples' literature and educational materials were targeted, leading to the censorship of books written in Peoples' languages. This suppression contributed to tensions between Peoples' and the government, exacerbating extant social conflict.

Cuba: Limitations on public debate of topics considered politically sensitive.<sup>4</sup>

### North America

Canada: Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Issues in Canada by Chelsea Vowe: (2016), an overview of Peoples' history, rights, and contemporary issues, has

faced attempts at censorship and other challenges in educational institutions due to its content questioning dominant narratives and exposing systemic injustices.

The United States: The U.S., as it becomes increasingly clear, is no exception to the practice or threat of banning books in public libraries and school districts. Book banning occurred as early as 1637 when Puritan authorities in Quincy, MA, banned Thomas Morton's *New English Canaan* for its alleged heretical critique of Puritan practices and power structures.

In our time, The American Library Association (ALA) reported that there were 1,269 attempts in 2022 to censor books in US libraries. Four out of five genres under attack feature trans characters, but characters who are Peoples and other minorities are targeted as well. Particularly noteworthy is the campaign to whitewash the current in US history of racial discrimination and violence in order to preserve the country's regnant narrative.<sup>5</sup> Although the ALA has mounted a "United Against Book Bans" campaign, and in spite of the considerable will of US citizens to support universal access to books (78 percent, according to a Michigan Library Association poll), the movement for prohibition is formidable.

Under attack, for example, is *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie for its explicit and controversial discussion of poverty, alcoholism, sexuality, and violence in Native American communities. From 2010 to 2019 it was the most frequently challenged book. Alexie tells the story of breaking away as an adolescent from the Spokane, Washington, Indian Reservation for a destiny in an all-white farm town. It is an exploration of life for Native Americans who endure abject poverty, discrimination by those who live outside the reservation, and the struggle for acceptance in a world dominated by whites.

The Anchorage, Alaska, School District removed a work by Velma Wallis titled *Two Old Women* from its curriculum for its allegedly off-color depiction of Peoples. It is a story of survival after two elderly women were abandoned to forbidding Arctic weather and imminent starvation by a migrating tribe. In this case the school-district decision fuelled a public demand for its reinstatement, basing their demands on the book's empowerment of women and appreciation of Native American resilience.

Various U.S. schools and communities have banned books such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger, or *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain due to objections to their content. *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* by Dee Brown was also a target of opprobrium. It documents the history of Native American tribes in the United States and their mistreatment by the U.S. government. While it was not officially banned, it faced significant opposition and censorship attempts due to its critical portrayal of U.S. policies and actions towards Peoples.

In recent years, there have been debates and controversies surrounding the freedom of expression on U.S. college campuses, with some guest speakers facing protests and attempts to prevent their speeches or discussions from taking place due to disagreement with their views. The crisis in the Middle East has energized debate about the limits of free speech when it descends to the assertion of identity that prohibits exchanges of legitimate viewpoints.

These examples represent only a few instances of book banning and suppressing expression on an international scale. There are numerous other countries where such practices occur to varying degrees, restricting the rights of individuals and limiting access to diverse perspectives and ideas.

Suppression's consequences are sometime subtle and hard to detect. Book-banning, for example, gives rise to self-censorship: How much art and literature never materialized for fear of punishment? This was a common malady during the early Communist period in Central Europe, as Anne Applebaum documented in her study *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956* (2012). Conformism, which amounted to self-censorship, prevailed because the risk to their careers, families, and friends was too great to express what they truly believed. A Turkish writer, Applebaum further noted in "The New Puritans" for *The Atlantic* (August 31, 2021), kept a manuscript he wrote in a desk drawer to avoid arbitrary prosecution for what the state could construe as criticism of the nation or its leaders. In the United States, too, fear of what she termed "the internet mob, the office mob, or the peer-group mob" is effectively producing self-censorship and self-imposed silence.

Surprisingly, suppression offers paradoxical advantages too. In her 2020 study, *Forbidden Knowledge: Medicine, Science, and Censorship in Early Modern Italy*, Hannah Marcus asserted that censorship actually "catalyzed" medical innovations, compelling discoveries that would hardly have occurred if conventional knowledge remained firm. There is evidence that librarians in Oxford used the Catholic Church's Roman Index of Prohibited Books to identify the best Protestant scholarship.

The hard power of speech suppression has paradoxically ignited paradigm shifts in reaction – new, radical ideas that exceed anything that the conventional marketplace of mainstream ideas can produce, for new or even contentious ideas freely exchanged are incremental in effect while ideas that violate conventions are seismic. Hard as it is to welcome insurrection, it was, after all, insurrection that shattered the Catholic lock on Christianity, opening the way to Christian plurality in the 17th century. The Pueblo Revolt in the late 17th century – a Peoples' rebellion against European colonial empires – amounted to a course correction that granted the Pueblo people a measure of autonomy.

Further complicating the question is the argument that suppression doesn't make any significant difference to begin with. In our age of social media is it really possible to conceal subject matter? In fact, the present state of social media algorithms possessing inflammatory content are shown to generate addictions to outrageous speech, so much so that concerned US citizens advocate for the application of product liability law to social media platforms and oppose Section 230 of the 1996 US Communications Decency Act that, if successful, would prevent social media from providing content deemed controversial. Their efforts may be in vain. Another reason why suppression may not garner credibility is the dubious assertion that words and images influence behavior. Words and images entertain and inform but there is no dispositive evidence that even profanity, sexuality, or political or religious criticism directly and uniformly inspire recipients to action.

### **III. The Scandalous Consequences of Suppression**

Even if suppression is futile, it remains a common global practice because dissent is highly seductive and therefore presents a considerable threat that cannot easily be ignored. Having considered the variation in the regional density of speech suppression, for the sake of creating a blueprint in response it is also important to consider common features.

It is axiomatic that those who achieve political power seek to keep it. Regimes typically resort to intimidation and aggression to emasculate dissent. Banning of books includes permanently removing a book from schools libraries or other shelves by the government or proxy organization. It involves restricting access to certain written materials or outright prohibiting their publication, distribution, or possession. Governments, religious institutions, or other authorities may ban books for various reasons, such as political dissent, religious preferences, controversial ideas, subversive content, or threats to the prevailing ideology. The assertion of power is often naked, repressive, and unyielding – power with an iron fist. Retention is a matter of social control, firm policies, and enforceable measures that assert power over subalterns, including Peoples, in order to punish or at least intimidate the street to assure subservience if not fidelity.

The consequences of naked speech suppression are immeasurable. Consider the following:

Banning books and suppressing expression raise concerns about the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression. This right is recognized internationally, enshrined in human rights conventions. as a cornerstone of democratic societies, allowing individuals to express their opinions, share information, and participate in public discourse.

When certain forms of expression are banned or suppressed, it restricts people's access to a diverse range of ideas, knowledge, and perspectives. This arrests critical thinking, limits intellectual growth, and impedes the ability to make informed decisions.

Banning books or suppressing artistic expression undermines cultural and artistic diversity. It inhibits the exploration of different cultural experiences, perspectives, and narratives, potentially leading to the marginalization or erasure of minority voices and their contributions to literature, art, and society.

Book banning and speech suppression has a detrimental effect on education. Limiting access to a wide range of books and educational resources arrests students' intellectual development. It also forcibly restricts educators' ability to provide a comprehensive and unbiased education.

Banning books or suppressing certain expressions perpetuates, if not accelerates, stereotypes and prejudices. It prevents the dissemination of works that productively interrogates societal norms, provides alternative and potentially breakthrough perspectives, and promotes inclusivity, social equality, and justice.

Speech suppression creates a climate of fear and dead-end self-censorship, where individuals and creators may hesitate to express their opinions or explore sensitive topics. This chilling effect can hinder intellectual and artistic freedom, as people may fear reprisals or backlash for expressing dissenting views or unconventional ideas.

#### **IV. The Seductive Power of Implicit Suppression**

Speech suppression, however direct and aggressive, has a price. Domination is risky precisely because if speech suppression is belligerent, its delivery can ignite popular resistance regardless of intimidation and the prospect of punishment. It is only a matter of time before restlessness and episodic resistance mutate to dedicated popular insurrection.

Regimes therefore typically attempt to placate subalterns by making a case for the imperative of patience in order to give beneficial policies the time they need to materialize. Disingenuous rationalizations abound for the sake of civility and selective prosperity. We need to be alert to this kind of mendacity.

There are many reasons why this strategy is vulnerable. Economic scarcity and social hierarchies require rationing resources, a procedure that predictably favours those who are privileged to the impoverishment and discontent of underclasses.

If authorities cannot distribute resources equitably, what they can do is to convince the street that a plan for distribution is in progress. Asserting the existence of prospects – what observers call “messaging” or “public relations” – obviates the need for state aggression and instead requires justification for speech suppression that can simultaneously stabilize power structures and pacify the street.

Justifying speech suppression is, of course, a stable measure only as long as it is limited to speech that directly threatens social order. It can otherwise tolerate Peoples’ cultural and community autonomy. If, however, suppression is predatory and enacts degrees of cultural erasure, justification of speech suppression, no matter how sincere and successful the plan is, is provocative. In the long run, its consequences – the sacrifice of plurality for social homogeneity – are destructive.

Following are three of the most cited examples of messaging whose conspicuous purpose is to preserve the social hierarchy and achieve social order. We need to evaluate in each instance the sincerity of a plan for resource distribution. If it is proven impractical or disingenuous, a distraction from the underlying motive to eviscerate heterodoxy, speech suppression cannot survive. Consider:

The protection of regional security requires the use of force to banish hate speech when speech seeks incitement and is therefore regarded as a terrorist activity. Is, for example, street resistance to measures compelling social compliance for the sake of social order disproportionate to measures ensuring economic and social benefits, or is it a justifiable response to state overreach, a defensive act in service of Peoples’ autonomy, and who decides?

The protection of moral and ethical values requires the use of force to prohibit obscenity, explicit salacious content, blasphemy, and subversive language and images. The question is how far the suppression of corrosive speech encroaches on Peoples’ customs or other uncommon standards of morality. Similarly, where is the threshold dividing the protection of minors from exposure to sensational language from expression that reflects Peoples’ customs and practices considered appropriate for minors and, indeed, important for their well-being?

Preventing disinformation by the state requires the use of counterforce in order to protect the public from deception and manipulation. However, manipulated content that is designed to persuade may well be legitimate content in Peoples' cultures. Is the promotion of community fidelity at the expense of regional or national patriotism a matter of disinformation or local cohesion? Local fidelity is the main concern in acclaimed essays emerging from post-colonial regions in African and Latin America. Especially iconic is Chinua Achebe' *Things Fall Apart* (1958).

## V. Insights from an Insider

We asked Nataly Tzirtzipi and Somaya Selim – members of the CNS Justice Commission – to provide first-hand observations of Peoples' abjection and aspirations. We believe including in this report a subjective perspective will help fuel a coordinated mitigation of speech suppression that the Congress of Nations and States is in a prime position to mobilize.

Nataly Tzirtzipi (NT) is a member of Greek Cypriot Peoples specializing in human rights and international humanitarian law. A recipient of a Bachelor's degree in Law and a Master's degree in European and International Law, she has a strong background in protecting asylum seekers and other vulnerable populations. She has previously worked for the International Protection Administrative Court of Cyprus, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Office in Cyprus, and the Asylum Service of Cyprus. She has previously served on two long-term projects for the Syrian Legal Network-NL and as an intern in fundraising and communications at the Antonio Cassese Initiative, an NGO promoting a global network of jurists "without borders" supporting judges, prosecutors, and lawyers working in countries facing challenges in the administration of justice. She is listed in the Republic of Cyprus's Register of Mediators, which is responsible for negotiating civil and commercial disputes.

The geopolitics on the island of Cyprus, which involves Greek, Turkish, and the United Kingdom's interests, require clarification. Historically bound up with the Ottoman Empire, the island became a protectorate of the UK in 1878. When the Ottoman Empire declared war on the Triple Entente, which included Great Britain, in 1914, after decades of the island's prominent Peoples' allegiance to Greece and their concomitant disaffection with Great Britain, the ascendant British Empire annexed Cyprus in 1914 and occupied it from 1914 to 1925. It then established British Cyprus as a Crown colony to 1960. The escalation of decolonization campaigns, which commenced after World War II, erupted in violence against the colonial power in 1955. These developments inspired militant Turkish Cypriots to demand unity with Turkey parallel to Greek Cypriots' ties to Greece and, indeed, internal hostilities between Turkish and Greek Cypriots. After proposals for partition failed, Great Britain relinquished control and, in 1960, the island achieved independence as the Republic of Cyprus secured by a Treaty of Guarantee signed by Greece, Turkey, and Great Britain. In short order, however, civil conflict intensified.

In 1974 Greece orchestrated a coup d'etat for effective control over the entire territory, a violation of prior agreements that precipitated a Turkish invasion of Cyprus and acceleration

of Greek Cypriot displacement from and Turkish settlement in the northern part of the island. Though the coup failed and order resumed, a debate ensued about the legitimacy of Turkey's sustained military presence under terms of the Treaty's Article IV. In 1983, Turkish Cypriots, dominant in the northern segment of the island, declared itself the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) under Turkey's effective control. Greek Cypriots governed the rest of the territory – informally referred to the “Greek side” – as the internationally recognized, sovereign Independent Republic of Cyprus. Polarization has restricted the rights and observance of heritage for the Greek-speaking minority residing in the north and for the Turkish-speaking minority residing in the south. Though the two sides have made strides toward a negotiated settlement, the island remains divided by a buffer zone.

Somaya Selim (SS) is an Egyptian citizen who has been active in the field of human rights since 2011. An architect and a lawyer with a BSC degree in architecture from Al-Azhar University and an LLB degree from Cairo University, she worked most recently with the Global Initiative for Justice, Truth and Reconciliation on a project called "A Victim-Centered Approach to the Transitional Justice Process," and managed a project with Minority Rights Group International to combat discrimination and persecution against ethnic minorities. Her fields of investigation included torture, extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, abuses in prisons and detention facilities, the right to a fair trial, the abolition of the death penalty, and the rights of minorities and Peoples.

Her comments that follow apply to minorities as well as to Peoples'. As indicated throughout this report, Peoples' are historically and therefore deeply rooted in territories where they reside. In Egypt, they are identified as Nubians, Bedouins, and Amazighs (Berbers). Minority groups in Egypt include Baha'is, Coptic Christians, Jews, and Shiites. Though minorities do not necessarily have historical ties to the region, like Peoples' they are distinguished from Egypt's dominant Sunni Muslims by their religious, cultural, linguistic, and social attributes. Somaya's activism and defence of human rights led to her life in exile after receiving threats from Egyptian authorities.

### **Suppression**

**CNS: Have you personally witnessed or experienced instances where books or other forms of expression related to minority or Peoples' cultures were banned or suppressed?**

**NT:** In the territory of Cyprus that is under effective control by the Republic of Turkey (the self-declared “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus”), any signs attesting to the Peoples' Cypriot cultures, such as books, historical monuments, customs and traditions, and topographical names, are suppressed or banned altogether. Any publication directly challenging Turkey's version of events on the island of Cyprus is subject to censorship and prohibition.

**SS:** I am aware of many works that have been targeted or banned in Egypt, including: *Late Winter in Cairo* by Ibrahim Issa, which discusses the minorities' and Peoples' experiences;

and *The Harafish* by Sahar Al-Siddiqi, a novel that tells the story of the life of minority Nubians in Egypt, residents of the Nubia region in southern Egypt.

**CNS: Have you observed any general patterns or trends in how minority or Peoples' speech are targeted?**

**NT:** Non-government organizations (NGOs) and governmental entities facilitate the dissemination of false information or misinformation. UN bodies in Cyprus, for example, refer to the internationally recognized Republic of Cyprus as the “Greek side” in spite of the fact that the republic is internationally recognized and a member of the United Nations. One result is the implicit support this labelling lends for the disputed Turkish settlement in the north, or what they misleadingly call the “Turkish side,” and the elision of Peoples’ heritage.

**SS:** Restrictions that are directed at minority and Peoples’ speech include censorship on the Internet, intimidation and threats aimed at authors and publishers, investigations and other forms of harassment, and secret surveillance.

Activists and journalists have been persecuted in Egypt for their activism in defending and speaking out about the minorities’ and Peoples’ rights. Here are some examples:

Journalist Ismail Al-Iskandarani is an Egyptian journalist active in the field of media and journalism. The military court sentenced him to seven years in prison for his prominent activity in defending the rights of the Bedouins in Sinai. Many activists concerned with the issue of the Bedouins in Sinai were subjected to arbitrary detention, intimidation, and abuse, most notably the activist “Walid Muhareb,” who was subjected to a military trial and is still detained.

Lawyer Muhammad Al-Baqir, from the Nubian village of Ibrim in southern Egypt, is an Egyptian lawyer and human rights activist active in defending the rights of Nubians in Egypt. He was arrested because of his activity in defending human rights and participating in the human rights movement.

Activists Ramy Kamel and Patrick Zaki were subjected to persecution and arbitrary arrest because of their activity and defence of the rights of religious minorities in Egypt. The decision to release them came after multiple appeals from the High Commissioner for Human Rights and United Nations experts.

**CNS: What specific types of literature have been targeted or banned?**

**NT:** Literature that is targeted or banned in the northern territory of the Island of Cyprus include 1) books or publications that challenge or present alternative viewpoints to the official narrative describing historical events, particularly those related to civil and political conflict; 2) academic works or research that address human rights abuses, political repression, or violations of minority rights that contradict official narratives or disrupt the status quo; and 3) literary works or artistic creations that celebrate the island’s cultural diversity and Peoples’ heritage or advocate for minority rights - positions often perceived as a threat to ruling political or cultural authorities.

**SS:** Books about religion and on minority issues in Egypt have been a special target for confiscation and the ban on circulation. Their authors have also been targeted for intimidation and harassment.

Expressions of political opinion is, unsurprisingly, the major government target. Restrictions on the publication or circulation of works expressing political opinion or criticizing government policy undermine freedom of expression and social participation. One notable example was the prevention of two books by Anwar Al-Hawari – *The Taming of Tyranny* and *The New Dictatorship* – from being displayed at the 54<sup>th</sup> session of the Cairo International Book Fair (2023). Both books contain frank criticism of the authorities.

In addition, there are orders to bar licenses, also called deposits, that are requisite for participating in book fairs. Khaled Abdel Rahman, a former member of the Doctors Without Rights movement, didn't receive a license to submit his book *42 Al-Qasr Al-Aini Street Doctors Without Rights* to the 2023 Cairo book fair, commenting, "After we agreed with the publisher and finished writing, the matter became dependent on having the depositing number. and entering the printing press, but the publisher informed me that the book was prevented from obtaining a deposit number without giving reasons from the censorship, which is what we expected would happen."

Publishing houses are also targets. Under the pretext of reports that Merritt Publishing House published books without deposit numbers, security forces raided the premises in 2016 and arrested Muhammad Zein, a volunteer, for having an unlicensed "sound mixer." Perhaps as a consequence of releasing Zein for failure to provide proof of unlicensed publications, the following year the government-sponsored National Library and Records House declined to issue a deposit number for the Merritt Publishing House's book *Al-Khazooq: The Military and the Brotherhood between the Coalition and Confrontation*.

Later that year, allegations that Khaled Lotfy, founder of Tanmeyah House, divulged military secrets and broadcast false statements and information in its publication of *The Angel: The Egyptian Spy Who Saved Israel* by the Israeli historian Uri Bar Joseph led to his imprisonment for five years with hard labor, the house's eradication of the book's entire print run, and a decree forbidding the house from participating in the Cairo book fair for two years. Mohamed Hawass, owner of Dhad Publishing House, along with the poet, Jalal Al-Behairi, were sentenced by the military court to three years in prison for publishing the collection *The Best Women of the Earth*, which the authorities considered offensive to the armed forces.

**CNS: Are there any historical or cultural factors that contribute to the ongoing suppression of books and others forms of expression?**

**NT:** The suppression of books and other forms of expression is noteworthy in the occupied territory of Cyprus by the Republic of Turkey in order to reinforce Turkish allegiance by controlling information and narratives, and, overall, shaping public opinion. Dissent and international interests are directly censored.

**SS:** Historically, Egypt's regimes have prioritized national unity at the expense of cultural diversity and free expression, which they have regarded, and continue to regard, as divisive and potentially disruptive.

**CNS: Have authorities provided any specific reasons or justifications for banning books or suppressing expression?**

**NT:** The putative Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus justifies censorship as necessary measures for the protection of morals, national security, and certain ethnic groups.

**SS:** In Egypt, the government frames its control of cultural expression as a matter of preserving national security. Refusing to justify its reasons for suppression, it is typically unaccountable for its actions.

**CNS: Have you, yourself, encountered any challenges in accessing censored or restricted literature or cultural materials representing minorities' or Peoples' perspectives?**

**NT:** As a descendant of people who have been forcibly displaced from the northern part of the island of Cyprus, I am not able to enjoy full rights in the region due to the restrictions imposed by the self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. These restrictions curb my freedom to express my Peoples' identity and heritage.

**SS:** During my time in Egypt from 2015 to 2020, particularly while attending the major annual book fair, I observed a noticeable absence of books addressing human rights issues or presenting political perspectives opposing Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's government. The fair, once a hub for diverse viewpoints, has transformed into a more controlled environment.

I later discovered that these changes were due to new restrictions imposed on publishing houses participating in the fair. Publishers were required to submit a list of books they planned to display to the Ministry of Culture for security approval. Such restrictions not only limited the availability of literature representing minorities' or Peoples' perspectives but also narrowed the scope of public discourse in Egypt, hindering access to a broader range of ideas and viewpoints.

**CNS: What has hindered efforts to hold individuals or institutions accountable for acts of speech suppression?**

**NT:** In the northern part of Cyprus, journalists are threatened directly or indirectly for advocating a unified Cyprus and celebrating the shared cultural heritage of its people. An example is the murder of Kutlu Adali, a Turkish-Cypriot who was born in Cyprus. He was a journalist who worked for a newspaper and opposed the division of Cyprus. Before his death, he received threats, and a group linked to Turkish security forces claimed responsibility for killing him. Another example of a journalist being targeted in Cyprus is the case of Tasos Isaac. He was a Greek Cypriot who was killed during a confrontation at a protest in August 1996. Isaac was participating in a demonstration against the Turkish occupation of Cyprus when he was attacked and fatally stabbed by Turkish nationalists. This incident highlighted the ongoing tensions between the Greek and Turkish communities on the island and the risks faced by those who speak out against the division of Cyprus.

**SS:** Human rights defenders, journalists, and activists who attempt to expose or redress injustices often face legal repercussions, harassment, and intimidation, discouraging them from pursuing accountability. Moreover, the limitations on expressing dissenting views hinder evidence of injustice, making it difficult for the public to be informed about cases of human rights abuses or misconduct by institutions. Additionally, the suppression of expression contributes to a culture of fear, where individuals are reluctant to come forward with evidence or testimonies that could hold wrongdoers accountable.

**CNS: How would you assess the overall level of public awareness and concern about state-wide book banning and Peoples' speech suppression?**

**SS:** There is little awareness of the problem. The main reason is the state's censorship of expression in education and the media, restricting the flow of information about these challenges.

### **Consequences**

**CNS: In your opinion, how do you perceive the impact of book banning on minorities' and Peoples' cultural identity?**

**NT:** The consequences of book banning are extensive and negative. Such actions contribute to the destruction of Peoples' cultural heritage, limit diverse perspectives, disrupt intergenerational transmission of knowledge, and silence the voices of marginalized groups. The suppression of cultural expression also accelerates language loss, suffocates creativity, and promotes psychological and emotional distress within these communities.

**SS:** Banning books and cultural materials for minorities and Peoples', including Nubians and Bedouins, leads to a significant loss of their cultural and linguistic heritage, a restriction of opportunities for education and research, and an erosion of land rights and political representation that results in their marginalization and social exclusion. Religious minorities, such as the Baha'is and Shiites, encounter significant barriers in Egypt. These groups are prohibited from openly expressing their religious identities and affiliations, restricting the construction of places of worship and their ability to practice their faiths and participate in religious activities.

**CNS: What specific case of state intimidation exemplifies the problem?**

**SS:** The situation with the Sinai Bedouins provides a poignant example. The Egyptian state's systematic defamatory campaigns against the Sinai Bedouins, including allegations of their involvement in drug trafficking and their role as agents of foreign entities, have led to their marginalization and discrimination that has occasionally escalated to their displacement from ancestral lands.

**CNS: Can book banning and speech suppression generally lead to an erasure of minorities' or Peoples' cultures?**

**NT:** The suppression of books and speech, especially in the region called the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, poses a serious threat to the preservation and flourishing of

minorities' and Peoples' cultures, contributing to cultural deterioration and possible irrevocable cultural loss.

**SS:** In the name of national security, the government in Egypt has controlled publications and the circulation of books. As a result, minorities and Peoples' are at risk of losing their cultural identity and cultural heritage. Of similar concern is the disruption of endogenous cultural transmission from older to younger generations, which disfigures native self-understanding. This is especially true among Nubians and Bedouins, exacerbated by their forced displacement and resettlement.

**CNS: Does suppression of Peoples' speech affect your people as a whole:**

**SS:** Yes. It erodes a culture of diversity and an understanding of alterity. In Egypt, as in any society, a diversity of perspectives is essential for fostering a comprehensive understanding of social issues, promoting dialogue, and working towards just and equitable solutions. The free flow of information allows individuals to access various viewpoints, engage in informed discussions, and actively participate in shaping the collective understanding of justice. When diverse voices are stifled, as seen in Egypt, it hampers the ability of the public to access critical information, dampening the pursuit of justice.

The impact of book banning and suppressing expression in Egypt extends beyond limiting access to diverse viewpoints; it creates a vacuum in public discourse. By restricting certain narratives and perspectives, authorities limit the ability of individuals and communities to contribute to discussions on justice and human rights.

**CNS: How important do you believe it is to protect and preserve the cultural expression and heritage of minorities' and Peoples' communities through unrestricted access to books and other forms of expression?**

**NT:** To nurture inclusive and vibrant societies, it is crucial to promote cultural diversity, protect freedom of expression, and challenge censorship.

**SS:** Protecting and preserving the cultural expression and heritage of minorities' and Peoples' communities allows these groups to maintain and celebrate their unique identities, traditions, and histories which are essential for a diverse and rich cultural tapestry. It also deepens cross-community understanding. I've seen the suppression of culture expression in Egypt that have compromised minorities' and Peoples' cultural heritage and attenuated broader society's understanding and appreciation of Egypt's diverse cultural landscape.

**Opportunities**

**CNS: What specific measures or actions do you believe should be taken to address if not rectify book banning and speech suppression more generally?**

**NT:** We're in a battle with passive intolerance for the crime of speech suppression. We need to implement education and other awareness programs to warn against the corrosive effects of censorship, on the one hand and, on the other, to highlight the importance of diverse cultural expression. Against local efforts to discourage international interests, we need to advocate for international organizations, such as UNESCO, to monitor and draw attention to cases of

censorship and impose sanctions, including economic measures, on governments whose policies contribute to the extinction of Peoples' cultures.

**SS:** Let's begin with measures that are important if evasive. The government in Egypt should revise policies that restrict minorities' and Peoples' freedoms to express, produce, and disseminate their cultural and religious practices and beliefs. Creating platforms and educational opportunities in schools and beyond would also be beneficial. More effective would be support for independent civil and human rights organizations, among others, that promote cultural diversity.

**CNS: What is the role of education in negotiating book banning and speech suppression and promoting understanding and acceptance of minorities' and Peoples' cultures?**

**NT:** Education could equip individuals with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to challenge censorship, promote inclusivity, and contribute to the protection of human rights.

**SS:** Education, like other aspects of Egyptian society, is a victim of speech suppression. In open societies, education plays a crucial role in fostering understanding and acceptance of minorities' and Peoples' cultures, a society's culture diversity, and empathy and respect for different communities. In Egypt, the exclusion of information about peripheral communities has restricted knowledge and an understanding of them. A notable example is the negative stereotyping of the Sinai Bedouins. They have been defamed with allegations of their criminal activities. Such stereotypes, perpetuated through compromised education and media, have negatively impacted Egyptian society's view of the Bedouins, leading to an erosion of support for their circumstances.

**CNS: Are there any specific policies or legal frameworks in your country or region that address the rights of minorities and Peoples' to the freedom of expression and access to information?**

**NT:** There are no specific policies or legal frameworks in Cyprus proper. The Republic of Cyprus, as a member of the European Union, is expected to adhere to EU regulations and directives that safeguard human rights, including freedom of expression. No such protocols exist in the purported Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

**SS:** There are several laws and regulations that address the minorities' and Peoples' rights. Notably, the Egyptian Constitution of 2014 guarantees the right to freedom of expression, as well as to freedom of the press and media. Additionally, there are various laws such as the Press and Media Law, copyright laws, and laws concerning literature and the arts, along with legislation aimed at combating cybercrimes. These legal frameworks provide a robust basis for protecting these freedoms. However, the reality in Egypt is at odds with these legal provisions. The decisive factor is how authorities interpret and apply these laws, which in many cases leads to the restriction of freedoms under the guise of security and military concerns.

**CNS: Is there a role for international organizations?**

**SS:** The involvement of international organizations, such as the Congress of Nations and States, can be pivotal by monitoring and advocating against speech-suppression practices, supporting local advocacy groups, and providing legal advice, funding, and educational resources. These measures will bring much-needed attention to abusive practices and the need for greater freedom of expression in Egypt. They will also exert pressure on the Egyptian government to reassess and modify restrictive practices.

**CNS:** **In your opinion, what specific strategies or approaches can be effective in raising awareness of minorities and Peoples' speech suppression and advocating for their rights?**

**NT:** We must redress the dearth of literature that serves to celebrate Peoples' cultural heritage as well as the act of banning books.

**SS:** Advocacy efforts could focus on collaborating with local NGOs and community leaders to document and publicize instances in Egypt of book banning and suppression of cultural expression. Creating and disseminating detailed reports will inspire concern about threats to cultural diversity and freedom of expression, on the one hand and, on the other, diplomatic pressure on Egypt to adhere to international standards of human rights and cultural preservation.

**CNS:** **Have you seen any successful efforts or initiatives that aim to counter book banning or promote the diversity of expression from?**

**SS:** There are two developments worth noting: The Foundation for Freedom of Thought and Expression works to promote and defend freedom of expression and the freedom to circulate information by presenting policies consistent with human rights principles. It also monitors reports and research papers that evaluates the conditions of freedom of expression in Egypt.

Digital platforms offer possibilities for preserving and accessing a range of cultural expressions. Storing cultural and literary works in online libraries, e-books, and digital archives promise to preserve minorities' and Peoples' voices and stories by circumventing state-controlled media and publishing channels. Moreover, online forums, blogs, and social media help raise awareness globally as well as in Egypt of these communities' challenges, cultures, and perspectives. In addition, the electronic software developer Moamen Taloush has launched an application called "Nubi" for adopting the Nubian language on a mobile phone, which will facilitate expression and help preserve the Nubian heritage.

## **VI. Resistance, Opportunities, and Proposal**

Evidence of resistance against book banning and suppressing expression can be found at local, regional, and global levels.



*Posted in the Millerton, NY, Oblong Bookstore (February, 2024)*

**Local Level: Community Advocacy:** Local communities often mobilize to challenge book bans or restrictions. They may organize protests, letter-writing campaigns, and public discussions to raise awareness about the importance of freedom of expression and the harmful effects of censorship. **Libraries and Bookstores:** Librarians and bookstore owners play a crucial role in defending intellectual freedom. They may refuse to remove banned books from their shelves, create displays to highlight censored works, or host events to promote open dialogue and freedom of expression.

**Regional Level: Human Rights Organizations:** Regional human rights organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and PEN International actively advocate for freedom of expression.<sup>6</sup> They document cases of book banning and suppression of expression, raise awareness through reports and campaigns, and provide support to writers, journalists, and activists facing censorship. Regional literary festivals and conferences often become platforms for discussing censorship and promoting free expression. Writers, scholars, and activists gather to share their experiences and perspectives, creating networks of resistance and fostering solidarity.

**Global Level: International bodies** like UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) and the International Publishers Association work to protect freedom of expression and combat book banning. They develop guidelines, issue statements, and collaborate with member states to promote and safeguard the right to access information and diverse viewpoints.

**Digital Activism:** Online platforms have become powerful tools for global resistance against book banning and speech suppression. Social media campaigns, petitions, and digital advocacy efforts allow individuals and organizations to reach wider audiences, share information, and mobilize support for those affected by censorship.

Education plays a particularly critical role in resisting book banning and speech suppression. Measures include:



*“Challenge Censorship,” The American Library Association’s third basic policy*

Curriculum development: Educational institutions and educators actively incorporate diverse perspectives, including those of marginalized communities, into their curriculum. By including literature, history, and social studies materials that represent different cultures and viewpoints, they resist attempts to suppress certain narratives and promote a more inclusive – and accurate – understanding of society.

Critical thinking and media literacy: Education fosters critical thinking skills and media literacy among students. By teaching them to analyse and evaluate information critically, students become more discerning consumers of knowledge and productive agents of social prosperity and peace. This empowers them to question censorship efforts and seek alternative sources of information, enabling them to form independent and informed opinions.

Classroom discussions and debates: Teachers create safe and inclusive spaces for students to engage in discussions and debates about sensitive topics. By encouraging open dialogue, students learn to respect diverse perspectives and challenge oppressive and suffocating narratives. This cultivates a culture of intellectual freedom and fosters resistance against attempts to banish certain viewpoints.

Awareness Campaigns: Educational institutions organize awareness campaigns, workshops, and seminars to educate students and the broader community about the importance of freedom of expression. These initiatives highlight the detrimental effects of speech suppression and encourage students to stand up for their rights and the rights of others.

Student Activism: Students often take an active role in resisting censorship and promoting freedom of expression. They organize protests, petitions, and creative initiatives such as performances, exhibitions, and literary events to raise awareness about the importance of unrestricted access to information and diverse expressions.

Access to Information: Libraries and educational institutions provide access to a wide range of books, resources, and digital platforms, ensuring that students have the opportunity to

explore diverse ideas and perspectives. By providing access to information, education supports the resistance against speech suppression.

Examples of educational resistance can be seen in initiatives by student organizations, teachers' associations, educational institutions, and community-based educational programs.

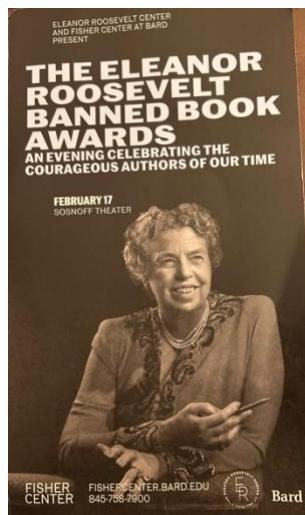
Evidence of legal redress for book banning and speech suppression can also be found at various levels.

**Local Level:** Individuals or organizations may file lawsuits challenging the constitutionality or legality of book banning or restrictions on freedom of expression. These legal actions aim to establish precedent and protect individuals' rights to access information and express their views. In addition, activists, civil society organizations, and free speech advocates often engage in public campaigns to raise awareness about the negative consequences of legal restrictions on expression. They may lobby lawmakers, organize protests, and collaborate with legal experts to challenge and reform laws that enable book banning or suppress expression.

**Regional Level:** In regions where human rights courts exist, individuals or organizations may bring cases related to book banning or speech suppression. These legal actions contribute to the development of jurisprudence that upholds freedom of expression as a fundamental right.

**Global Level:** Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and human rights groups work at the global level to advocate for legal accountability regarding book banning and speech suppression. They monitor and document cases, provide legal support, and engage in diplomatic efforts to pressure governments to uphold freedom of expression. International treaties and agreements, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, establish legal frameworks that protect freedom of expression. Human rights organizations and advocates leverage these instruments to hold governments accountable for violations related to book banning and speech suppression. Individuals or groups may submit complaints or petitions to international human rights bodies, such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights or the United Nations Human Rights Council. These mechanisms provide a platform to hold governments accountable for violations of freedom of expression.

The prospect of a better future may never be anything more than a calculated mirage, a dream that, as Harriet Tubman had come to understand, is always recurring because it will never be fulfilled. When, however, a regime asserts naked domination as its primary if not exclusive purpose, when, as in the case of predatory colonialism, institutions or regimes holding sway are dedicated to protecting and preserving their ways of life and beliefs at the expense of native civil society, suppression demands unqualified resistance. As Martin Luther King, Jr. made clear in his Letter from a Birmingham Jail: "There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over and men are no longer willing to be plunged into an abyss of injustice where they experience the bleakness of corroding despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience." Effacement of culture demands swift and unsparing action.



Effective resistance, we should note, is a matter of timing. If we find ourselves standing just short of an abyss, better to propel redress incrementally. It's also important to note that the effectiveness of resistance efforts can vary depending on the legal and political context of each country or region. Renewal, then, requires focus, analysis, and perseverance. Efforts to address book banning and speech suppression exalt freedom of speech, access to diverse viewpoints, warnings about censorship issues, and dialogue on the importance of protecting and promoting the rights of individuals and communities to freely express themselves. Collective action through legal challenges, public advocacy, engagement with regional and international mechanisms, and the support of human rights organizations, as well as supporting Peoples' internal development, contributes to the ongoing fight for accountability and expression.

The political movement for speech suppression is considerable. In addition to regime determination, this report noted subtle or indirect regime measures that delay the promise of free expression – and therefore popular resistance – with disingenuous, long-term plans for resource distribution, or effectively elicit self-censorship as a result of unsparing suppression backed by intimidation. Even the postulate that suppression is sometimes persuasive when a case is made for preserving prized regional values for community cohesion can eviscerate the will to resist or create. We believe, however, that impediments, no matter how hegemonic, demand a vigorous and unrelenting response. We have no choice. Indeed, we believe that regimes often underestimate Peoples' yearning for expression and resolve.

International organizations, such as the Congress of Nations and States (CNS), must play a particularly crucial role in resisting book banning and speech suppression. Following are a number of strategies for consideration, noting that the strategies CNS decides to adopt should be ones that it can reasonably implement.

They raise awareness. They engage in public education, organize protests, and use media platforms to highlight the negative consequences of speech suppression. Included is the dissemination of this report, or its distillation, to media outlets, governments, the United Nations, the European Union, and religious organizations as well as CNS's own members.

They provide legal support. They may initiate legal challenges, file lawsuits, and provide pro bono legal representation to defend individuals' rights to express themselves and access information.

They actively monitor cases and document violations. They compile reports and publish research to expose the extent and impact of censorship, supporting evidence-based advocacy efforts.

They leverage international networks and partnerships. To exert pressure on governments, they engage in diplomatic advocacy, collaborate with other organizations, and work with international bodies.

They conduct training programs, workshops, and capacity-building initiatives. By fostering knowledge and awareness, they equip people with the tools to resist censorship and promote language development as well as freedom of thought and creativity.

They implement popular observance of benchmark civil aspirations, such as a “language day.”

They utilize digital platforms and social media. Online activism allows for broader reach and enables individuals to express solidarity and share resources in real-time.

The Congress of Nations and States should partner with other NGOs, including PEN International, Article 19, Human Rights Watch, Reporters Without Borders, Index on Censorship, Electronic Frontier Foundation, and various local and regional organizations promoting freedom of expression.

At stake is the protection of Peoples' rights and social diversity; economic prosperity and social peace through civil dialogue and collaboration; and the case for the unparalleled benefit of cross-boundary interaction that promises to restore mutual trust and provide a better chance than privilege and speech suppression for social mutuality and peace, endemic serenity, and gratifying productivity.

<sup>1</sup> <https://freedomhouse.org/country/russia/freedom-world/2023>

<sup>2</sup> <https://freedomhouse.org/country/china/freedom-world/2023>

<sup>3</sup> <https://freedomhouse.org/country/iran/freedom-world/2023>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/cuba/>

<sup>5</sup> See Richard Slotkin, *A Great Disorder: National Myth and the Battle for America* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2024).

<sup>6</sup> For details about the work of PEN International in combating book banning, see a report by staff member Nadine Farid Johnson for a symposium sponsored by the Transitional Justice in the USA titled “Do Memory Battles About Contemporary and Historical Racial Injustice in the U.S. Undermine the Right to Truth,” at

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=941QOzTbO8I&list=PLb2ogFdBfKT1fBiBFn-W8NPQpe5\\_FTdp1&index=8&t=40s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=941QOzTbO8I&list=PLb2ogFdBfKT1fBiBFn-W8NPQpe5_FTdp1&index=8&t=40s), 26:59-34:52.

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