

**Forum:** Social, Humanitarian & Cultural Committee (GA3)

**Issue:** Safeguarding Cultural Diversity and Artistic Freedom in Restrictive Regimes



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**Position:** Co-Chair

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## Personal Introduction

Dear delegates,

My name is Evita Maragaki, and I am a student in the 11th grade at the German School of Athens. It is an honor for me to serve as a co-chair in GA3. I chose this committee because I believe that matters of protecting cultural diversity and artistic freedom are the cornerstones of who we are and are shaping our way of life, and even our tomorrow, as said in this year's conference theme. With these factors in mind, I decided to participate in the GA3 Committee.

To begin with, congratulations on deciding to take part in MUN, as it is an unforgettable experience with much to offer. As a past delegate, I strongly urge you to savor every moment and every step of the process. We live in an era in which we are facing urgent changes and challenges that demand immediate action. Throughout the entire MUN procedure, we learn about effective ways to take action and resolve these issues, as MUN raises awareness about these issues while encouraging cooperation.

In this study guide, you will find an overview of the topic and all the basic information you need to know. However, to be as prepared as possible for the upcoming conference, I highly recommend and urge you to conduct your own independent research.

For any questions, whether about the study guide, additional study material, or issues that may arise during your research, please do not hesitate to contact me via email: [evita\\_eins@hotmail.com](mailto:evita_eins@hotmail.com), or feel free to reach out to the Main Chair of GA3, Katherine Eliopoulos, at [kathyeliopoulos88@gmail.com](mailto:kathyeliopoulos88@gmail.com). I am looking forward to the February conference and meeting you all!

Best regards,

Evangelia Maragaki

## Topic Introduction

Restrictive regimes are defined as political systems in which power is concentrated in a small group of people and basic human rights, such as freedom of expression, are limited through numerous means, such as censorship or surveillance<sup>1</sup>. There were many restrictive regimes in the world, such as the Soviet Union, Iran, Russia, and China, which placed strict control over literature and theater as well as constraints on the artists themselves. Consequently, safeguarding cultural diversity and artistic freedom is strongly correlated to human rights and a means to combat the suppression of the people of the arts in such regimes.

Artistic expression is oppressed in such regimes, as it is an effective means of fostering a critical environment, but also because it creates space for reflection, dialogue, and all values that are against the idea of an authoritarian regime. This issue is of paramount importance, as artists, through their creations, are fostering values of constructive criticism and, in general, reflection and expression of their opinion.

This suppression is harmful on many levels, with minorities being one of the most impacted groups. Such groups include indigenous people, people who are of a certain religion, or even LGBTQ+ persons. Their views and opinions, in oppressive governments, are viewed as a threat to national security and unity, and thus become marginalized, or even leading to the extinction of a specific culture.

In order to achieve the protection of cultural diversity and artistic freedom, there needs to be a definite and direct reform of such regimes, to allow freedom of expression, as well as to enable people to exercise their culture freely.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Artistic freedom

“Artistic freedom is the freedom to imagine, create, and distribute diverse cultural expressions free of governmental censorship, political interference, or the pressures of non-state actors. It includes the right of all citizens to have access to these works and is essential for the well-being of society.”<sup>2</sup> This right is important, as it gives the artists the freedom to fully express themselves; however, in restrictive regimes, the people and artists are deprived of this right.

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<sup>1</sup> Santos, Edmarverson A. “The Struggle for Human Rights in Authoritarian Regimes.” *Diplomacy and Law*, 5 Aug. 2024, updated 2 July 2025,

<https://www.diplomacyandlaw.com/post/the-struggle-for-human-rights-in-authoritarian-regimes>.

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO. *Artistic Freedom: A Global Report*. UNESCO, 2023.

[https://www.unesco.org/creativity/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2023/01/artistic\\_freedom\\_pdf\\_web.pdf](https://www.unesco.org/creativity/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2023/01/artistic_freedom_pdf_web.pdf)

## Authoritarian regimes

“Authoritarianism, in politics and government, is the blind submission to authority and the repression of individual freedom of thought and action. Authoritarian regimes are systems of government that have no established mechanism for the transfer of executive power and do not afford their citizens civil liberties or political rights. Power is concentrated in the hands of a single leader or an elite class, whose decisions are taken without regard for the will of the people.”<sup>3</sup> Authoritarian regimes are central to this issue, since these regimes foster grave violations of human rights.

## Censorship

“A system in which an authority limits the ideas that people are allowed to express and prevents books, films, works of art, documents, or other kinds of communication from being seen or made available to the public, because they include or support certain ideas.”<sup>4</sup> Censorship is the action taken by restrictive regimes to prevent artists from exercising their inherent right to express their opinions through their work.

## Cultural diversity

“Cultural diversity refers to the variety of cultural expressions, practices, and identities that exist within a society or community. It encompasses different backgrounds, languages, traditions, and beliefs that shape individuals and groups. Cultural diversity is one of the main aspects that authoritarian regimes target, as it is a means for people to resist and a way to express themselves and express their dissatisfaction with the regime.

## Political elite

“Political Elite” refers to a select group of individuals who hold significant power and influence in a society, often including high-level bureaucratic officials, members of the judiciary, and key political figures. Their authority is derived from laws; however, these are discriminatory, and they play a crucial

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<sup>3</sup> “Authoritarianism.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., <https://www.britannica.com/topic/authoritarianism>

<sup>4</sup> “Censorship.” *Cambridge Dictionary*, Cambridge University Press, [CENSORSHIP | Bedeutung im Cambridge Englisch Wörterbuch](#)

role in shaping political decisions and policies.”<sup>5</sup> The political elite in charge of the restrictive regime, who are deciding what artists are allowed to express in their art and what they are not.

## Propaganda

“Propaganda can be defined as the spreading of ideas, information, or rumors for the purpose of helping or injuring an institution, a cause, or a person, and the ideas, facts, or allegations spread deliberately to further one's cause or to damage an opposing cause.”<sup>6</sup> Propaganda is heavily connected to this issue, as it is the means used by restrictive regimes to hinder the free expression of artists.

## Self-censorship

Self-censorship is a precaution taken by artists in regions governed by restrictive regimes to protect themselves from government suppression. There is a sense of self-preservation where one “controls what they say or do to avoid annoying or offending others, but without being told officially that such control is necessary.”<sup>7</sup>

## Background Information

### Historical background

#### The Nazi regime on cultural diversity and artistic freedom

Historically, restrictive regimes such as Nazi Germany and the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia have restricted art and artistic freedom in general. For example, on May 10, 1933, in the Opera Square in Berlin, the students burned more than 20.000 books that did not align with the Nazi ideologies<sup>8</sup>. The books that were burned were books that belonged to public libraries and school or university libraries. This was one action taken to achieve the Gleichschaltung. Gleichschaltung is the term used by historians to describe the Nazification of German society, when the Nazi Party took over power in 1933. When Hitler became the Führer of Germany, he,

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<sup>5</sup> “Political Elite.” *ScienceDirect*, Elsevier, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/computer-science/political-elite>

<sup>6</sup> “Propaganda.” *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, Inc., <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/propaganda>

<sup>7</sup> “Self-censorship.” *Cambridge Dictionary*, Cambridge University Press, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/self-censorship>.

<sup>8</sup> “Book Burning.” *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/book-burning>

along with the Nazi party, tried through laws and spread propaganda to align political, social and cultural institutions with the Nazi beliefs and political agenda<sup>9</sup>. Among the books that were burned were the book of Helen Keller, a blind and deaf American who fought for the equality of disabled people, and even Erich Kästner, a popular German children's book author. However, the book burning pyres did not only happen in Berlin, but also in other 20 university towns across Germany, with the support of the Nazi Party.

### **Impact of the Nazis on the arts and German societies**

Art was important in spreading Nazi propaganda. To begin with, the Nazi opposed new movements like Dadaism, Cubism, Expressionism, and Abstraction. They portrayed those new art movements as “non-German” and as one of the main reasons for the decline that German society was facing. Members of this party seized paintings that belonged to such movements and displayed them in a deliberately derogatory manner. The most famous of those exhibitions was one held in Munich in 1937. Later, those paintings were either destroyed, sold to finance the war, hidden, or lost.

### **The Khmer Rouge on cultural diversity and artistic freedom**

Another authoritarian regime was the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. The Khmer Rouge is a radical communist movement that ruled Cambodia from 1975 to 1979 after winning power through a guerrilla war. It was purportedly set up in 1967 as the armed wing of the Communist Party of Kampuchea. The Khmer Rouge government under Pol Pot was responsible for the Cambodian genocide (1976-78), during which up to three million people were murdered<sup>10</sup>. Policies abolished money, private property, religion, and urban life, enforcing forced labor, thought control, and purges of perceived enemies, including intellectuals and minorities like the Cham Muslims. Notably, up to 90% of Cambodia's artists were killed or disappeared during this regime<sup>11</sup>. All artists who managed to survive were made to hold performances that limited their artistic freedom. Finally, the National University of Fine Arts closed, not allowing professional

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<sup>9</sup> “Gleichschaltung: Coordinating the Nazi State.” *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/gleichschaltung-coordinating-the-nazi-state>.

<sup>10</sup> “Khmer Rouge.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Khmer-Rouge>

<sup>11</sup> “Cambodia Sees Revival of Traditional Arts, Culture.” *VOA News*, Voice of America, 2018, <https://www.voanews.com/a/cambodia-revival-traditional-arts-culture/4343623.html>.

training to artists anymore<sup>12</sup>. Additionally, they also targeted the traits that characterize other communities, such as religion, and more specifically Buddhism and Christianity, language spoken, dress code, and occupation, while also persecuting ethnic minorities, such as Vietnamese, Cham Muslims, and Chinese populations.

### **Impact of the Khmer Rouge regime on arts and Cambodian societies**

The Khmer Rouge regime had a significant impact on Cambodia, but especially on the spectrum of the arts. Before the regime came to power, Cambodian songs were about the cruelty they endured during the civil war, the bombing of their land by the United States of America, scenes of their daily lives, and praising women's beauty. After the Khmer Rouge came into power, the songs became aligned with the goals of the regime; pre-Khmer Rouge songs were banned, and generally, songs became a medium through which this regime was spreading its philosophy. Also, it is important to note that due to the actions taken, indigenous music styles were weakened, and they lost a great part of their musical wealth, given that most singers and their songs were lost during the reign of the Khmer Rouge. Art performances were also targeted. During the Khmer Rouge reign, art performances were performed across the country, and the themes were about the Khmer Rouge party and its goals. That was implemented to ensure that citizens were internalizing the philosophy; hence, art performances were a means to spread propaganda, but also to test their loyalty to the party.

### **Parallelisms between the Khmer Rouge and Nazi with modern-day regimes**

The aforementioned conditions are apparent in many of today's authoritarian regimes, just like in the case of the DPRK and Iran. The regimes in those countries strongly echo Nazi and Khmer Rouge tactics, as they employ culture to control and to suppress diversity through bans, surveillance, and erasure. Specifically, in the DPRK, the only type of artistic expression that is allowed is the one that depicts the Kim Family as heroes. No foreign galleries are allowed to exist there, providing a monopoly in the world of the arts, thus limiting artistic perspective and freedom. Since 1979, in Iran, all art produced needs to be examined and approved by the Ministry of Culture. In 2022, over 100 artists were jailed after Mahsa Amini's death, with recent

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<sup>12</sup> "Cambodia Sees Revival of Traditional Arts, Culture." *VOA News*, Voice of America, 2018, <https://www.voanews.com/a/cambodia-revival-traditional-arts-culture/4343623.html>.

2026 internet blackouts silencing digital dissent. Underground scenes persist but face raids, mirroring Nazi "degenerate art".

## Rising censorship today

### Censorship in today's societies

Over the past year, the phenomenon of censorship has risen significantly in many regions of the world. Censorship is being implemented through the usage of internet shutdowns, content removal demands, AI tools, and laws that target freedom of expression under the pretexts of national security or even protection of minorities. Other forms of censorship include social media blocks, book bans, and press restrictions. In 2024 alone, there were 296 internet shutdowns across 54 countries. Russia has blocked Facebook and X amid Ukraine controls, while 25 countries limit social media access. Social media platforms also have faced thousands of takedown requests, according to surveys. X complied with 71% of them, while Google has handled nearly 330,000 since 2020<sup>13</sup>. As far as book bans are concerned, numerous countries have created "no-read" lists for schools.

### Effects of rising censorship in today's world

This trend of rising censorship is also affecting artists themselves, especially in authoritarian regimes, where they often face imprisonment, death sentences, and violence as a means to try to suppress their freedom of expression. In Iran, at least 19 artists have faced such measures. One of them was poet Fariborz Sadehi, who was sentenced to 22 months for critical poetry<sup>14</sup>. Artists are also frequent victims of violence. Globally, 93 artists have been killed or detained in incidents linked to war, political protest, or satire. Many are targeted in conflict zones such as Gaza and Ukraine, while others face criminal violence in regions like Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa, where organized crime poses significant risks. Funding restrictions and regulations on foreign affiliations have led some artists to limit their public expression on political or social issues, particularly among marginalized groups. These precede arrests, as in Thailand and Jordan, where satire led to trials, mirroring historical authoritarian tactics.

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<sup>13</sup> Alexey Strelnikov. "YouTube, WhatsApp Blocked in Russia." Dw.com, Deutsche Welle, 12 Feb. 2026, [www.dw.com/en/youtube-whatsapp-blocked-in-russia/a-75940102](https://www.dw.com/en/youtube-whatsapp-blocked-in-russia/a-75940102)

<sup>14</sup>"Systemic Repression of Artists and Writers in Iran under the Clerical Regime." *Iran Human Rights Monitor*, 30 May 2025, <https://iran-hrm.com/2025/05/30/systemic-repression-of-artists-and-writers-in-iran-under-the-clerical-regime/>.

## Censorship, Surveillance, and Minority Erasure

Authoritarian regimes are using the tools of propaganda, narrative control, surveillance, coercion tactics, and erasure of minority history as a means to control artistic freedom and to eradicate all minorities that are to be found in a country. Many authoritarian governments, such as Hungary under Orbán, are using media and laws to control and filter art as a means of achieving national security. Surveillance and police raids are deployed, as done in Turkey's Kurdish communities or Iran's targeting, enforcing self-censorship, and neutralizing threats via predictive policing. State actors were responsible for 72% of the 18 global censorship cases in November 2025, with arrests and detentions accounting for 39%, often under the pretext of counterterrorism<sup>15</sup>. Such governments are also trying to eradicate specific minorities from their respective countries or even from the whole world, as Hitler tried to do with Jews, Roma, and many more, such as the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, that exterminated 80% of Cham Muslims to declare "the Cham nation no longer exists"<sup>16</sup>.

## Major Countries and Organizations Involved

### Hungary

In Hungary, the government has placed pressure on academic and artistic freedom, as it tightened its control over universities and cultural institutions. The measures taken include restructuring the boards of universities to align politically with the government's points of view, closing or pushing out important institutions such as the Central European University and restricting fields that do not align with the government's opinions. These interventions show how state control over higher education can be used to align culture and scholarship with an illiberal national narrative<sup>17</sup>. So far, the Hungarian government has neither implemented nor proposed any measures that could potentially alter the current conditions in the country.

### India

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<sup>15</sup> "Social Media Censorship." *Views4You*, 2023, <https://views4you.com/blog/social-media-censorship/>.

<sup>16</sup> Coz, Clothilde Le. "The Question of Genocide and Cambodia's Muslims." *Www.aljazeera.com*, 19 Nov. 2015, [www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/11/19/the-question-of-genocide-and-cambodias-muslims](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/11/19/the-question-of-genocide-and-cambodias-muslims).

<sup>17</sup> "Pride, Hungary: Orbán's Culture War Escalates Ahead of 2026 Election." *Review of Democracy (RevDem)*, Central European University, 3 June 2025, <https://revdem.ceu.edu/2025/06/03/pride-hungary-orbans-culture-war-escalates-ahead-of-2026-election/>.

In India, academic and research freedom has come under pressure through politically motivated grant cancellations, programs, closures and funding cuts. The reason for those cuts is ideological grounds, the elimination of programs that have to do with gender and diversity, and generally stricter and tighter control on what topics are discussed and studied. Those controls are enforced especially on topics such as human rights and minority issues, thus highlighting the lack of artistic freedom and cultural diversity<sup>18</sup>. Private actors and regional movements have attempted to establish artistic freedom and allow the flourishing of artistic development, but the lack of cooperation between these actors and the national government has led to limited success.

### **International Council of Museums (ICOM)**

It is the International Council of Museums, which promotes the use of museums to safeguard tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Taking inspiration from UNESCO's 2003 Convention on intangible culture, it emphasized that traditions, performing arts, and even community practices are of vital importance to cultural diversity and must be protected, especially in fragile political environments. It provides UNESCO with advice and supports museum policies that respect artistic freedom and protect cultural diversity, by defending vulnerable heritage from erasure.<sup>19</sup>

### **National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC)**

The National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC), based in the United States, is an organization that protects the freedom of expression through multiple media, including all forms of art. It supports artists, curators, students, teachers, and librarians who face the lack of freedom of expression. It offers legal and advocacy resources while also documenting censorship incidents to reveal broader patterns of suppression. Through many programs focused on art and youth, it tries to stress that controversial and/or minority viewpoints remain part of public cultural life<sup>20</sup>.

### **The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)**

The special rapporteur on cultural rights examines how states respect or violate cultural rights, including the right to artistic expression and freedom of expression, as well as the right to practice one's

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<sup>18</sup> Pradhan, Saloni. "Why India's Academic Freedom Is at Stake." The Loop, 23 Oct. 2024, [www.theloop.ecpr.eu/indias-academic-freedom-is-at-stake/](http://www.theloop.ecpr.eu/indias-academic-freedom-is-at-stake/)

<sup>19</sup> "Missions and Objectives." *International Council of Museums (ICOM)*, <https://icom.museum/en/about-us/missions-and-objectives/>.

<sup>20</sup> "About Us." *National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC)*, <https://ncac.org/about-us>.

culture safely, within the UN human rights system. It examines how states respect or violate cultural rights, such as the right to artistic expression and creation. It also monitors laws, policies, and practices that are marginalizing certain communities and minorities, reporting them to the Human Rights Council along with measures on how to protect cultural diversity and art. All in all, this system highlights how censorship, economic pressure, and discrimination can all curtail cultural participation and creativity<sup>21</sup>.

## **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)**

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization has had a primary role in establishing artistic freedom in all member nations around the world. UNESCO's 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions sets a global framework for safeguarding cultural diversity and supporting artistic freedom. It defines artistic freedom as the right to create, produce, and distribute cultural expressions free from censorship and intimidation, and stresses that cultural diversity can only thrive where human rights and fundamental freedoms are guaranteed. States parties commit to creating enabling environments for artists and cultural professionals, ensuring access to diverse cultural expressions, and supporting international cooperation to strengthen plural cultural ecosystems.<sup>22</sup>

## **Blocs Expected**

### **Alliance 1: Countries that support freedom of expression**

This alliance is composed of countries that support freedom of expression via sanctions and funding. The countries that endorse the freedom of artistic expression are against censorship. They are also the countries that provide a safe space to artists who are persecuted and not allowed to exercise their right to artistic freedom.

### **Alliance 2: Countries that limit freedom of expression**

Countries that promote national culture and oppose foreign influence by limiting artistic expression. Members of this alliance are also countries governed by regimes which prevent artists in one or another from expressing their opinion through the arts.

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<sup>21</sup>“About the Mandate.” *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)*, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-cultural-rights/about-mandate>.

<sup>22</sup>“Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.” *UNESCO*, <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/convention-protection-and-promotion-diversity-cultural-expressions>.

## Timeline of Events

Date	Description of Event
May 10 <sup>th</sup> , 1933	Nazi Germany: book burnings and cultural control <sup>23</sup>
December 10 <sup>th</sup> , 1948	The universal declaration of human rights (UDHR) <sup>24</sup>
1966-1976	Government control of culture in China <sup>25</sup>
December 16 <sup>th</sup> , 1966	The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights established a non-binding treaty to protect artistic freedom and cultural diversity. <sup>26</sup>
1975-1979	Khmer Rouge in Cambodia: erasure of art and identity <sup>27</sup>
1979-present	Cultural and artistic restrictions in Iran <sup>28</sup>
2003	UNESCO Convention on the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage <sup>29</sup>
2005	UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions <sup>30</sup>

<sup>23</sup> "Book Burning." *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/book-burning>.

<sup>24</sup>"Universal Declaration of Human Rights." *United Nations*, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>.

<sup>25</sup>"How the Cultural Revolution Destroyed Chinese Traditional Culture." *China Human Rights Network (CHN)*, <https://chn.info/history/history-events/how-the-cultural-revolution-destroyed-chinese-traditional-culture>.

<sup>26</sup>"International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights." *United Nations Treaty Collection*, [https://treaties.un.org/PAGES/ViewDetails.aspx?chapter=4&clang=en&mtmsg\\_no=IV-4&src=TREATY](https://treaties.un.org/PAGES/ViewDetails.aspx?chapter=4&clang=en&mtmsg_no=IV-4&src=TREATY).

<sup>27</sup>"The Khmer Rouge Regime: A Cultural Revolution." *Nickled & Dimed*, 26 June 2023, <https://nickledanddimed.com/2023/06/26/the-khmer-rouge-regime-a-cultural-revolution/>.

<sup>28</sup>"Iran's Artist Uprising: From Visible Icons to Strategic Silence." *Mimeta – The Culture Brokers*, 8 Jan. 2026, <https://www.mimeta.org/mimeta-news-on-censorship-in-art/2026/1/8/irans-artist-uprising-from-visible-icons-to-strategic-silence>.

<sup>29</sup>"Basic Texts of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage." *UNESCO*, <https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/15164-EN.pdf>.

<sup>30</sup>"Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions." *UNESCO*, <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/convention-protection-and-promotion-diversity-cultural-expressions>.

2010	Rising Authoritarianism and Modern Censorship, e.g., Hungary under Orbán, Russia, China, and Iran <sup>31</sup>
2014-present	International Advocacy and Monitoring through UNESCO and OHCHR programmes <sup>32</sup>
2015-present	Contemporary Initiatives and Reforms, such as EU resolutions, NCAC, and examples of countries like Brazil. <sup>33</sup>
November 30 <sup>th</sup> , 2023	Renewed state pressure on artists in Russia <sup>34</sup>

## Relevant UN Resolutions, Treaties & Events

### 2005 UNESCO Convention<sup>35</sup>

It is a binding cultural treaty that aims at the protection and promotion of culture, such as art, media, and all creative industries. It shows the direct correlation between human rights and cultural diversity, as it stresses that no measure may be used to justify human rights violations. The goal of this convention was to ensure that policies are adopted that promote the upkeep of cultures and their characteristics, while also protecting them from becoming a commercial commodity. However, the implementation is uneven, as numerous countries have not integrated this convention. It is also relying on the political will of each state; thus, in many countries, especially those with authoritarian regimes, weak enforcement is reported, not to mention that there is no sure enforcement of strict enough sanctions against states that violate or do not enforce this convention. Finally, it does not

<sup>31</sup> "Pride, Hungary: Orbán's Culture War Escalates Ahead of 2026 Election." *Review of Democracy (RevDem)*, Central European University, 3 June 2025, <https://revdem.ceu.edu/2025/06/03/pride-hungary-orbans-culture-war-escalates-ahead-of-2026-election/>.

<sup>32</sup> "Monitoring Framework." *UNESCO*, <https://www.unesco.org/creativity/en/policy-and-monitoring/monitoring-framework>.

<sup>33</sup> "European Cultural Sector Releases a Joint Call for Artistic Freedom and Autonomy of the Arts." *Pearle – Live Performance Europe*, <https://www.pearle.eu/news/european-cultural-sector-releases-a-joint-call-for-artistic-freedom-and-autonomy-of-the-arts>.

<sup>34</sup> "Russia's Escalating Assault on Artistic Freedom across All Disciplines, 2022–2026." *Mimeta – The Culture Brokers*, 8 Jan. 2026, [Russia's New Censorship Machine: How the Kremlin Is Crippling Art, Books, Music and Theatre — Mimeta](#)

<sup>35</sup> "Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions." *UNESCO*, <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/convention-protection-and-promotion-diversity-cultural-expressions>.

address digital platforms, surveillance, and transnational corporate power, which are now of utmost importance.

### **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)**

It is an international treaty that protects civil and political rights, such as freedom of expression and non-discrimination. Its goal was to make sure that everyone was able to form their own opinions and to be able to exchange ideas transnationally. It also helped provide a universal legal framework and a means to monitor it, along with ensuring that states are held accountable. However, it falls short in three aspects. To begin with, the level of enforcement is dependent on each state; this means that they could freely ignore the treaty and even fail to implement the recommendations given to them. Lastly, it has not prevented widespread misuse of security arguments to censor dissenting or minority art. As seen in many restrictive regimes, the ICCPR's protections remain largely symbolic because courts and institutions are not independent.

### **Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>36</sup>**

It is a non-binding declaration adopted in 1948 that states the human rights that every person should have. It includes freedom, opinion, and expression, the right to enjoy the arts, and to participate in cultural life. It wanted to establish a common moral and normative framework, to affirm that all people share equal and inalienable rights. It also wanted to be the cornerstone of binding treaties and national constitutions to protect freedom of expression, cultural participation, and non-discrimination. However, the fact that it is not a treaty and not binding, means it falls under each nation's discretion to implement. The reason why it failed was the fact that it was not binding; on its own, it could not stop states from adopting repressive laws and practices.

### **UN Human Rights Council resolution on artistic expression<sup>37</sup>**

The Human Rights Council (HRC) has adopted resolutions and taken up reports to show that artistic expression is protected by freedom of expression and cultural rights. These texts recognize that artists face censorship, threats, and violence worldwide. Its goal was to showcase that artistic creativity is protected by international law, and that art, no matter how controversial, must be met with freedom

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<sup>36</sup>“Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” *United Nations*, n.d., <<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>>.

<sup>37</sup>“Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression: Addendum.” *United Nations Documents*, n.d., <<https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/44/49/ADD.2>>.

of expression and respect. It also wanted to urge states to review their laws and make them comply with the right to freedom of cultural and artistic expression. However, they are not legally binding and cannot enforce anything. They are important, but it is up to each state whether it will implement those laws suggested by the Human Rights Council, thus limiting its power.

## Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

### **Funding independent institutions and boycotts of exhibitions by Western foundations.**

One of the solutions that has been implemented in the past is the funding of independent cultural institutions. Those include non-governmental organizations, alternative art spaces, exile platforms, and residencies. The organizations are providing safer spaces and material support for artists who are facing oppression, especially those who are either in exile or in semi-democratic countries. These initiatives preserve artistic freedom and also create an international visibility; they more often than not remain small-scale, which means that they do not reach a large audience and thus more often than not leave many artists in authoritarian states without access.<sup>38</sup> Another action that has been used a lot is boycotts of exhibitions or state-sponsored cultural events. This is especially done by Western foundations, which often raise awareness about it and even delegitimize “art-washing”; however, it can also isolate local artists even more and cut off one of the few remaining channels for income and engagement in the world of the arts.

### **UNESCO and OHCHR campaigns to monitor censorship**

Another past attempt to resolve this issue is the actions taken by UNESCO and the OHCHR monitoring campaigns. The 2005 convention of UNESCO and the artists' freedom reports on OHCHR have shown us important patterns regarding censorship, while also urging states to protect artists. At the same time, they have clarified that artistic freedom is a human right. Through those campaigns, artistic freedom has been brought into the international agenda. However, it is much dependent on state cooperation and has limited leverage over regimes that reject the right of artistic freedom, thus limiting its power in specific areas.

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<sup>38</sup> Private Foundations.” *Kunsten.be*, n.d.to, <<https://www.kunsten.be/en/now-in-the-arts/private-foundations/>>.

## **Compensatory policies in Brazil for affected artists, though global implementation remains limited**

Brazil has experimented throughout the years with numerous compensatory or affirmative cultural policies. Those include targeted funding, quotas, or even support programs for artists from marginalized communities, such as Afro-Brazilian, Indigenous, favela-based, and LGBTQ+, aiming to stop structural exclusion and to make sure that diverse cultural and artistic expressions are visible and sustainable. Those steps have helped minorities become mainstream institutions, support filtration centers that are based on a specific community, and challenge long-standing racial and social hierarchies in cultural policy. However, these actions, despite their promising outcome, become victims of the political swings in Brazil. More specifically, conservative governments are limiting the funds, leading to limited success and development on the issue.

### **Legal Safe-Haven and City-of-Refuge Programs**

ICORN, the International Cities of Refuge Network, and similar organizations provide oppressed artists with a place to live. They give the artist a 1-2 year residency, housing, and stipends, so that they can continue their work in complete freedom. Those places are called “safe cities” and are usually found in Europe and North America. UNESCO’s work on artistic freedom sees these relocation mechanisms as a concrete policy response, with dozens of cities, especially in Scandinavia and wider Europe, formally committing to host at-risk artists and defend their right to create. However, the fact that those safe havens are not located in more places in the work, make those ineffective, as they cannot be reached by all artists.

### **Regional Human-Rights and EU Cultural-Freedom Frameworks**

Another past solution was the implementation of regional human-rights and even EU cultural-freedom frameworks. The Council of Europe used the European Convention on Human Rights and soft-law tools, such as “free to create” report recommendations and structured dialogue, to motivate member states to protect artistic freedom, preserve cultural diversity, and sanction or pressure governments that politically interfere in the world of the arts. Within the EU, there are also numerous cultural networks, such as Culture Action Europe, that have launched campaigns in the EU in its entirety, while also holding petitions to have a binding legal framework to protect their freedom of expression in the arts and also preserve cultural diversity. However, the fact that they are only

implemented in Europe, and not in the whole world, makes them ineffective, as what is needed is a legally binding international treaty that safeguards artistic freedom and cultural diversity in restrictive regimes.

## **Possible Solutions**

### **International Law and Monitoring**

The UNESCO 2005 Convention could be used to pressure states to take action and to safeguard artistic freedom and cultural diversity. The pressure will be implemented by having periodic reports, naming censorship, and funding cuts if no compliance is made. Another solution could be to strengthen the OHCHR Special Rapporteur on cultural rights by providing it with evidence on repression and pushing for country visits, urgent appeals, and resolutions that strengthen the safeguarding of human rights.

### **Expansion of the current refuge and residency programs**

Another solution would be to expand and improve the already existing refuge and residency programs. Those centers will provide a space for artists who are threatened. This domain could allow such artists to relocate, receive an income, and continue their work in safety, thus maintaining visibility even in exile. Another step would be to create rapid-response funds and emergency visas for artists at risk and cultural workers, by implementing improvements and amendments related to the general issue. First of all, there should be cultural policies in legislation, in order to ensure that funding cannot be so easily dismantled. Governments should also couple financial support with protective measures, such as protection from harassment, legal support for censored artists, and transparency obligations for funding decisions. Finally, there ought to be an exchange of practices among member nations, in order to allow for overall development to be achieved.

### **Investing on the development of digital and technical tools**

Digital and technical tools are also an important aspect of the issue. The use of such tools could lead to the creation of secure decentralized platforms that include encrypted messaging, privacy-focused social media, and blockchain and NFT tools. Through this safe and regulated domain, artists can sell and publish their works by passing through the ministry of their country's regime. It can also be ensured that artists have an outlet in which they can express themselves artistically, no matter the regime, and also a place in which we can ensure diversity, especially cultural diversity. Online archives

can also be developed, in order to mirror and back up censored works abroad, ensuring that banned films, music, and visual art remain accessible and traceable for the future.

### **International cooperation for education and digital documentation**

International cooperation for education and digital documentation is of paramount importance. UNESCO or UN-led curricula on cultural rights, diversity, and media literacy could be a potentially useful tool. International programs can also be taken into advantage to digitally document and archive endangered cultures, languages, and artworks, preferably outside of their respective repressive states. Thus, a mindset change can be achieved in the long term, as more people would now understand the importance of artistic freedom and cultural diversity, not to mention that more people will be helping to preserve cultures against erasure, meaning that there always will be an archive of works and practices of each culture, even if it becomes banned from a restrictive government, as they will be preserved for the future generations or even a later restitution or revival.

### **Promoting cultures and artistic freedom**

Government bodies need to promote diverse cultural expressions to stop the cultural erosion taking place and to counteract all authoritarian governments and their actions against cultural diversity and artistic freedom. Firstly, international advocacy, such as UNESCO frameworks, provides tools for states to safeguard their artistic freedom against censorship while also protecting cultural diversity.<sup>39</sup> Uncensored platforms can also help to prevent censorship, as people will still have a way to access neutral points of view about what is happening around the world, keeping in mind that the history and the tradition of cultural minorities will be preserved, to ensure that no culture goes extinct. Lastly, artist residencies ought to be established to offer refuge for artists who come from countries with totalitarian regimes. Those artists will also be able to join resistance groups in their countries with the help of mentors, to ensure that cultures and artistic freedom are upheld and protected.

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