



Issue 5: August 2013

## FAIFE Newsletter



*The newsletter of the International  
Federation of Library Associations'  
Committee on Freedom of Access to  
Information and Freedom of Expression*

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## *Message from the Chair*

### JOIN FAIFE TO SHARE, TO DEBATE, AND TO INSPIRE!

FAIFE is multitude of things. It is an arena for IFLA visitors to check the latest trends of freedom and expression. It is a global network of library activists who think these issues are too important to be left for others.

FAIFE has the most important tool to share: the passion and knowledge of its members around the globe.

Foremost FAIFE is a service unit for IFLA. Everything it does it does for IFLA members to keep them informed and aware.

Last year FAIFE informed you of the internet censorship control and data surveillance and published a highly esteemed report entitled **Sleepwalking toward a control society? Ten Must-Know Trends** by Kai Ekholm and Paivikki Karhula. [<http://www.ifla.org/publications/sleepwalking-toward-a-control-society-ten-must-know-trends>]

At our session in Helsinki we presented the role of US data surveillance center in the Salt Lake City and named our first trend as "Free internet is dead" - global conditions of control has been established. Reading the global media today simply shows we were right and the global media slow and slightly ignorant...

What has this all to do with the libraries? FAIFE and libraries have a clear mission: the digital environment is radically changing the way of access to information. The infamous GAFAs enterprises, Google, Apple, Facebook, and Amazon define the digital rules we are suggested to follow. The media publishers are creating a stronghold around e-lending that leaves public libraries without any role in digital environment. Copyright legislation seems not to serve the majority of library users, not even the copyright holders. FAIFE and libraries have a clear mission: to defend the digital citizenship in all forms and to open all possible ways to access to information.

FAIFE welcomes you all to its vital new session in Singapore entitled: ON THE WAY TO FREEDOM OF ACCESS - Join the debate!

As an outgoing chair of FAIFE I would like to thank you all for wonderful period and welcome the new chair, national librarian Martyn Wade to take the lead. FAIFE is in good hands.

Kai Ekholm, Chair of FAIFE



## *Join the FAIFE session at WLIC 2013*

I'm very proud to invite you to FAIFE session in Singapore in 21.8.2013. It is entitled **ON THE WAY TO FREEDOM OF ACCESS** - Join the debate!

As usual, we give you the latest global drama, we make an update of the trends and give you deep thoughts of how this all relates to our lives, libraries, and practice. We also introduce you several approaches on how to respond to tightening control of internet. These include legislative initiatives, policies and statements as well as campaigns and networking to support freedom of information and privacy.

As chair I will open the session with sharpening the FAIFE mission.

We have a prominent keynote speaker Chris Chia with the title of Media control today.

Päivikki Karhula will revisit the ten trends we introduced last year in a light of recent developments. Especially NSA leak and Snowden's case have confirmed that many of our earlier concerning remarks of increasing level of control on internet are valid - infrastructure of control is not only an option but it is also evident that this option is largely utilized. Barbara Jones is giving an important update of ALA taking stand on the USA controversy and media control.

And finally we inspire you introducing IFEX, the most important portal of freedom of expression, we are promised to have a video update of IMMI legislation of Iceland and Herman Roesch informs us of the popular IFLA Code of Ethics: Further steps. Stuart Hamilton from IFLA presents the IFLA Internet Government Statement & advocacy work.

Many have asked why we are having IFLA in Singapore that strongly controls the media and sexual minorities. We have a panel that discusses important theme entitled ACCESS IN ASIA. Local representatives will discuss us of these issues.

We are there to learn and debate. Join us!

**Kai Ekholm, Chair of FAIFE**

# *Asia – raising influence and versatility of cultures of control*

*By Päivikki Karhula*

FAIFE's session in IFLA Conference Singapore will include a review of the freedom of information in Asia. Asian countries have in this respect a versatility of strategies with increasing impact on the future of internet.

During internet age Asian countries have extended their influence and power on internet globally. Over 40% of internet users come from Asia and their number is still expected to grow significantly. Asian influence is also reflected in models of internet control. For example, China was involved, together with Russia's to propose DPI-based control of network in ITU-conference last year. While the proposal did not pass through, it indicates the political will to increase control of internet which is supported by several powerful states.

South East Asian region is characterized by wide cultural heterogeneity. Same concerns freedom of information and control practices: there is a wide variety of political, cultural and religious contexts and a range of control practices from encouraged self-censorship to national level filtering mechanisms. However, state control over communication is a more common tradition in Asian region than in other parts of the world. Another issue is how the limits of crimes are defined. There are examples of legislation in Asian countries which narrows down freedom of speech in terms of cybercrime and "offensive speech". In addition, a vague interpretation of the laws and unpredictability of the presence of surveillance practices and level of punishments will cause tension and have a chilling effect in a society. Although these developments also take place in

other parts of the world, their impact in this area is worth to be noticed.

Altogether, restrictions to freedom of information in Asia recall to the deeper cultural and political understanding. All restrictions do not necessarily represent the repressive culture of administration. For example, it may go against western expectations that some cultural restrictions in Asian countries have even a broad public acceptance.

## **Literature**

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*Freedom of expression and access to information in Syria during the civil war*

**Freedom of expression and access to information in Syria today**

**By Inaam Charaf**

*“All human beings by nature desire to know.”*

*Aristotle*

## Introduction

If we assume that people have a right to access information, this means that they should have access to institutions or techniques which provide access to that information. The right of access to information was established at the international level in 1946, when the UN General Assembly adopted, at its first session, resolution number 59 which states: “Freedom of access to information is a fundamental human right and the keystone of all freedoms declared by the United Nations”<sup>1</sup>. Information rights include the right to freedom of expression, access to information and the right to read.

For decades the Syrians were deprived of these rights and the access to information was very limited. Today, we are living a very delicate situation. A peaceful popular revolution transformed into a conflict between the regime forces and armed opposition. Since the 18 March 2011, everything has changed. Syrians began breaking the barrier of fear and started calling for their right to freedom of expression, one of the most important rights for which they revolted. Freedom of expression requires flexible access to a wealth of information. They have found their own ways to obtain this access and subsequently express their thoughts through alternative means such as social networks like Twitter and Skype as well as other technological means.

Keeping this pretext in mind, we will try to shed light on these issues in the most important kinds of institutions: traditional and new Syrian media and libraries.

### 1. Syrian Media before March 18<sup>th</sup> 2011

Since the Baath party first seized authority in the early sixties (1962), it realized the importance of the media and its potential to become a serious threat to its existence as a totalitarian ruling party. In the second statement it issued, the Baath party gave itself full power to seize all types of media, publishing and printing, public and private. According to this statement, the party also closed all newspapers and

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<sup>1</sup>United Nations. 1948. Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/history.shtml>

magazines issued before the 8 March 1963, including partisan newspapers, and kept only the official and party representative newspapers<sup>2</sup>.

When Hafez Alassad seized power in 1970, printed media was condensed and represented in only three national newspapers (Baath, Teshreen and Althawra), severely limiting public opinion. These newspapers were structured in an institutional form. One of them (Baath) is under the authority of the national leadership and the two others follow the government directly; however, all of them were and still are dominated by the security control.

### **1.1. Law of Publications**

After March 1962, printed press became frozen and the number of institutions controlled by the Baath party and executive authority increased. All these institutions followed the Only Media Directed (OMD) policy. Under the OMD policy, everything is under the control of the General Corporation for the Distribution of Publications. The GCDP prevents thousands of publications from circulating and rips thousands of magazine pages before distribution. Such was the case with AlNakked, AlDomarry and AlNahej magazines, to name a few.

According to the Law of Publications, every publication should be controlled directly by the Minister of Information and any breach of the authority principals could cause the cancelation of this publication, as has happened many times with multiple publications. Television and radio stations were not included in this Law of Publications, and are still exclusively under the total control of the government.

### **1.2. Law of Journalists' Union**

According to Article 3 of the law, which was issued in 1990, the Union of Journalists believes in nation goals and is committed to achieving these goals in accordance with the decisions of the Baath Party and its directions. Article 54 states that the union has the right to penalize any member who breaches the goals of the union, and no one in Syria can be a journalist without being a part of this union.

## **2. Alternative Syrian media: Renaissance of Freedom of Expression**

From the first day of the popular revolution in Syria, the government occupied the space of the media and tried to distort the facts, while at the same time depriving people of delivering their voice to the world. International media was also forbidden to enter Syria and document what was happening in the country. Syrian activists recognized from the beginning the importance of the media. They learned from past experience and started to create for themselves an independent new media to be the alternative of the Syrian official media<sup>3</sup>.

The alternative media created by Syrian activists expresses the popular vision, thoughts, and dreams of freedom and dignity in total liberty. In two years, 80 publications appeared in the form of magazines, newspapers and periodic bulletins. Some of these publications were stopped for financial reasons and others because of the situation on the ground and the obstacles of working within the escalating violence and lack of resources.

Most of these publications are still regional, with each one expressing and covering the local region where it was issued and distributed; however, some of them were able to be more widespread in their coverage, releasing articles to cover news throughout Syria and expressing the views of the majority of Syrians in several areas such as EnabBaladi, AlmassarAlhor, Dawdaa, and others.

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<sup>2</sup>Alsafady, Motaa. 1964. Baath Party: The tragedy of birth and the tragedy of the end. Beirut, Dar Alaadab.

<sup>3</sup> Figure number 1, p. 3.

Briefly, during the last two years, Syria has been seeing a remarkable development in print and audio-visual media. Several television and radio stations, magazines and newspapers have appeared and are still trying to deliver a clear picture of what is happening in the country without any restrictions, borders or pressure of any kind.



Figuer1. Example of new printed and electronic media during the civil war in Syria (issues of May 2013)

### 3. Access to information in Syria before and after 18 March 2011

Indeed, according to the human rights organization *Article 19* and the list of recommendations at the end of its report entitled, “Global Trends on the Right to Information”, governments, civil society, and businesses are essentially expected to ensure the access to information in any country as summed up in the following brief points<sup>4</sup>:

- Governments ought to “develop and support appropriate systems for the dissemination of information to all members of society, taking into account culture, education, wealth and other differences.”
- Civil Society ought to “develop and apply innovative and effective methods of producing, accessing, disseminating and using information.”
- Businesses ought to “contribute actively, including through technical and economic support, to establishing better systems for information generation, storage and dissemination.”

As we discussed above, access to information in Syria was very limited. When applying the above points to the case of Syria, it becomes evident that none of them are visible. The Syrian government develops and supports systems that fit or are in line with its political orientation and objectives, especially at the domestic, political level, without taking into consideration differences in cultural beliefs and education.

Civil society is a strange concept in Syria; civil associations are not allowed, with the exception of those founded by the government or following a political decision. All of these associations, including the Syrian Libraries Association, are controlled and unable to make independent decisions. The fact that none of the professional librarians were involved or part of this association further illustrates this.

All businesses in Syria focused on commercial aspects and financial investments. Access to information was not a priority for these kinds of projects, especially in such a controlled environment.

#### 3.1. General Syrian Corporation for the Distribution of Publications

Founded in 1975, the GSCDP’s mission is to carry out prior censorship on all publications distributed in Syria such as newspapers, magazines and books. According to the law of its foundation, it is the only institution authorized to distribute publications in Syria and the Board of Directors should be composed of officials from the Ministry of Information, the army and the Baath Party. The GSCDP, according to this law, has the right to control and refuse the distribution of any publication. It has the right also to determine the amount of distributed publications without referring to the publisher or distributor. So within its authorities, and as we mentioned above, for a long time the GSCDP banned thousands of books from entering Syria, and tore pages of thousands of publications before distribution<sup>5</sup>.

#### 3.2. Access to information today

During the last two years, the only way for Syrians to get information has been through the Internet—particularly social networks. They have been able to develop a very wide communication network, thousands of Facebook pages and thousands of accounts on Twitter and Skype. Many digital projects were developed by Syrians, both inside and outside the country, to ensure access to information for all members of the society. Televisions (Syrian Revolution TV, Syria Alshabab Channel, Alghad TV, etc.),

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<sup>4</sup>Human Rights Organization, July 2001. Global Trends on the Right to Information: A survey of South Asia. Chapter 5- Recommendations.

<sup>5</sup>Albonny, Anwar. 2004. Legal mechanism of the dominance of Baath Party in Syria. AlhewarAlmotammaden, N. 989. 17/10/2004. <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=25146>[Accessed 14/07/2013]

radio stations (RadionAlkul, Hawa FM, radio Smart, etc.), and all kinds of publications appeared online, especially outside the country. Today, information is available for all Syrians, but this availability of information for those who are still in Syria is dependent on the availability of electricity and (naturally) the Internet. Many associations representative of the Syrian civil society were founded during these two years, inside and outside of the country.

### **Libraries as keystone institutions for information access**

As librarians, we believe that libraries can serve as a cornerstone institution that can ensure the individual's right to access information and can further the promotion of the commitment to human rights more generally.

The main mission of any library is to provide people with information, which they otherwise would not be able to access. Libraries should also be concerned to collect, in addition to works of literature and accessible reading materials, works that address basic information needs relative to the context. Libraries may serve as places where public and governmental information may be archived and organized; help promote literacy by giving people access to books and encourage a literate culture; and promote digital literacy by providing access to computers and other information technologies.

In Syria, because of the local laws relative to publications (as mentioned above), all these tasks were done but with very limited access. The Syrian Library Association was founded on a political decision, it does not contain any professional librarian and today all of its activities are frozen because of the situation.

Libraries were also affected by the war situation: access to the libraries became very hard with the army on the ground, and in addition to daily bombardment, explosions, suicide attacks, etc., some libraries have also been bombed like the libraries at Aleppo University, AlBaath University in Homs and Damascus University. Thus, due to this situation, students and employees have been deprived of access the libraries. Due to its widespread availability, the Internet remains today the only way to access information in Syria.

## ***State library association from the USA publishes a special issue about intellectual freedom and censorship***

***By Loida Garcia-Febo***

Recently the Indiana Library Federation made their peer-reviewed journal an open access publication. This is a first and remarkable step taken, as per the publishers, to provide *immediate open access to its content on the principle that making research freely available to the public supports a greater global exchange of knowledge.*

The first issue of the publication under this format was the **Special Issue of the Indiana Libraries: Intellectual Freedom & Censorship**. It was edited by J. Douglas Archer, Chair of the Intellectual Freedom Committee of the American Library Association. The publication includes a wide range of topics such as the freedom to read, libraries and democracy,

challenged books, advocacy, privacy, and journalists, librarians and intellectual freedom.

All the topics are of high interest to intellectual freedom advocates. The journal also feature articles such as "Fundamental Freedoms, Library Services, and Multi-Lingual Populations" by Loida Garcia-Febo, " "How We Came to Love Books": Not With Labels and Not With Emoticons" by Barbara Jones and Pat Scales, and "Religion, the First Amendment and America's Public Libraries" by Archer.

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Loida Garcia-Febo was recently elected to the IFLA Governing Board, is an Expert Resource Person at FAIFE, and is a Council Member of the ALA. President, Information New Wave.

## ***The Office for Intellectual Freedom at the American Library Association***

***By Barbara Jones***

The Office for Intellectual Freedom at the American Library Association has been focused intensively on the current revelations that the National Security Agency (NSA) has been collecting data from phone calls. This really came as no shock to the ALA, since we, along with other civil liberties groups, have been monitoring government and corporate activity in this arena since the passage of the USA PATRIOT Act in 2001. We have now redoubled our efforts to educate the USA public on how libraries play a key role in securing privacy for its people. Libraries 1) inform the public on the current status of national security and other legislation and court cases and 2) reflect best

practices in how we run our libraries and protect user privacy.

At the June/July ALA Annual Conference in Chicago, we were delighted to welcome so many international visitors to our meetings on these topics! For the first time, the Freedom to Read Foundation meetings included participants from India, Egypt, Sweden, Mexico, and other countries. We hope that this trend will continue! The ALA Council took action on July 2, 2013, with a resolution on national surveillance. Since then, we have signed an important letter from all major USA civil liberties organizations urging the Obama Administration to take actions in this regard.

Both documents, and much more, can be found on the OIF BLOG at: <http://www.oif.ala.org/oif/>.

Recently ALA and CILIP in the UK had a Skype conversation to initiate a global library awareness and action plan for redressing the balance between national security needs and the privacy and civil liberties of citizens. FAIFE will undoubtedly join this effort. Be part of these important conversations in Singapore and after!

Google has funded ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom, and the Office for Information Technology Policy to hold an invitational conference July 29 and 30, 2013, to discuss the repercussions of the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) on its 10th anniversary. This law has led to many public and school libraries installing filters on Internet access to young people. The participants are expected to come up with a research agenda and recommended actions. There will be a free

Google Hangout on Tuesday, July 30, to discuss the results of the conference.

For further information, see: <http://www.districtdispatch.org/2013/07/reminder-free-google-hangout-revisiting-cipa-10-years-later/>

(Filters are a HUGE issue here in the USA and we are trying very hard to contain the damage caused by them (in my opinion)).

ALA has launched a new initiative to keep the public updated on recent activities in the national surveillance arena.

This information can be found at: <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/privacyconfidentiality>.

Also, let's think ahead and celebrate Choose Privacy Week this year as an international activity! See the Choose Privacy Week website at: [www.chooseprivacyweek.org](http://www.chooseprivacyweek.org).

### ***Translation worldwide of the IFLA Code of Ethics for Librarians and other Information Workers***

*Did you know there are already sixteen translation of the Code of Ethics?*

The IFLA Code of Ethics for Librarians and other Information Workers, approved by the Governing Board in August 2012, has been translated worldwide by many librarians around the world in order to contribute to IFLA key initiative number 5. *Multilingualism.*

Take a look at it and see if your language is missing

<http://www.ifla.org/faife/professional-codes-of-ethics-for-librarians>

Also, FAIFE has collected more than 40 national codes of ethics for librarians from around the world adopted by national library or librarians associations.