

A SAFETY GUIDE FOR ARTISTS

arc

An abstract graphic design featuring several geometric shapes and colors. A diagonal line with segments in orange, teal, yellow, and purple runs from the bottom left towards the top right. A large red arc is positioned in the upper right quadrant. A light blue sphere is located in the center. A purple triangle is situated in the lower left. A dark blue semi-circle is at the bottom right. The overall composition is dynamic and colorful.

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Artists at Risk Connection (ARC), a project of PEN America, manages a coordination and information-sharing hub that supports, unites, and advances the work of organizations that assist artists at risk globally. ARC's mission is to improve access to resources for artists at risk, enhance connections among supporters of artistic freedom, and raise awareness of challenges to artistic freedom.

For more information, go to artistsatriskconnection.org.

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FOREWORD

One night in October 2019, as a curfew blanketed the city of Santiago, Chile during nationwide demonstrations for social justice, opera singer Ayleen Jovita Romero peacefully protested by singing “El derecho de vivir en paz” (“The right to live in peace”) from her window, a song made famous by singer Victor Jara before he was murdered following the 1973 military coup.

As UN Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights, I shared this example in my March 2020 [report on cultural rights defenders](#) (CRDs)—human rights defenders who defend cultural rights in accordance with international standards—because this story shows the ways that artists can both challenge injustice and bring hope to others in difficult times. Artists and their work promote access to culture and creative responses in the face of human rights violations and strife. Yet, artists and other CRDs have not been adequately recognized as human rights defenders, and therefore receive insufficient protection when their work puts them at risk around the world.

Over the past few years, I have had the opportunity to collaborate frequently with the Artists at Risk Connection (ARC) on just such issues, jointly hosting expert meetings and public programs and working together along with other partners on advocacy concerning persecuted artists. ARC has also coordinated joint statements with a range of other civil society organizations engaged on these issues at the Human

Rights Council in support of the cultural rights mandate. All these activities have made a significant contribution to work on cultural rights in the United Nations system. Through stakeholder meetings that ARC has helped facilitate, they have also played an important role in working to build a coalition of civil society organizations to defend the cultural rights of different constituencies, including women, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, minorities, and LGBTQIA+ people. With their wide-ranging understanding of both the human rights and cultural spheres and their intersections, ARC has excellent capacity to be a catalyst for collaboration and to help raise awareness of cultural rights like artistic freedom at the international level.

It is therefore my pleasure to introduce *A Safety Guide for Artists*, a vital tool to help artists access needed support in the face of threats to their human rights. Similar to analogous guides for journalists and other human rights defenders, this guide affords a critical tool for those working to defend their own right to freedom of artistic expression and that of others.

The field of artist support is constantly evolving, as new programs emerge and as artists continue to be mainstreamed into discussions of defending human rights. This critically important guide offers a window into that field, helping artists develop strategies to overcome persecution.

A great deal of my work as Special Rapporteur has been devoted to understanding the needs of cultural rights defenders and advocating for the steps that should be taken to ensure their safety. In offering a comprehensive toolkit of practical strategies to counter the risks, I am certain that this guide will be crucial in advancing artists’ safety around the world. I also hope it will help bring much-needed attention from governments, international mechanisms, human rights organizations and civil society generally to the threats that artists face, therefore helping to ensure that the next Victor Jara or Ayleen Jovita Romero in any country is able to make their work in peace.

*–Karima Bennoune, United Nations
Special Rapporteur in the Field of
Cultural Rights*

INTRODUCTION

The year 2020 has exploded with global crises. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic began, the rise of nationalist, authoritarian, and extremist regimes and conflicts around the world led to disturbing increases in violations of fundamental human rights. In response to these threats, massive social movements, from pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong¹ to calls for a new constitution in Chile,² arose, generating hope for more equitable societies. But these movements also led to ever greater dangers for activists, frontline workers, and outspoken voices.

The health crisis has only intensified these realities. Beyond placing restrictions on everyday life, from the shuttering of venues and public spaces³ to the shutdown of borders,⁴ authoritarian regimes and declining democracies alike have exploited the pandemic to crack down on dissent. They have curbed protests through enforced curfews,⁵ criminalized activism under the guise of vague laws meant to curtail “spreading disinformation” about the virus,⁶ and more. The pandemic helped quell the protests in Iran⁷ and Iraq to Argentina and Venezuela⁸ to Hong Kong,⁹ where the Chinese legislature slammed through a disturbing national security law¹⁰ that many believe signals the end of Hong Kong’s autonomy and which has already been used to arrest countless outspoken voices.¹¹

And yet, at the same time, to a degree not seen in decades, opposition movements are ascending, from protests of police brutality in the United States¹² to massive demonstrations rejecting the rigged 2020 presidential election in Belarus.¹³ Throughout this outpouring of dissent, artists have stood at the forefront,¹⁴ bearing witness to inhumanity and catalyzing solidarity through songs,¹⁵ slogans,¹⁶ and murals¹⁷ that call for change. When artists are able to express themselves freely, they can be forceful and influential voices that document oppression, articulate cultural critiques, and accelerate social progress. Art can offer an essential outlet for nurturing free thought and exercising free will. It can help independent viewpoints survive, challenge orthodoxies in ways both subtle and overt, and create openings that allow citizens to imagine a different future.

But this power can also put artists at the forefront of backlash, exposing them to violence, intimidation, and other forms of persecution by both governments and non-state actors. It is no accident that artists are among the first targets for suppression during the rise of authoritarian regimes, the spread of armed conflicts, and the collapse of democracies.

In 2019, the Artists at Risk Connection (ARC) received more requests for assistance than in any previous year, and global watchdogs documented over

700 incidents in at least 93 countries in which artists’ rights were violated¹⁸— numbers that do not include hundreds of cases that go unreported. While many artists defy these attacks and continue their work, others live in constant fear for their safety and the safety of their families, and some have been intimidated into self-censorship or silence. Though many threats come from state actors such as governments, politicians, police, and the military, they can also come from non-state parties, including extremist groups, fundamentalist or conservative communities, and even one’s own neighbors and family members. These attacks rob artists of the opportunity for creative expression and impoverish democratic discourse by excluding challenging ideas and perspectives and depriving the public of valuable contributions, insights, and inspiration.

Artists are vital to the health and longevity of free and open societies, and their importance is enshrined in international law. “Artistic expression,” as former UN Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights Farida Shaheed has stated, “is not a luxury, it is a necessity.”¹⁹ As a fundamental human right, it is addressed in varying ways in a number of documents within the international human rights framework, including article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;²⁰ article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;²¹ and related provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. It is also addressed by UN Special Rapporteurs in the field of cultural rights and freedom of expression; as outlined in the Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural

Rights’ 2020 report, artists are cultural rights defenders—those human rights defenders who act in defense of culture—and therefore deserve the same recognition and protection as traditional human rights defenders.²² Artists take risks, but they should not have to risk their lives.

What Is ARC?

The Artists at Risk Connection (ARC), a project of PEN America, aims to safeguard the right to artistic freedom of expression and ensure that artists everywhere can live and work without fear. ARC works to achieve this goal primarily by connecting persecuted artists to our growing global network of resources, facilitating cooperation among human rights and arts organizations, and amplifying the stories and work of at-risk artists. ARC plays the role of connector and coordinator, matching need and response to equip artists with the means to withstand pressure and continue creating.

Since its inception in 2017, ARC has assisted more than 280 individual artists and cultural professionals from over 63 countries by connecting them to a wide range of services, most frequently including emergency funds, legal assistance, temporary relocation programs, and fellowships. Thanks to a core network of over 70 partners, over 50 percent of artists who seek our help have already received direct support. Our network is the heart of ARC: Since we are not a direct service provider but a hub that brings together the vast constellation of organizations that support artists, our work would not be possible without the diverse partners we refer artists to.

You can contact ARC through our [website](#), via email at arc@pen.org, or via our [encrypted intake form](#). For more information about using ARC's resources, please refer to the "Finding Assistance" section.

Why Does This Guide Exist?

In the four years since ARC was created, we have been fortunate to collaborate with a vast array of partners working on the ground to support artists at risk. We have engaged an even larger number of organizations that might not traditionally have supported artists but are now beginning to serve them, such as Freedom House, Front Line Defenders, and ProtectDefenders.eu. However, while a number of robust guides exist for vulnerable journalists,²³ cartoonists,²⁴ and human rights defenders,²⁵ and other vulnerable groups,²⁶ no such tool exists expressly for at-risk artists.

In creating this manual, ARC aspires to offer concrete recommendations and provide a comprehensive tool kit to help artists navigate, counter, and overcome threats and persecution. This guide will cover topics including cybersecurity threats and best practices; tactics used by governmental and non-governmental actors to attack artists; resources available to artists under threat and ways for organizations to provide support; methods of identifying risks to yourself; strategies for developing a safety net and plan; actions to take against perpetrators; and an appendix of further resources.

Although ARC has tried to make this manual exhaustive, every experience of risk is unique, and this guide may not provide every tool for every scenario.

In such cases, we recommend getting in touch with ARC or with one of the vast array of organizations that might be able to meet your specific needs with specific assistance, many of which are listed in the appendix. Because the world changes quickly, we will give frequent updates to keep this information relevant. In particular, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused massive disruptions in the field of artistic freedom. Some of the resources recommended in this guide may currently be on hiatus or be offering altered services. We always recommend checking organizations' websites directly to get the most up-to-date information regarding their support.

This guide has been inspired by the practical experience of ARC and our partners. In compiling it, we have listened to artists themselves—their direct requests for assistance, their responses to a survey that we conducted in 2018, and their thoughts expressed in in-depth interviews that we conducted in 2020. We have also drawn on research and manuals published by organizations that specialize in assisting artists, journalists, and human rights defenders. Certain sections might act as a gateway to other organizations' resources, to which we have provided useful links or footnotes.

This guide will be continually updated as trends and recommendations change.

We hope that by presenting the voices of artists who have faced similar challenges and the strategies they used to overcome them, this guide can help at-risk artists feel less alone, more prepared, and better able to make their art in peace.

Special Thanks

This guide would not exist without the continued, crucial support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, ARC's primary funder; the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts; the Elizabeth R. Koch Foundation; the Silicon Valley Community Foundation; and the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy. We are immensely grateful to them for helping ARC make the world a safer place for artists.

NOTES

¹ "Hong Kong kicks off 2020 with fresh protests," *BBC*, January 1, 2020.

² Philip Reeves, "Protests in Chile," *NPR*, January 11, 2020.

³ Valentina Di Liscia, "As the Art World Shuts Down Over COVID-19, Uncertainty Plagues Hourly Workers," *Hyperallergic*, March 19, 2020.

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⁵ Anthony Faiola, Lindzi Wessel, and Shibani Mahtani, "Coronavirus chills protests from Chile to Hong Kong to Iraq, forcing activists to innovate," *The Washington Post*, April 4, 2020.

⁶ "Thai Artist Arrested for Posting About Country's Coronavirus Screening," PEN America, March 25, 2020.

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⁹ Austin Ramzy and Elaine Yu, "Under Cover of Coronavirus, Hong Kong Cracks Down on Protest Movement," *The New York Times*, April 21, 2020.

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¹¹ Austin Ramzy, Tiffany May, and Elaine Yu, "China Targets Hong Kong's Lawmakers as It Squelches Dissent," *The New York Times*, November 11, 2020.

¹² Elliott C. McLaughlin, "How George Floyd's death ignited a racial reckoning that shows no signs of slowing down," *CNN*, August 9, 2020.

¹³ "Nearly 3 months after vote, Belarus protests still go strong," *Associated Press*, October 31, 2020.

¹⁴ Carly Mallenbaum, "Art activism: Stories behind murals, street paintings and portraits created in protest," *USA Today*, July 6, 2020.

¹⁵ Marta Balaga, "Las Tesis, Collective Behind Anti-Rape Protest Song, on Campaign Against Violence," *Variety*, October 31, 2020.

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¹⁷ Raisa Bruner, "'Art Can Touch Our Emotional Core.' Meet the Artists Behind Some of the Most Widespread Images Amid George Floyd Protests," *TIME*, June 3, 2020.

¹⁸ "The State of Artistic Freedom 2020," *Freemuse*, April 15, 2020.

¹⁹ Farida Shaheed, "The right to freedom of artistic expression and creativity," *UNESCO*, March 14, 2013.

²⁰ "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," OHCHR, 1948.

²¹ "International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights," OHCHR, 1966.

²² Karima Bennouna, "Cultural rights defenders. Report of the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights," pp. 3-4, OHCHR, 2020 and OHCHR, "Who is a defender?"

²³ "Safety Guide for Journalists," Reporters Without Borders and UNESCO, 2015.

²⁴ "Practical Guide for the Protection of Editorial Cartoonists," *Cartooning for Peace*, 2019.

²⁵ See "New Protection Guide for Human Rights Defenders," *Protection International*, 2009 and "Protection Guide for Human Rights Defenders," *Front Line Defenders*, 2005.

²⁶ Gary McLelland and Emma Wadsworth-Jones, "Humanists at Risk: Action Report 2020," *Humanists International*, 2020.

METHODOLOGY

WITH OUR BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF THE FIELD OF AVAILABLE RESOURCES, ARC DEVELOPED THIS GUIDE BY DRAWING UPON THE WEALTH OF EXPERTISE OF OUR GLOBAL PARTNERS AND PEN CHAPTERS AND UPON INFORMATION GLEANED FROM THE 280 ARTISTS ARC HAS HELPED CONNECT TO DIRECT SUPPORT, 197 RESPONSES TO A SURVEY OF PERSECUTED ARTISTS CONDUCTED IN 2018, AND 13 INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED IN 2020 WITH PROMINENT ARTISTS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED PERSECUTION.

Global Network

ARC strives to act as a clearinghouse, bringing together the vast constellation of global resources for artists at risk into one accessible hub. Before its existence, artists in need and their allies would have to peruse hundreds of individual websites to search the scope of existing resources. With ARC's database, all of these resources are compiled in one portal. When ARC was launched in 2017, its network included 709 partner organizations—579 in its public, searchable database and 130 in a private database offering resources to persecuted artists. As of October 2020, the network has grown to 881 partners, including 673 in the public database. Of

these organizations, about 70 constitute ARC's core network—partners that ARC consistently turns to and collaborates with when aiding artists at risk. In addition to its global network, ARC has an Advisory Committee made up of prominent artists and representatives of core partners. This wide range of partners gives ARC a unique opportunity to study the field of artist support as a whole and understand what services exist, which are most helpful, and how artists can most effectively navigate them.

Much of this manual draws upon the insights, expertise, research, and resources of this diverse group of

partners. Partners regularly conduct research and publish reports, many of which have been cited throughout this manual. In addition to collaborating on assisting at-risk artists, ARC regularly works in concert with our partners when attending international forums and hosting public and private programs—giving us insights into how service-providing organizations operate, which trends and challenges are most salient, and which organizations are best equipped to provide support to artists in need. This guide, and ARC's work, would not be possible without their knowledge.

Requests for Assistance from Artists at Risk

Since its inception, ARC has received 280 requests for assistance from artists in 63 countries, and we work daily to refer these artists to our partner organizations. By analyzing trends in these requests, ARC has gained a deeper understanding of the state of artistic freedom and has been able to make inferences that helped inform the contents of this guide. But the requests that ARC receives by no means capture the full scope of persecution faced by artists. Though ARC receives about 87 requests a year, research from our partners and other watchdogs suggests that hundreds, if not thousands, more artists face substantial threats.

2018 Survey of Artists at Risk

To complement and deepen the information that ARC has gleaned from the artists who contact us, in 2018 we surveyed 197 individual artists at risk globally to better understand their needs, conditions, and challenges. This survey explored questions about what types of risk artists perceive, what risks they have experienced, and how

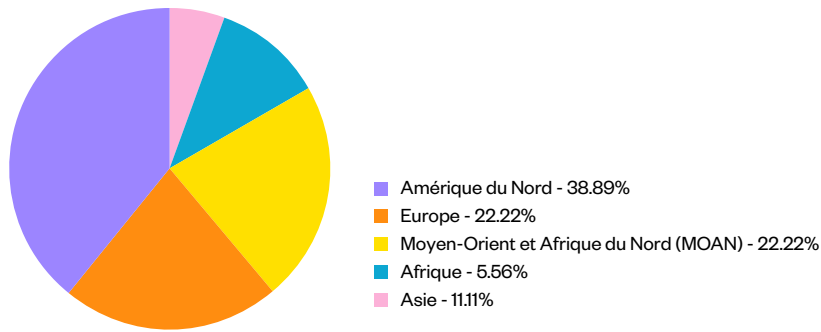
often they have experienced them. It also asked artists about their views of the assistance process, perceived gaps in available support, regions where risk is most acute, and more. The survey provided crucial data that has helped ARC better understand the worldwide landscape of threats and support.

In addition to general biographical questions, the main questions of the survey included:

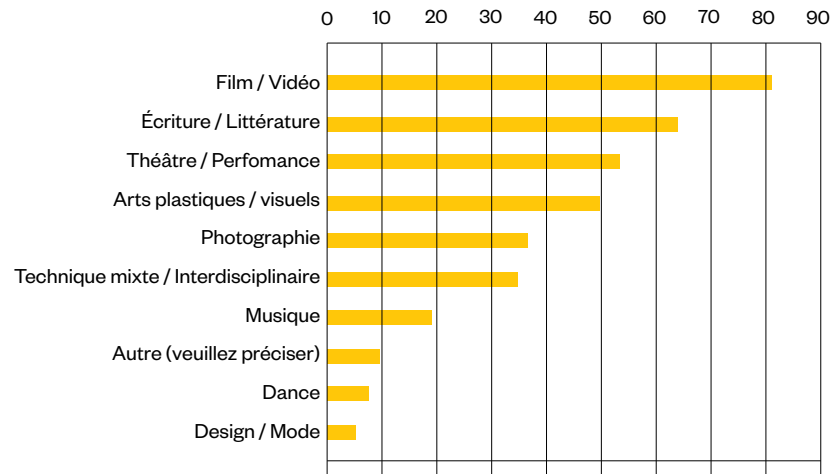
- What do you feel is the biggest threat to freedom of artistic expression?
- Have you experienced persecution as a direct result of your work as an artist?
 - › To the best of your knowledge, who are/were the perpetrators of the persecution?
 - › To the best of your knowledge, what is/was the reason for the persecution?
- What action(s) did you take or are you currently taking to protect yourself?
- What kind of support, if any, did you receive, or are you receiving?
- When persecuted, what was/is the best way for you to access information about support?

2020 Interviews Conducted with Artists at Risk

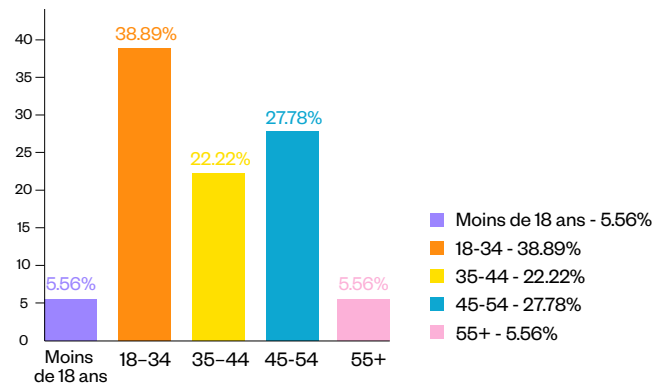
Each of ARC's in-depth interviews with 13 prominent artists who have previously been or are currently at risk lasted approximately one and a half to two hours and explored the artist's career, activism, and experiences coping with persecution and finding assistance.



Geographic repartition of artists surveyed in 2018.



Disciplinary composition of the artists surveyed in 2018.



Age of the artists surveyed in 2018 at time of first persecution.

Conducting firsthand interviews enabled ARC to ascertain what the lived experience of risk is like, what tactics artists use to counter threats, what forms of support help most, and what forms of support remain lacking. ARC interviewed the following artists:

- **Aslı Erdoğan**, Turkish writer
- **Betty Tompkins**, American painter
- **Dread Scott**, American visual artist
- **Hamed Sinno**, Lebanese singer
- **Kubra Khademi**, Afghan performance artist
- **Masha Alekhina**, Russian member of art collective Pussy Riot
- **Nanfu Wang**, Chinese documentary filmmaker
- **Oleg Sentsov**, Ukrainian filmmaker
- **Shahidul Alam**, Bangladeshi photographer
- **Tania Bruguera**, Cuban performance artist
- **Valsero**, Cameroonian rapper
- **Wanuri Kahiu**, Kenyan filmmaker
- **Yulia Tsvetkova**, Russian visual artist.

The main interview questions included:

- Can you tell me about your development and career as an artist? As an activist? At what point did you realize these two were connected?
- When did you first experience risks, threats, harassment, persecution, etc., as a result of your creative approach? How have the threats intensified over your career as you continued to make artwork?
- How did threats/persecution affect your creative practice? How were your life and career affected?

• When threats began, please walk me through what you did to find assistance. Did you reach out to other members of the art or activist community, or elsewhere, such as human rights groups?

- If you did receive assistance from a human rights organization, can you discuss what it was like to navigate the world of human rights support as an artist?
- What was your experience in turning to the art community for help? What advice would you offer to other artists who are put at risk because of their artwork/activism for the first time?

For more about each artist, see the “Artists’ Voices” section of this manual. Interview excerpts have been edited for brevity and clarity.



PATTERNS OF PERSECUTION

PATTERNS OF PERSECUTION

THROUGHOUT ARC'S EXISTENCE, THE NUMBER OF REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE FROM AT-RISK ARTISTS HAS CONTINUOUSLY GROWN. WHILE THIS GROWTH IS PARTLY DUE TO INCREASED AWARENESS OF ARC'S RESOURCES, WE BELIEVE IT IS ALSO ROOTED IN THE GLOBAL RISE OF AUTHORITARIAN, NATIONALIST, AND EXTREMIST REGIMES AND GROUPS THAT ARE EXERTING PRESSURE ON ARTISTIC FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION. THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS ONLY EXACERBATED SUCH THREATS.

Although artists from all over the world contact ARC for assistance, the majority come from the Global South, and from a few regions in particular. Year after year, since ARC's inception, the most requests—42 percent—have come from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, followed by artists from Africa (19 percent), Latin America (14 percent), and Asia (11 percent), with other regions constituting the remaining 14 percent of requests. Within these regions, certain countries tend to have higher rates of violations of artistic freedom than others. For example, while

many countries have only one to two artists a year who reach out for support, ARC has received 36 requests for assistance from Iranian artists, nearly 14 percent of the total number of requests. Other high numbers come from Turkey (19), Egypt (17), Cuba (15), and Yemen (11).

In terms of artist disciplines, ARC receives the most requests from visual artists (a category that encompasses anyone working in a visual medium, including painters, filmmakers, and photographers), at 38 percent, followed by writers (28 percent), musicians

(13 percent), and other cultural professionals such as curators, theater directors, art scholars, and researchers (10 percent).

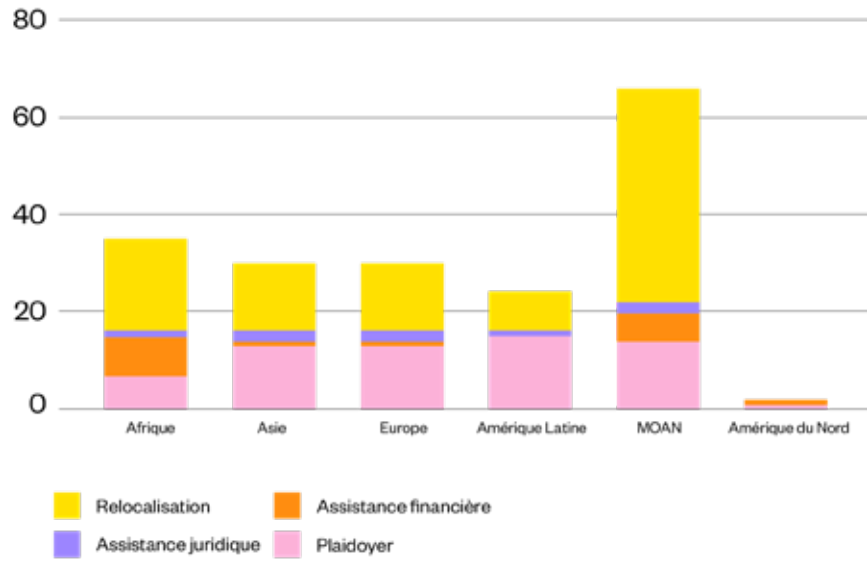
Requests for assistance overwhelmingly come from artists who identify as male—only 28 percent of ARC's cases have been imperiled women. Yet while female and non-gender conforming artists make up only a small percentage of ARC's cases, the risks they experience tend to be greater in severity and related to their gender in some capacity, which is not typical for male artists' persecution. Furthermore, threats tend to more significantly affect artists who identify with minority groups, whether due to their gender, sexuality, language, ethnicity, religion, race, or class.

Thirty-two percent of artists who contact ARC for assistance do so because they are experiencing threats of violence, death, verbal or physical harassment, or arrest, followed in frequency by artists who have already been arrested or detained and are looking for assistance either to avoid imprisonment or to be released from prison (22 percent). Artists seeking asylum assistance and/or looking for support in exile also make up a substantial portion (13 percent) of ARC's requests.

When ARC receives such requests, we assess the situation and level of risk and connect artists to the support they need. ARC does not provide direct services but rather refers artists to our global network of partner organizations, each of which has its own parameters for what it can provide and how many cases it can take on. Twenty-nine percent of ARC's requests have come from artists seeking to flee threats

by relocating to a safer area, either temporarily within their country or region or long-term, often to countries in the Global North. Requests for relocation tend to come alongside those for emergency grants, often to pay travel costs, or living costs after relocation. Although some urgent funds are earmarked specifically for artists, many tend to be restricted to extremely prominent artists seeking to carry out specific creative projects and are only rarely reserved for those in dire need. Instead, ARC must often connect at-risk artists to emergency grants for human rights defenders, offered by a wide range of human rights organizations around the world.

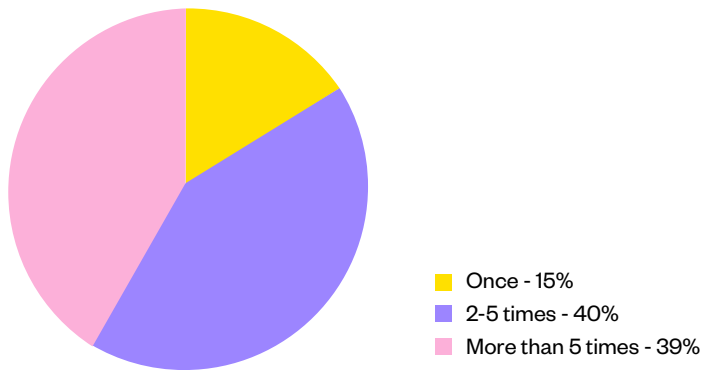
Requests for relocation and emergency grants are followed in frequency by requests for legal assistance (such as representation in a criminal case, immigration advice, and trial monitoring) and for advocacy (help with raising awareness about their situation and putting pressure on governments, institutions, or other perpetrators). More often than not, however, artists request a mix of services: They may need relocation assistance as well as funds to support them abroad, or they may need public advocacy in addition to publishing opportunities to boost visibility of their case.



Types of assistance requested by region from 2018-2020, according to ARC data.

After artists receive support, ARC stays in touch with them to ensure the long-term sustainability of their safety, as they often find themselves bouncing from one resource to another, their threats persistent and ongoing rather than singular, one-off experiences.

Beyond direct persecution, artists often endure continuing difficulties related to psychological and emotional trauma. So lasting security often requires long-term cooperation with organizations or a combination of short-term opportunities in succession.



Data from a 2018 survey of 197 artists who had experienced or were experiencing persecution.

1

DEFINING RISK

Art is inherently political. Through creative work, artists use image, representation, metaphor, motif, and more to challenge the status quo, oppressive religious beliefs, reigning political ideologies, social and cultural norms, and moral or economic injustices. Artists don't always make an active choice to be political; often they do so unintentionally when their work unexpectedly touches on sensitive topics. Yet engaging politics, deliberately or not, can be one of the most dangerous acts of their career. Because art has the power to move people and envision alternative, more equitable societies, artists often face significant threats from those seeking to silence them. These threats include censorship, verbal or physical harassment, assault, arrest, legal prosecution, imprisonment, torture, and even death.

Whether or not you affirmatively decide to be politically engaged and make overtly political art, it is important to understand the kinds of risks faced by artists around the world. Such awareness is crucial to knowing how and why your own work might put you at risk and will leave you better equipped to anticipate, withstand, and ultimately overcome pressure.

WHAT KINDS OF THREATS DO ARTISTS FACE?

ARTISTS CAN FACE A WIDE RANGE OF RISKS AROUND THE WORLD.

THE FOLLOWING ARE THE MOST COMMON:

Censorship

The enforced silencing of artists—by preventing them from displaying or promoting their work, forcing them to alter its content, or damaging or destroying it—is far and away the most common threat worldwide.²⁷ Censorship can be carried out by both state and non-state agents, through laws and regulations, corporate and commercial pressures, or force and intimidation. Many countries require artists to get licenses from a censorship board to make art. State-sponsored censorship is often carried out on such grounds as protecting national security,²⁸ controlling obscenity,²⁹ regulating hate speech,³⁰ promoting or restricting political or religious opinions,³¹ and preventing libel.³² But censorship may or may not be legal, and many countries have laws that protect against it.

In the internet age, censorship on digital platforms by both private and public groups is another growing

concern, as authoritarian regimes control what content is allowed online³³ and social media companies use arbitrary algorithms to remove content deemed inappropriate.³⁴ Furthermore, censorship begets censorship, and many countries have cultures of self-censorship, a toxic situation in which fear of censorship or retaliation leads artists to muzzle themselves.³⁵

In Kenya, filmmakers are required to get approval from a censorship board before they can make and distribute their films. When Wanuri Kahiu, a world-renowned filmmaker, brought her film *Rafiki* to the Kenya Film Classification Board, she was asked to make a few changes. The film, about two young girls who fall in love, was viewed as too pro-LGBTQIA+ in a country where homosexuality is still criminalized. But Kahiu

refused to censor her film, so it was banned. Besides a one-week release period after Kahiu appealed, and in the face of international acclaim, *Rafiki* has not been available in Kenya.³⁶ Read more about Kahiu's case in the "Artists' Voices" section.

Detention, Legal Prosecution, and Imprisonment

Detention, prosecution, and imprisonment are the second-most-frequent violations of artistic freedom.³⁷ Detention occurs when an artist is arrested and taken to jail but has not yet been charged with a crime. As soon as an artist is indicted for a crime, prosecution begins. Artists who are successfully prosecuted and convicted may be sentenced to prison or face some other punishment. Artists can be arrested, prosecuted, and imprisoned for a wide variety of reasons. Often such actions are politically motivated, but sometimes they are legitimized under existing statutes and laws. To understand what kind of laws you could be prosecuted under, see "Knowing Your Country's Laws."

Egypt is one of the world's most frequent jailers of artists and writers.³⁸ One of the most common tactics used by President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's government to silence artists and other dissidents is pretrial detention, which allows detainees who have been arrested, but have not been formally charged or undergone trial, to remain in custody for up to two years—a limit that is often

violated.³⁹ On May 2, 2020, after spending 793 days in pretrial detention for filming a music video that was critical of el-Sisi, 24-year-old filmmaker Shady Habash died in jail.⁴⁰ Not long after, a friend, film editor Sanaa Seif, was also placed in pretrial detention. Her brother, prominent activist Alaa Abd El Fattah, was already behind bars in pretrial detention at the time.⁴¹

Harassment, Violence, and Assault

Artists around the world can face generalized harassment, including physical violence and assault; online abuse; verbal hate speech or threats carried out in person, by phone, or on digital platforms; physical assault such as beatings, police raids, or damage to facilities and equipment; state violence, including torture; and even killings or death sentences.

Sanctions and Fines

Artists are frequently subject to fines and sanctions, which act as a sort of extension of censorship. Governments try to force artists to be silent by levying heavy fees against them for a wide range of reasons, from violating minor laws and committing petty infractions to imposing sentences related to criminal or civil prosecution.⁴²

Travel Bans

State persecution often goes hand in hand with travel bans. When a state seeks to criminalize an artist, it will often place them under travel ban or even house arrest for the duration of their court case—and longer still if they are handed a conviction. These tactics are

meant to constrain an artist's ability to spread their work across borders and cultures, seek safety in a third country, and meaningfully advance their career through international opportunities.

In Russia, travel bans are frequently used against artists currently on trial or under investigation. In 2017 Kirill Serebrennikov, a prolific Russian playwright and theater director, was detained and charged with embezzling 68 million rubles, a politically motivated and spurious allegation meant to silence a prominent critic of Putin's regime. He was placed under house arrest from August 2017 to April 2019, when he was released on bail. On June 26, 2020, he was convicted and received a suspended sentence, and although the case has now concluded, he remains unable to leave Russia, causing lasting damage to his ability to engage foreign arts institutions and communities.⁴³

WHO IS MOST VULNERABLE TO THREATS?

WHILE ANY ARTIST CAN BE PUT AT RISK FOR THEIR WORK, CERTAIN FACTORS INCREASE THE LIKELIHOOD THAT THIS WILL OCCUR. WOMEN, LGBTQIA+ PEOPLE, THOSE WITH DISABILITIES, SENIORS, MIGRANTS OR REFUGEES, AND MEMBERS OF RELIGIOUS, ETHNIC, OR LINGUISTIC MINORITIES OFTEN FIND THEMSELVES AT HEIGHTENED RISK OF REPRESSION, AS DO ARTISTS IN THE WORLD'S MOST RESTRICTIVE REGIONS.

Women and LGBTQIA+ People

Though male artists tend to make up more documented cases of risk, women and non-gender-conforming artists face a greater range of threats related to their gender than their male colleagues.⁴⁴

This occurs for a variety of reasons, including orthodoxies and regulations about gender and sexuality, regressive social attitudes toward women, and heightened risks of sexual violence. The same holds true for members of the LGBTQIA+ community. Even if their work is not explicitly related to their sexuality or gender, hostile attitudes and biases toward these groups place them at inherently higher risk.

Russian feminist artist and activist Yulia Tsvetkova is currently on trial for disseminating pornography, a charge that could land her in prison for up to six years. Her only crime was making pro-LGBTQIA+ and body-positive artwork. After creating two social media webpages that displayed work by feminist artists, some of which included frank depictions of female genitalia, Tsvetkova was arrested in November 2019 and charged in January 2020. In a society in which

“gay propaganda” is outlawed and in which homophobia and misogyny are rampant, Tsvetkova’s case was largely seen as punishment for raising taboo subjects.⁴⁵ For more on Tsvetkova’s case, see the “Artists’ Voices” section.

Minorities or Underrepresented Groups

Sometimes merely being a member of a minority or underrepresented group can lead to persecution. Kurds in Turkey and Iran,⁴⁶ Tamils in Sri Lanka,⁴⁷ Rohingya in Myanmar,⁴⁸ Palestinians in Israel or occupied Palestine,⁴⁹ and Uyghurs,⁵⁰ Tibetans,⁵¹ and Hui⁵² in China are among the ethnic and religious minorities, stateless groups, unrecognized people, or otherwise minoritized groups that face persecution.

In the name of combating “Islamist extremism,” the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has turned Xinjiang, an autonomous region in western China, into a police state, where those who publicly express their ethnic identity are marked as potential enemies of the state. Uygher people, a Turkic, Muslim-majority group that makes up about half of the region’s population, are especially vulnerable. According to estimates, more than a million Uyghers are believed to have been detained in “reeducation camps” for “deradicalization.”⁵³ Detainees are not given a trial, a lawyer, or any semblance of due process.

Even more shocking, Uyghurs and others are sent to the camps for everyday expressions of their culture or faith. Artists who in any way express Uygher cultural identity—or artists who simply are Uygher—are often detained. Rashida Dawut, a celebrated Uygher singer, was sentenced to 15 years in prison for alleged “separatism” in a secret trial in late 2019,⁵⁴ and countless Uygher artists, poets, and activists have been similarly persecuted.

Artists from Certain Regions

Artists around the world face risks, but some regions violate artistic freedom more regularly and brutally than others. While some of this variation can be attributed to discrepancies like a lack of reporting or lack of civil society support, it is nevertheless important to recognize that certain threats tend to occur at higher rates in certain regions. The Middle East and North Africa region consistently ranks as one of the highest violators of artistic freedom across a number of metrics, followed by Asia and Europe as the second- and third-most-risky places for artists.⁵⁵

But regional differences shift depending on the specifics. For instance, Europe is one of the most common places for threats based on minority backgrounds.⁵⁶ And in 2019, the majority of imprisoned writers—141 out of 238 cases—were in just three countries: China, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey.⁵⁷

Belarus is often labeled the “last dictatorship in Europe.” Its government exerts widespread control over the cultural sphere, supporting official programs that serve its ideological needs and cutting off funding for those that don’t. In early 2020, numerous activists and writers were tried for participating in demonstrations calling for independence from Russia’s influence.⁵⁸ Following massive protests in the wake of President Aleksandr G. Lukashenko’s reelection in August 2020—an election widely viewed as rigged—writers, members of PEN Belarus,⁵⁹ members of the art collective Belarus Free Theater,⁶⁰ and countless other dissident artists have felt the brunt of the government crackdown, facing arrest and detention.⁶¹

WHERE ARE THREATS MOST LIKELY TO COME FROM?

THREATS CAN COME FROM A VARIETY OF SOURCES.

THE MOST COMMON ARE STATES AND STATE ENTITIES,⁶²

WHILE NON-STATE GROUPS, CORPORATE OR COMMERCIAL ENTITIES, AND OTHER SOURCES ALSO PRESENT RISKS.

State Groups

State groups, including **governments, heads of state, politicians, police, and the military**, are by far the most likely entities to persecute artists, who are frequently imprisoned for criticizing government policies and practices.⁶³ Artists whose work directly engages political or social issues should prepare for possible retaliation. Those who criticize heads of state are frequently prosecuted for criminal defamation and sued for libel, even if the criticism is valid or warranted. But “apolitical” art can also pose a threat to the status quo, and artists should always be prepared for the possibility of state persecution, including by familiarizing themselves with laws used against artists, as outlined below.

Valsero, one of the most popular musicians in Cameroon, is known for politically tinged rap songs that call for greater accountability and transparency from President Paul Biya's administration and that strive to spread awareness of civil and political rights. Biya, who has ruled since 1982, has maintained power through decades of intimidation and force, and his regime has taken countless measures to curtail freedom of expression. Over the years, Valsero has been detained a number of times by Cameroonian police forces, and many of his concerts have been banned. On January 26,

2019, he was arrested on the outskirts of a demonstration protesting the previous year's presidential election, which many Cameroonians saw as rigged to favor Biya. He spent nine months in jail, awaiting trial for charges that carried punishment as severe as the death penalty, until he was eventually released. ⁶⁴For more information on Valsero's case, see the “Artists' Voices” section of this guide.

Non-State Groups

Non-state agents such as **terrorist and extremist groups, paramilitaries, organized crime, religious fundamentalists, and online trolls and hackers** have also persecuted artists.

Those whose work pushes against orthodoxies may be more likely to experience the wrath of non-state agents if they live in especially conservative or traditional societies. Similarly, artists in conflict zones may face backlash from armed or extremist groups, and in such cases the availability of traditional legal recourse can be slim. Trolls and hackers may seek to harass artists online or compromise their digital security. Artists can also face attacks from family members, neighbors, and other artists within their own communities.

Sharmila Seyyid, an internationally acclaimed novelist and activist from Sri Lanka, has dedicated her life to advancing gender equality and fighting extremism within her Muslim community. In

November 2012, after an interview on BBC Tamil in which she said that legalizing sex work would better protect workers, Seyyid rapidly became a target of vitriolic criticism, harassment, and death threats from religious fundamentalists. Since then, she and her family have faced incessant attacks, including threats of acid assaults and rape. Not long after the BBC interview, the English academy that she ran with her sister was vandalized. In 2019, authorities notified Seyyid that she was a target of National Thowheeth Jama'ath (NDJ), a militant Islamist group responsible for bombings that took place on Easter Sunday in 2019, forcing her to go into exile.⁶⁵

Corporate or Commercial Entities

Corporate or commercial entities often censor **broadcasters, publishers, communications companies, and other media** that have political or social agendas.⁶⁶ They may also target or harass artists. Broadcasters and media companies that are de facto mouthpieces for the governments sometimes use their megaphones to spread disinformation or launch smear campaigns against artists.

Social media platforms present both opportunities and risks for artists, enabling them to amplify their messages while also leaving them vulnerable to persecution. These platforms are among the most common forums for harassment, as trolls and other

hostile groups can easily single out artists with vitriolic or threatening speech.⁶⁷ Artists also face internal censorship, as vague content regulation mechanisms based on “standards of behavior” are

open to interpretation, especially regarding hot-button subjects like terrorism and nudity.⁶⁸ Women, queer, and transgender artists in particular have fallen prey to such content controls.⁶⁹

KNOWING YOUR COUNTRY'S LAWS

ARTISTS IN ANY SITUATION, REGARDLESS OF WHETHER THEY ANTICIPATE RISK, CAN BENEFIT FROM A COMPREHENSIVE UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR COUNTRY'S SPEECH LAWS OR OTHER LEGISLATION THAT IS USED AGAINST ARTISTS.

Logically, laws that regulate speech or expression are most likely to be used against artists thought to have crossed a line, so staying informed about the general climate and current status of free speech and expression is crucial to practicing your art safely. But artists can also be prosecuted under laws with seemingly no connection to art and expression. Laws to pay attention to, if they exist in your country, include, but are not limited to:

Laws Regulating Speech

Many countries have laws that regulate varying forms of speech and expression. These laws usually center on **defamation and libel**,⁷⁰ **disinformation**,⁷¹ **cybercrime**,⁷² **online speech**,⁷³ and **broadcasting and telecommunications**.⁷⁴ Speech-related laws are frequently used to criminalize artists for both the content of their work and the views they express. Artists working in countries that deploy such tactics should

be especially wary of airing opinions on social media and in other digital spaces.

In Bangladesh, the draconian Digital Security Act (DSA)—formerly the Information and Communication Technology Act (ICT)—is frequently used to criminalize online dissent. With its vague definitions and heavily punishable, non-bailable offenses, the act gives Bangladeshi authorities unprecedentedly wide purview to crack down on freedom of expression and launch investigations into anyone whose activities and/or online speech is deemed harmful or threatening. Under the DSA and former ICT, thousands of Bangladeshi artists, journalists, and activists have been arrested.⁷⁵

Anti-Terrorism

Along with legislation that regulates speech and expression, governments increasingly turn to anti-terrorism laws to crack down on artists. At least eight countries have used anti-terrorism and/or anti-extremism legislation against artists.⁷⁶ In over half of such prosecutions, the artists belonged to a minority group.⁷⁷

In Turkey, almost any action related to Kurdish identity or language runs the risk of being criminalized under counterterrorism regulations.⁷⁸ When artists represent Kurdish life in their work, the government often invokes the Kurdistan

Workers Party (PKK), a militant separatist group, branding them as terrorists even if their art in no way advocates violence or even addresses the political status of Kurds. Zehra Doğan, an influential journalist and artist, was sentenced to prison for terrorism after painting a scene based on a photograph of Turkish troops leveling a Kurdish town.⁷⁹ Likewise, members of Grup Yorum, a musical collective that often advocates for Kurdish rights and uses the Kurdish language in its songs, have been perennially arrested and convicted under trumped-up terrorism charges.⁸⁰

Entertainment Control

Another form of legislation that's commonly used to target artists is entertainment control acts. In their most drastic form, these laws exist in countries with state censorship apparatuses, such as China⁸¹ and Iran.⁸² In these countries, anyone who hopes to create something that could qualify as entertainment—pretty much anything in the cultural sphere, including films, TV, songs, and books—must first submit it to a censorship board, which grants licenses to release the work. If the board deems the content inappropriate or not in line with state narratives, it will withhold the licenses, and if artists circumvent such licenses and make their art anyway, they may face severe threats like imprisonment.

Decree 349 in Cuba, enacted in 2018, institutionalizes and expands limits on creative

expression. The decree criminalizes unregistered artistic labor, granting authorities wide remit to censor and constrain artists' activities. Under Decree 349, there has been an immense uptick in the censorship, harassment, and arrest of independent artists in Cuba.⁸³ Since 2017 Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara, an esteemed performance and street artist, has been arrested at least 21 times, frequently as a direct result of his outspoken criticism of the decree.⁸⁴

National Security

As outlandish as it may seem, in some countries artists may find themselves accused of violating national security laws merely for making art.⁸⁵ In countries with hard-line governments, artists who are seen as promoting agendas that pose a threat to a ruling regime or endorsing the cultural mores of a country deemed an enemy of the state may be prosecuted under draconian national security laws.⁸⁶ In the latter case, artists may be accused of using foreign cultures to dismantle the state, posing a danger to society. Convictions under national security laws can carry some of the most hefty prison terms of any on this list.

In Hong Kong, after months of historic pro-democracy protests against China's encroaching influence on the semi-autonomous island, Chinese officials rushed a national security law through the legislature. The law, which criminalizes acts of protest

against Beijing and severely weakens guarantees of freedom of expression within the city on vaguely defined "national security" grounds, has ignited widespread fears that Hong Kongers' civic freedoms are being erased.⁸⁷ In the weeks after it was passed, prominent artists, writers, publishers, and activists have been arrested or forced into exile,⁸⁸ as their pro-democracy work is now considered a threat to China's national security.

Criminal Codes

Performance artists and musicians, whose work often incorporates or occupies public spaces, can be especially vulnerable to charges of **hooliganism**⁸⁹ or **vandalism**.⁹⁰ **Obscenity**⁹¹ and **blasphemy**⁹² laws are also frequently used to criminalize artists. Similarly, when a government truly wants to silence artists or activists, a common tactic is to accuse them of economic crimes, such as spurious tax- or embezzlement-related charges.⁹³ To guard against such treatment, it is crucial for artists to maintain financial security and legitimacy. When trouble arises, an error in your finances might be the reason a government that dislikes you is able to put you behind bars. For more on financial security, see "Preparing for Risk."

Ultimately, laws are ever-changing, as are those in power, so it's impossible to give comprehensive recommendations that apply across the globe. Instead, we suggest staying up to date on your country's attitudes toward freedom

of expression. To keep track of laws that might pose a threat to your artistic practice, you should familiarize yourself with organizations that maintain detailed, annual country reports, such as Freedom House, Freemuse, and Human Rights Watch.

Whether or not you actively criticize the government or call for social change in a hostile environment, there is a wide range of scenarios that could endanger your well-being. To prepare for them, it is essential to understand and assess the types of threats that you might encounter.

Hopefully those threats never materialize, but knowing what they look like is crucial to effectively and safely navigating them if they do.

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2

PREPARING FOR RISK

Whether or not you think you will be put at risk because of your practice, there are other important preemptive steps you can take, including minimizing your visibility as a target, setting up a plan and support network, and ensuring your financial security.

AVOID MAKING YOURSELF A TARGET

One of the simplest ways to minimize risk is to prevent yourself from becoming a target.⁹⁴ Following certain steps and protocols can lessen the likelihood that your artistic practice reaches the attention of hostile forces. Steps as simple as making your social media profiles private, curating the content that you show in public, and restricting your audience can give you some control over who engages with your art, helping you to avoid the wrong people. Unfortunately, reducing your visibility or going dark online could have profoundly debilitating effects on your career and income. This dilemma can be stark and painful: Keep working at the same level of scrutiny and you might face serious risk; lower your profile and your practice might suffer. Self-censorship inhibits many artists around the world. Instead of self-censoring for fear of retaliation, consider entering a “dormancy” period, staying below the radar for a limited amount of time. Such decisions require careful calculations, weighing the shortest possible time you might need to go quiet against the longest possible time you can stay safe without compromising your work.

In the end, most artists simply follow their instincts. If something gives you pause, don't ignore that feeling. Ask yourself: Why does this make me

uneasy? What about this artistic endeavor might be endangering my work or safety? If your gut is telling you that you might be putting yourself in a sticky situation, your gut is probably right. That said, even in situations that don't seem excessively risky, preparations never hurt. If you reach the conclusion that reducing the visibility of your work alone cannot avoid making you a target, you can instead prepare for potential repercussions, deciding in advance and in some detail on the most effective ways to navigate and, ultimately, counter them.

“We really need to anticipate and be prepared for the worst. If our film crew doesn't get in contact within a certain number of hours, what action do we take, and what emergency contact or help could we find to minimize the risk and the consequence? Also, we need to be prepared if someone encounters police: What do we say, what do we do, and what is the action we trigger if something really urgent happens? For all of those, we have plans in place, so we know that if something bad happens we could minimize the consequence.”

—Nanfu Wang, Chinese documentary filmmaker

SETTING UP A SUPPORT NETWORK

The experience of persecution can be not just risky but also isolating. One of the most important steps you can take to protect your mental and physical well-being is to establish a wide, diverse, and supportive community of peers.

If you are about to release or promote work that you believe could attract dangerous attention, you should notify this support network to make sure that it's ready and able to respond. Support networks can be deployed to counter hateful speech online,⁹⁵ to provide safe shelter, or to raise awareness about your case in your stead if you have been detained or kidnapped. Developing a support network is a process that is completely within your control, and it can help you feel empowered and encouraged. Identifying and building a community of **friends, colleagues, and like-minded professionals** in your field who will stand in solidarity with you—people you can trust and reliably turn to for assistance—can give you peace of mind during calmer times and defend you if trouble arises.⁹⁶

Beyond your immediate network, having a number of **international organizations**, including human rights, free expression, and artistic-freedom groups, available to turn to as part of your network is of critical importance.

You do not necessarily need strong personal relationships with these organizations, although, whenever possible we encourage fostering such relationships; merely having an array of organizations that can advocate for you, as well as direct contact information for each of them, must be a part of an artist's toolbox.⁹⁷

It is crucial to be able to easily communicate with your network once risk erupts. Many artists send simple messages notifying their contacts when they are attacked, arrested, or imprisoned. You should be able to easily and quickly reach them through a variety of communication channels, which should be **as secure as possible**. We recommend making sure that everyone in your network has encrypted messaging or email platforms (see the “Digital Safety” section for more specific recommendations). In urgent situations, such channels can include private messages on social media and email listservs that allow you to blast large numbers of people at once. You should also be able to quickly blast messages to the international organizations, or facilitate a way for your direct network of peers to do so, making the organizations immediately aware of your situation so they can dispatch aid.

MAKING A PLAN

With your support network, you should **develop an action plan**⁹⁸ to quickly and collectively respond to threats. Because no one knows more about your case than you, you must be prepared to be the locus and leader of this plan. At the same time, you must implement processes for your network to take action on your behalf in the event that you are detained or otherwise unavailable to take action.

Your plan might change over time as your adversaries and their tactics change. You must be flexible and make sure that everyone in your network knows about these changes as they happen.

When developing a plan, the first step is usually engaging your most intimate network: your family and attorney.⁹⁹ Sit down with them and evaluate your strengths and weaknesses and the resources at your disposal. Next you should evaluate your wider network, including peers, colleagues, like-minded professionals, and international organizations, to identify their assets and strengths. Each one can likely contribute something unique to your plan of action—a journalist friend might be able to cover your story, a peer might have studio space where you can store your artwork for safekeeping, an organization might have access to a safe house or urgent funds.

Most importantly, you should **plan ahead**. If you are about to, for example, share something online, release a song, or unveil a work of art that you

know might put you at risk, **contact your support network beforehand** and make action plans to prepare for a number of outcomes.

Such plans should address:

1. **Your safety and security:**
 - a. **If you are put at risk, what steps can your network take to keep you safe?**
 - b. **Can your network provide safe housing or temporary shelter?**
2. **Your family's safety and security:**
 - a. **If you are put at risk, what steps can your network take to keep your family safe?**
 - b. **Will your family be vocal about your case, and if so, how can they prepare for risk themselves?**
 - c. **Can your network provide a temporary or long-term safe haven and shelter to your family?**
3. **Your legal security and plan:**
 - a. **If you are placed at risk of legal threats, such as arrest or imprisonment, do you have legal counsel?**
 - b. **Can your support network mobilize legal support, including fundraising?**
 - c. **Can your support network be mobilized to help you post bail?**
 - d. **If you are taken to jail, does your network have a plan for how to reach you, share information about your case, and ensure your physical safety?**

PREPARING WITH YOUR LAWYER

When making a plan, it is crucial to consult an attorney or legal expert. While not everyone has access to legal representation, a number of organizations offer pro bono services, and countless online sources can educate you on your rights in your country and under international law. A lawyer will be able to identify areas of the law that can be invoked to protect you from those who threaten you. If you are arrested, it is vital to have an attorney at hand to help you navigate

the logistical realities of posting bail, ensuring your due process rights, and being represented throughout the criminal process. Integrating an attorney's expertise into your action plan will help ensure that you know your rights, know your country's laws, and know the legal recourse available to you. You should also discuss immigration possibilities with your lawyer, in case you need to obtain proper documentation and flee the country.

FINANCIAL SECURITY

As noted previously, when a government wants to silence artists or dissidents, the first place it will often turn to is their finances. Martin Luther King Jr. was targeted for tax-related crimes,¹⁰⁰ which eventually proved spurious, as a pretext for imprisoning him on grounds unrelated to his civil rights actions. More recently, Kirill Serebrennikov, a Russian theater director, was charged with embezzling money from his theater

company.¹⁰¹ He was ultimately convicted of this obviously false charge, and though his sentence—a fine, probation, and a three-year ban on leading any state-backed cultural institution—was lighter than expected, it was seen by some as a warning meant to chill others who contemplated cultural expression that could anger the powers that be.

When the chips are down, financial crimes are some of the easiest for hostile governments to pursue.

Ai Weiwei, one of the world's most prominent political artists, was arrested by Chinese authorities in April 2011 and held for 81 days without charges. He was and remains an outspoken critic of the Communist Party of China and has conducted extensive research into government corruption and human rights violations. Despite a lack of charges, officials eventually hinted at “economic crimes,” a tactic often used by governments to silence critics by going after their finances—claiming infractions like tax

evasion and fraud—instead of directly targeting their human rights activities.¹⁰²

ARC is not able to give financial advice, but we recommend taking action to ensure that, if a government wants to silence you, it cannot go after your finances.

Steps we recommend include:

- speaking to a financial adviser
- familiarizing yourself with your country's tax laws and making sure you are paying all applicable taxes
- keeping accurate, detailed, and consistent records of all financial transactions and expenses, especially those related to your artistic practice.

ESCAPE PLAN

While an escape plan should typically be activated only as a last resort, you and your network should prepare for any eventuality. If truly severe threats occur, you may be forced to go into hiding or flee your city, region, or country altogether, even if that means giving up some of your power as a voice of dissent and driver of change. When such drastic measures are required, having a plan already in place is crucial.

In drafting an escape plan with your network, be sure to address the following questions:

1. If staying in your country is safe, can someone in your network offer you safe housing in your city, in your region, or elsewhere in the country? How can you get from your location to the safe house swiftly and without being identified? What do you need from your network to make this plan a reality, and how can you activate it while making sure to, in turn, protect your network?
2. If staying in the country is not safe, can anyone in your network offer you safe housing elsewhere in your region of the world?

3. If you need to flee the country, do you have all the proper documentation? Any escape plan should factor in which countries you can travel to without a visa and which ones require visas.
 - a. Speak to your attorney about acquiring necessary documentation.
 - b. If you anticipate needing to flee the country and wish to go somewhere that requires a visa for entry, you should arrange for this visa beforehand, as the process of obtaining one can take a while.
 - c. If you intend to relocate for a long time but not permanently, make sure that your documents will not expire while you are abroad.

4. If you have to flee to another country, which ones are safest? Do any countries have relationships with your country's government that would allow them to extradite you?

5. If you have to flee to another country, can you go someplace where you speak the language?

6. Can an organization or host institution provide you with safe housing in your region or another country?

7. How will you sustain yourself once you are in hiding? Can your network support you, or will you need to withdraw savings or apply for urgent funding?

8. How long will your escape last for? Do you plan on returning, or relocating permanently? If the latter, do you need to consider seeking political asylum?

9. Does your family also need to escape? If so, how can they do so safely?

All the aforementioned questions will necessarily apply to family members looking to escape as well.

To ensure that your escape can be executed swiftly and safely, each of these questions should be discussed at length, thoroughly, and well in advance of any anticipated risk with your family, support network, and attorney.

YOU CAN NEVER BE TOO PREPARED

There are countless further steps that artists should take to prepare for risk. But in short, **you can never be too prepared**. If you fear there's a chance—even a remote one—that you might be put at risk, you should take all steps necessary to prepare for all possibilities, from the lowest to the highest threat. This way, no matter what happens, you will have a foundation to help you react. Support networks and action plans are two of the fundamental ways to lay this foundation and feel that you are ready and not alone when trouble arises. If you are ever looking for advice on how to prepare and/or want to make connections to help lay the groundwork for a contingency plan, you [can contact ARC](#) through our website.

NOTES

⁹⁴ [“Don't Let Yourself Get Involved in a Cyber Attack: Tips & Tricks”](#), National Home Security Alliance.

⁹⁵ [“Finding Supportive Cyber Communities”](#), Online Harassment Field Manual, PEN America.

⁹⁶ [“A Safety Manual for Political Cartoonists in Trouble”](#), CRNI, 2016, p. 6.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ [“Protection of Editorial Cartoonists”](#), *Cartooning for Peace*, 2019, p. 39, e.g.

⁹⁹ CRNI, p.7.

¹⁰⁰ Kelly Phillips Erb, [“Why Justice Matters: The Income Tax Trial Of Martin Luther King, Jr.”](#), *Forbes*, January 15, 2018.

¹⁰¹ Sadovskaya, Artists at Risk Connection.

¹⁰² [“Ai Weiwei”](#), PEN America.

3

DIGITAL SAFETY

New digital technologies are transforming the art world. Social media and music streaming channels are becoming the platforms on which artists publicly display and promote their work. But these platforms have also generated an array of threats to artists' rights and freedom of expression. Such threats can come from a variety of sources—state governments seeking to surveil and censor online spaces, abusive trolls seeking to intimidate artists into silence and self-censorship, hackers seeking to undermine or breach artists' content and data, and more.

One of the most effective things you can do to mitigate and prevent risk is to bolster your cybersecurity practices.

A large and growing number of ARC's cases concern digital safety, and many requests for urgent assistance deal with some sort of online harassment. In 2017, PEN America conducted [a survey](#) of over 230 journalists and writers in the United States and found that 67 percent of respondents had reacted severely to being targeted by online harassment—refraining from publishing their work, permanently deleting their social media accounts, fearing for their safety or the safety of their loved ones. In authoritarian countries, many artists and writers are frequently surveilled or attacked online by state agents and have had speech or online content, sometimes from their personal social media accounts, used against them in courts of law. Online harassment and security breaches can come in so many shapes and sizes, and via so many different mediums and platforms, that merely contemplating how to prepare for them can feel overwhelming. But being proactive is infinitely more effective than being reactive. The following section will provide tips, guidelines, and best practices for protecting yourself and your personal information from hacking, doxing, impersonation, and other forms of online harassment.

Because ARC does not specialize in digital security, and because there are far more comprehensive resources that offer specific recommendations, the steps outlined in this section are intentionally broad. Cybersecurity is such a dynamic and nuanced topic that platforms that are safe for an artist in one country or at one time may be dangerous for an artist in another country or at another time. For specific and continually updated

recommendations and information, we suggest looking at the “Further Resources” section below.

PASSWORDS

Establishing secure passwords is a simple yet crucial first step for protecting yourself online.

- Use a **password manager** to create and store passwords. To access your password manager, you will need to create a long and unique password. If you feel you are being targeted by a government or you feel you are at risk of being detained then you should regularly log out of your password manager as you would your other accounts.
- A strong password, like those generated by a password manager, **ideally has at least 16 characters** and contains a mix of upper- and lowercase letters, symbols, and numbers.
- Avoid using personal data, such as your date of birth or address, in your passwords. This information can easily be found on social media and online databases.
- Do not reuse passwords—create a unique password for each individual account.
- If you feel that you are being targeted by a government or that you are at risk of being detained, you should regularly log out of your password manager as you would your other accounts.
- Using **security questions** is another important way to protect yourself from

breaches to your accounts, but it is important to **pick difficult questions** and answers that aren't searchable on Google. The Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) [recommends](#) using a fictional or **randomly generated answer** in response to these questions.

Don't forget all the different accounts out there! Email, social media, banking, household expenses like electric and heating, credit cards, health insurance, television and movie subscriptions, and memberships are just some of the online accounts you might have.

Keep in mind: Even if the account itself is not that important to you, if it is breached, your private data (home address, credit card, etc.) could be exposed. If you have accounts that you no longer use, you should take steps to delete them, but remember to erase your personal information from the account first.

MULTIFACTOR AUTHENTICATION

Turn on **multifactor authentication (also known as two-step verification)** whenever possible.

This extra layer of security will help protect your accounts if your password has been compromised.

There are three types of multifactor authentication:

1. **Provide your cell phone number and get text messages with access codes**
2. **Download and install an authenticator app, which randomly generates secure codes**
3. **Get a physical security key.**

Any form of multifactor authentication is better than none. But if your threat comes from a government or a group with sophisticated tech capacity, we recommend using authenticator apps and physical security keys. These methods are more secure than text-message-based authentication, offering stronger protection against a phenomenon called SIM hijacking (see more information below).

EMAIL

Establishing a secure email account is crucial for protecting yourself from privacy breaches, unsolicited or threatening messages, and surveillance by state- or non-state agents.

Account Management and Security

- Choose your email address carefully. While many or even most people use email addresses that contain identifying information for business and commercial purposes, we strongly advise that artists **aim for an address that does not reveal identifying information**, like your name, ethnicity, age, religion, gender, sexual orientation, location, place of employment, or interests.
- Use a password manager and turn on multifactor authentication.
- **Keep your personal and professional emails separate.** If you use a specific email address for professional purposes, use a different one to communicate with friends and loved ones. Ideally, you would also have a third email for things like e-commerce, services, newsletters, etc.

- If you need to send messages containing sensitive information, whether personal or professional, consider sending them instead via [Signal](#), an end-to-end encrypted messaging app.

Handling Email Harassment

- **Beware of spam and phishing.**

Think carefully before opening unexpected or unsolicited emails.

Try to verify the identity of the sender via another channel, such as a website. Use the Preview option to view attached documents within the email instead of clicking on them or downloading them to your device.

- Ask your workplace, university, or volunteer affiliations **not to publish your contact info** in their online directories or on their “about” pages, to protect your email address from circulating and attracting unsolicited inquiries or spam.
- If you receive an abusive or threatening email, it is best **not to respond to or engage with the attacker** in any way.
- Screenshot or archive threatening messages to document them in case future threats appear, but do not forward the email—if you need to share it, copy and paste the content instead. Forwarding the email might cause you to lose important routing data encoded in the original email that law enforcement may require later on.
- If the behavior persists, you can **report the sender** to the platform that the email was sent from as well as where it was received, if different.
- To prevent future emails, **block the sender** by following platform-specific

guidelines or **set up an email filter** in the settings of your email account. The filter will redirect the abusive emails to a spam folder or alternate email account. However, it is important to periodically monitor filtered emails for threats or escalation; if this feels too painful or scary, consider asking a trusted ally to help.

SOCIAL MEDIA

People can learn a lot about you just by looking at your social media accounts. The following steps help ensure that as much of your private or sensitive information as possible is protected and visible only to those you know and trust. These precautions are especially relevant today, as artists increasingly turn to social media platforms to promote their work.

Be strategic about which platforms you use for which purposes:

- Separate your work accounts from your personal account. Avoid mixing personal and professional content in one place so that if an account is breached, the attacker will gain access to information from only one area of your life instead of all of it.
- If you’re using a platform for **personal reasons** (like sharing photos with friends and family on Facebook or Instagram), review your privacy settings and check who is able to see your posts. If you’re using a platform for **professional reasons** (such as displaying and promoting your work), you may decide to leave some of the settings public—in which case, **avoid including sensitive personal information** and images that can be used to verify your identity or

locate you, including your birthday, cell number, location, home address, and family members’ names and photos.

- **Pay close attention to privacy settings**

and select the most restrictive ones that you’re comfortable with. There are, of course, trade-offs—tightening privacy settings can impair audience engagement and reach. Keeping your profiles private ensures that your activity can be viewed only by people you’ve allowed to “friend,” “follow,” or “connect” with you, preventing strangers from accessing your profile simply by Googling your name. Ultimately, you’ll need to find the right balance that works for you.

Whenever possible, **choose user names that do not reveal any identifying information** about your name, ethnicity, age, religion, gender, sexual orientation, location, place of employment, or interests, and don’t use your email address as your user name. Make sure that basic account info such as your bio, which may be visible to non-followers even if your account is private, does not contain sensitive or private information.

INTERNET CONNECTIONS AND PUBLIC COMPUTER USE

Accessing your accounts from public devices, or using your own devices on public or insecure internet networks, can heighten the risk of breaches of your personal data and account info. It is important to understand the risks posed by public devices and networks and to protect yourself accordingly if you ever need to use them.

- When using your phone, tablet, or

laptop in public, **avoid connecting to free or public Wi-Fi sources**, as these connections can be monitored. If you do connect, avoid accessing sites that hold a lot of your personal information, such as banking websites. Ensure that you only visit websites that are encrypted—look for the padlock symbol in the top left of the browser.

- Protect your online browsing on public Wi-Fi by using a **virtual private network (VPN)**. A VPN will change your internet protocol (IP) address so it appears that you are navigating the internet from a different country. Be aware that the VPN company may be logging your browsing history, so you should choose a service that is not located in your own country and has transparent processes about what it is doing with your data.
 - Try to avoid using public computers located in an internet café, hotel, library, or government building. Such devices may be being monitored and/or are infected with malware. If you need to use a public computer, avoid logging into personal accounts, such as your email, and ensure that you clear your browsing history when you’re finished. If you do need to log into an account, make sure you log out of it and all services associated with it, and clear your browsing history. Do not save passwords on shared computers. Do not leave the computer unattended while logged into your accounts.
- ## MOBILE PHONE
- Securing the information and correspondence that you store on your mobile phone is crucial for protecting yourself from breaches, hacks, and threats.

Securing Your Phone

- **Always keep your phone locked** with a pass code to prevent others from accessing your information in the event that your phone is lost or stolen. Aim for a pass code that is long and complex (at least 6 characters, but at least 10 if you are concerned about state surveillance), avoiding recognizable phrases or the repetition of numbers. **Avoid using pattern-recognition** pass codes, as patterns can often be easily seen by holding the phone screen up to the light. Think carefully about using biometrics (fingerprints, facial recognition, etc.) as an option to open your device. While such functions add convenience, they can give people easier access to your device, for example at border crossings.

- **Keep your cell phone's operating system up to date.** Updates can protect your phone and the data it holds from newly discovered bugs and potential security threats. You can check to see if your phone's operating system is up-to-date in the phone's general settings, usually under System Updates or General Updates. Make sure that apps are also regularly updated.

- **Disable geolocation tracking**, commonly called Location Services, wherever possible in the settings on your phone and in individual apps. Disable location tracking in the settings on social media platforms as well, to ensure that you are not publicly broadcasting your location on social media.

- Keep in mind, however, that your **Wi-Fi and Bluetooth can also project location data** when they are on, so if you're seriously concerned about being surveilled or revealing your physical location, you may need to turn off

location tracking, Wi-Fi, and Bluetooth.

- Be sure to **stay alert when downloading anything**, including apps or files from the internet, to your phone. Only download things when absolutely necessary, and make sure that they are from a secure source that you know and trust.

Securing Your Data and Cellular Connection

- To protect the data on your cell phone, **resist the urge to connect your phone to public Wi-Fi sources**, which can often be insecure connections that can lead to breaches. Using your phone's cellular data connection is typically much more secure than Wi-Fi hot spots.

- Consider calling your cell phone provider and **requesting that a PIN number** be required to make any changes to your account. Not all cell phone providers offer this service, but it's worth asking. The PIN protects you from **SIM hijacking**, making it more difficult for hackers to hijack your cell number by routing traffic to a new SIM card that they control.

- Consider setting up a **virtual phone number** to use publicly (for work, to post online, etc.) See if your cell phone provider offers virtual phone numbers (some do so for free, some for an additional fee). Alternatively, Google Voice and MySudo are two independent services that may be available to you. You can use this virtual phone number as your primary number in order to protect your personal phone number. You can forward all calls to your personal device.

Securing Your Texts

When texting from your phone, consider using an **encrypted messaging platform**. As with encrypted emails, these platforms scramble the content of your text messages, making it much harder for a third party to read and surveil them. For an up-to-date list of encrypted messaging platforms to consider, see the Rory Peck Trust's [Digital Security Guide](#).

ENCRYPTING YOUR DATA AND DEVICES

Encryption is a great option for keeping your documents, emails, photos, and search queries private. Essentially, this process scrambles and transforms your data so it can't be read by prying eyes. **Full-disk encryption (FDE)** can protect your data in the event that your laptop is lost or stolen. A range of software services offer FDE. For an up-to-date list of encryption options to consider, see the Rory Peck Trust's [Digital Security Guide](#). Check to see if working with a full-disk encryption is legal in your country.

PROTECTING YOUR COMPUTER AND YOUR FILES

- To protect against newly discovered bugs or security threats, it is crucial to **keep your operating system and software up to date**. To protect against fake updates, which hackers sometimes employ to trick users into downloading viruses or disclosing log-in credentials, always check directly with your computer's operating system by navigating to system settings.

- To secure your files, **make a habit of cleaning out your hard drive**. Regularly deleting old files and apps that you no longer need can make you less of a target for hackers. If you need a record of something, consider backing it up on your personal computer, a flash drive, or an external hard drive and deleting it from your work laptop or mobile device. When possible, use password protection to keep sensitive files secure, even if they are only on your personal laptop.

- **Stay alert when downloading anything**, including software or files from the internet, to your computer. Only download things when absolutely necessary, and make sure that they are from a secure source that you know and trust.

- Cameras and webcams can also be hacked and accessed remotely, so it is a good idea to **cover the cameras on your devices** when they are not in use. Consider using a sticker, a Post-it note, or tape that can be easily removed if you use your camera frequently.

PROTECTING AGAINST MALWARE

Malicious software, or malware, is a program or code that seeks to harm your computer system or access your personal data. Malware is typically activated by clicking on a spam link or accidentally agreeing to download unwanted and unfamiliar software. It can frequently be found in email, SMS, or social media messages. To protect against it, exercise caution when clicking on links and accepting software downloads and make sure that they come from sources that you know and

trust. Avoid synchronizing your devices if you suspect that one is infected with malware, as the others can become compromised, too. For up-to-date information on protecting yourself from malware, see the Rory Peck Trust's [Digital Security Guide](#).

CHOOSING SECURITY SOFTWARE

While preventive best practices are important to protect your computer from malware, sometimes it can still find its way in—which is why it's a good idea to invest in security software as an extra layer of protection against viruses. Consider installing a firewall—a security system that establishes a barrier between the internet and your secure internal hard drive, allowing it to block untrusted or unwarranted downloads or files. For more comprehensive protection, you can opt for an antivirus security package. Remember to keep these up to date by updating regularly.

WHEN TO SEEK LEGAL RECOURSE

Because laws governing online harassment vary widely from country to country, no online resource can replace the advice of a local lawyer. If you are unable to explore legal representation, a range of organizations can give you guidance on digital rights, cyberlaw, and more. See the “Finding Assistance” section for advice on getting legal aid.

To help you decide whether to seek legal recourse, you should familiarize yourself with the laws governing cybercrime,

cyber-related speech, and harassment in your country or locality. In some countries, it is hard to make the case that online harassment constitutes a threat, while others have robust anti-harassment and hate speech laws.

No matter what, we recommend documenting online abuse, including threats (as outlined in the section on “Documenting Risks”). Proper documentation may aid your efforts to involve law enforcement if and when you choose to do so. Involving law enforcement itself can be intimidating and overwhelming, and in many countries it may not be a safe, viable, or helpful alternative. Sometimes a hateful online message falls within the realm of protected speech, and the law doesn't apply. Sometimes law enforcement is not adequately equipped to respond to online harassment. And sometimes law enforcement—or other state agencies and individuals—is directly involved in the harassment. That said, while filing a police report does not always result in effective action, creating a paper trail that proves a “course of conduct” (i.e., that the online harassment is not an isolated incident but a concerted effort) can be critically important to pursuing legal action. Trust your instincts about whether it is safe to engage with law enforcement.

Whether you feel you can engage law enforcement or not, consider seeking additional support. Options might include contacting organizations that deal with issues of online freedom, mobilizing a community of your peers to support you online, and using features built into social media platforms to block, mute, restrict, or report harmful content. You can find more information on how to prepare

for, respond to, and seek support for online abuse in PEN America's [Online Harassment Field Manual](#). Hopefully, as online threats become more visible and awareness rises, greater protections for artists will be put in place around the world.

FURTHER RESOURCES

If you need urgent assistance with digital security issues, contact Access Now's [Digital Security Helpline](#), with 24/7 support available in nine languages: English, Spanish, French, German, Portuguese, Russian, Tagalog, Arabic, and Italian. They aim to respond to all requests within two hours.

ARC does not specialize in digital security, and all the information in this section has been gleaned and adapted from a number of highly detailed, continually updated, and accurate resources that we highly recommend you consider in greater depth if you are hoping to bolster your digital security.

These include:

- Consumer Reports' [Security Planner](#)
- Front Line Defenders and Tactical Technology Collective's [Security in a Box](#)
- Global Cyber Alliance's [Cybersecurity Toolkit for Journalists](#)
- PEN America's [Online Harassment Field Manual](#) and [Threat Assessment](#) (for writers and journalists)
- Rory Peck Trust's [Digital Security Guide](#)
- Electronic Frontier Foundation's [Surveillance Self-Defense guide](#) and [Threat Modeling](#).

4

DOCUMENTING THREATS

No matter how many precautions you might take, risk is sometimes unavoidable, and when it happens you want to be as well-equipped as possible to respond to it. The first thing to do when you believe you have been put at risk is to conduct a threat analysis, assessing the nature of the threat against you.

THREAT ANALYSIS: WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THE THREAT AGAINST YOU?

Because artists can face risks from many perpetrators and for various reasons, it is crucial to understand the nature of the threat against you.¹⁰³ You can more easily do so by familiarizing yourself with the kinds of risks experienced by other artists.

Such an assessment requires asking yourself a number of questions, including:

1. What is the source of the threat? Who is threatening you? Is it a state or non-state agent?
2. Why are you being threatened?
3. How are you receiving threats? Is there anything you can do now to reduce the ability of the perpetrator to threaten you?
4. What is the threat? Could it escalate, and if so, how?
5. Has there been a pattern of threats over time?

6. Who is the threat directed at: only you, or also at your family, your colleagues, or other artists working on similar topics?

- a. Is there anyone else you know or know of who has experienced a similar threat?
- b. What is the likelihood that this threat can or will be put into action?

7. If the threat is from a non-state actor, is there a possibility of protection or redress from the police or authorities? Or will involving law enforcement create greater challenges?

Answering these questions will allow you to more easily determine what types of assistance you should look for and can help guide you toward past examples of artists at risk that might serve as a roadmap.

After conducting a threat analysis, your first priority should be to **document your threats wherever and whenever possible**. When assessing your case, the number one request from a lawyer

or human rights professional trying to help you will be for robust, thorough, and accurate evidence that you experienced risk. The more information you can provide, the more swiftly they will be able to assess your case and activate

assistance. The following section moves sequentially through stages of risk, from non-physical kinds, including online and verbal harassment, all the way to imprisonment and torture.

DOCUMENTING ONLINE HARASSMENT

[Documenting online harassment](#) is critically important to addressing it. **Preserving all evidence** provides a record of what's happened, tracks available information about the perpetrators, and alerts you and others to patterns of abuse and escalations. While **saving hyperlinks and taking screenshots** of abusive emails, voicemails, and texts on social media can force you to relive the harms inflicted on you, such documentation is a necessary step—a prerequisite for alerting your employer, reporting abuse to law enforcement, or pursuing legal action.¹⁰⁴

Make sure to save all relevant evidence and not just information that paints you in a favorable light. For example, if you contributed offensive dialogue or heated language to an online exchange that you're planning to document, it will enhance your credibility if you include those aspects of the exchange along with the rest.

Documentation can be time-consuming, draining, and painful, so consider enlisting a trusted ally to help you. Smartphones and computers have made screen grabbing a quick two-click process.

The following links explain how to take **screenshots** on various operating systems:

- computers with [Mac](#) operating systems
- computers with [Windows](#) operating systems
- computers with [Chrome](#) operating systems
- computers using [Linux](#) operating systems
- iPhones and other [Apple](#)-operated devices
- Androids and other [Google](#)-operated devices.

Once taken, all screenshots should be saved in easy-to-access folders.

If the online harassment is repetitive, ongoing, or severe, consider creating a log to record specific information, including the following:

- **date and time**
- **type of electronic communication** (direct message, posted image, social media comment, etc.)
- **name of platform**
- **any available geographic information**
- **nature of the online incident** (a threat of sexual violence, a racially motivated attack, etc.)

Social media platforms have a number of built-in features, such as blocking, muting, and reporting, that help users respond to abuse. These features should be used only after you've completed documentation, as they run the risk of erasing the incriminating messages from the platform. **Blocking the harasser** will prevent both you and the harasser from communicating and

viewing each other's content. Muting allows you to hide specific abusive content—but only from yourself. While helpful, blocking and muting have some drawbacks. Because blocking abusers allows them to see that they've been blocked, it can provoke them and escalate the abuse. Muting can hide the escalation or other harmful tactics from you, but hiding the full nature and extent of abuse can also make it harder for you to assess risk. Asking a trusted ally to monitor messages or mentions associated with your username can help. Finally, once you've documented the abusive content, be sure to **flag or report** it directly to the platform—a feature that's usually built directly into the interface.

PEN America's Online Harassment Field Manual provides more detailed information about [blocking and muting](#), as well as [reporting](#), abusive content.

DOCUMENTING VERBAL HARASSMENT AND THREATS

There are a number of steps you can take to document verbal harassment such as hate speech, threats of physical

violence, or death threats. If you receive verbal threats over the phone, make sure to do the following

whenever possible:

- **log the time and date of calls**
- **log the phone numbers**
- **save voicemails**
- **record and save the conversations if possible. If not possible, take notes on what was said.**

Receiving ongoing verbal harassment over the phone can be emotionally

taxing and scary. We highly recommend documenting these threats whenever possible, but if you reach a point where you feel the need to stop the threatening calls, you may be able to **block the caller**. Nevertheless, we emphasize that you should take this step only after documenting the harassment in some way.

DOCUMENTING PHYSICAL HARASSMENT AND ATTACKS

Being physically attacked can be terrifying and emotionally and physically debilitating. Documenting the attacks after the fact can seem like the last thing you want to do. Nevertheless, forcing yourself to take measures like writing down the date and time and taking photographs of yourself might severely reduce the likelihood of a recurrence and increase the likelihood of successful recourse. As with all forms of risk, make sure you keep track of when it happens in a log, recording the **date, time, place, manner of attack, and motivation**, if it can be determined. If the physical assault has left visible marks on your

body, we strongly suggest **taking photographs of yourself**, logging the date and time they were taken, and storing these photos in a safe, accessible place such as the cloud.

You should also take measures—as safely as possible—to document **who the perpetrators are**. If it is possible to take photographs, all the better, but we strongly advise against doing so if it might risk provoking the perpetrators. Instead, if you experience physical assault, you should take time afterward to write down all the identifying features of your attackers that you can recall,

including their **size, their appearance, their voices, how many were present, and what they said.**

Sometimes physical attacks can come from police and state agents themselves. Any evidence, including photographic evidence, of police

mistreatment should be recorded immediately upon your release, as soon as you have access to a method of documentation. These pictures can be part of a forensic report that can be presented in court and in front of international law institutions.

DOCUMENTING ARREST, DETENTION, OR IMPRISONMENT

Being arrested, detained, or imprisoned for your art can leave you feeling helpless, but there are actions you can take to document your situation and control your fate. More than other threats, documenting arrest or imprisonment may require the support of family, peers, or colleagues.

If you are arrested, make sure to keep track of:

- **when and where the arrest occurred (time, place, location)**
- **why the arrest occurred—was there a warrant? If not, what was the context and impetus for your arrest?**
- **who carried out the arrest**

- **whether there were any witnesses.**

If you are detained, do your best to identify the **location** of your detention as well as the **length**, the **circumstances**, and the **events that transpired** during your detention. Sometimes you may experience physical assault, even torture, during your detention. If so, make sure to keep track, as much as possible, of when, why, and how the assault occurred.

If at any point you are formally charged, make sure you or someone close to you is able to keep records of all legal documents related to your case. If you are called to court, **keep track of which**

court, which judge is presiding, and which prosecutors are on your case.

If you are formally sentenced and imprisoned, make sure to keep a record of your sentence on file.

Unfortunately, maintaining such records for yourself may be nearly impossible during the draining and demoralizing experience of navigating jails, court hearings, and prisons. But many legal systems allow you at least some form of communication with the outside world. If so, make sure to dispatch all relevant information to a trusted source, including both an attorney and peers in your network.

Sometimes such communications are not possible or are actively prevented by state agents. In such cases it is crucial to have a **safety network** that can be mobilized to document your situation on your behalf (as outlined in the previous section on “Setting Up a Support Network”).

Make a security plan with your network, addressing the following points:

- **If you are arrested, who will log relevant information?**
- **If jailed, who will monitor your jailing, keep records, and make decisions on issues such as bail and counsel?**
- **If you go through formal proceedings, make sure your legal team and/or network is keeping records of all court documents.**

While navigating such legal proceedings can be immensely difficult, making the effort to maintain detailed records will increase the likelihood of receiving reprieve and justice down the line.

How to react if you're arrested: Arrest can be disorienting, terrifying, and confusing, often intentionally so. While your rights vary from country to country, some recommendations hold true across the board. First of all, try to remain calm. Getting angry and challenging your captors can give them a reason to treat you violently or add trumped-up charges. Try not to answer any questions or sign anything before first speaking with your attorney. Above all, follow the advice of Masha Alekhina of Pussy Riot: “Know your rights.” If you know your rights before being arrested, you stand a far better chance of surviving your arrest without further endangering yourself. Read more about Alekhina's case in the “Artists' Voices” section.

NOTES

¹⁰³ “New Protection Manual for Human Rights Defenders,” Protection International, 2009, p. 41.

¹⁰⁴ [Online Harassment Field Manual](#), PEN America.

5

FINDING ASSISTANCE

After documenting the threats against you, the next step is to assess whether you should seek assistance. Assistance can take a variety of forms at varying degrees, from raising awareness to legal recourse to temporary or long-term shelter and exile.

WHEN TO SEEK ASSISTANCE

Assessing whether to seek assistance requires making a calculation¹⁰⁵ as to:

- the severity of the threats
- the likelihood of their abeyance, continuation, or escalation
- the effort involved in seeking relieve
- the likelihood that assistance would alleviate risk.

The nonprofit group [Protection International](#) outlines a range of actions that human rights defenders can take when put at risk, and the same holds true for artists.¹⁰⁶

These actions include:

- accepting the risk as it stands, because you feel able to live with it
- reducing the risk by seeking assistance to increase security and minimize threats
- sharing the risk with organizations and other stakeholders who might be able to raise the visibility of your case
- deferring the risk by changing your creative practice so that it might be less likely to incur backlash
- escaping the risk by seeking temporary safe haven or shelter, or even going into exile.

The **acceptance and deferral** of risk typically do not require assistance from a third party. If you choose such options, we nevertheless *strongly recommend*

documenting as much as possible, in the event that the risk recurs or escalates. This way, you will be better prepared to identify a pattern of risk and seek more serious support.

Alternatively, if the risk is severe enough that you wish to **reduce, share, or escape** it, your best course of action may be to contact organizations that are able to offer urgent support, advocacy, or relocation and safe haven. Try to stay strong—while you may feel more isolated than ever, there is a vast world of organizations with resources that may be able to help you. Still, navigating the field of assistance can feel isolating and overwhelming in their own right if you don't know where to turn. Many artists, for example, have never worked with human rights organizations, and vice versa. This section aims to give an overview of the field of resources that exist for artists and to outline some of the most common forms of assistance that artists at risk look for.

Timing Is Everything

Above all else, when finding assistance, it is crucial to act quickly. We know how exhausting and taxing the experience of risk can be. Trying to find support may be the last thing you feel you have the energy for. Nevertheless, many organizations' mandates have time limits on when they can offer support. Freedom House, for instance, can only

assist human rights defenders who have experienced risk in the past three months. The further back experience of risk goes, the less likely you will be to receive support. Moving swiftly will give you the best chance of receiving aid.

Remember: Artists Are Human Rights Defenders

Although the field of human rights has been changing, in some cases the onus is still on artists to make the case that they should be classified as **human rights defenders**, or agents who act in defense of human rights and thus qualify for assistance. When contacting a human rights organization, it is crucial to “market” yourself as a human rights defender—in some ways, this status should be stressed more emphatically than your work as an artist. Some organizations typically want to know, for instance, that you are a human rights defender who uses your artistic practice to defend human rights, not an artist who makes art about human rights. Fair or not, presenting yourself properly will vastly increase your chances of finding support from human rights organizations.

“Cultural rights defenders. . . deserve the same level of attention and protection as other human rights defenders. . . . Many people may be cultural rights defenders, or function as such, without necessarily describing themselves in those terms. These include anthropologists, archaeologists, archivists, artists, athletes, cultural heritage professionals and defenders, cultural workers, curators and museum workers, educators, historians, librarians, media producers, public space defenders, scientists, staff and directors of cultural institutions, writers, defenders of cultural diversity in accordance with international standards and those promoting intercultural understanding and dialogue.”¹⁰⁷
— *Karima Bennoune, UN Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights*

USING ARC'S DATABASE

ARC is connected to a global network of more than 800 organizations that work to defend artists at risk. Artists who wish to explore the breadth of resources available to them can begin by perusing ARC's searchable database. From the [Find Help](#) page, this public database offers easy tools that can tailor searches by regions of assistance, demographics, types of support, disciplines supported, and more. When an artist finds an organization that is of interest, they'll see descriptions of the organization, guidelines for its assistance, and links to further information, application forms, and contact information.

You can also get in touch with ARC directly: through our [contact page](#), which allows artists to write to the ARC team using a highly secure, end-to-end encrypted form; through referrals from ARC's network partners; and through ARC's social media channels (@atriskartists) and general email inbox. If you are an artist in a sensitive situation, ARC strongly encourages you to get in touch via the encrypted contact

page on the ARC website, as this is the safest method to communicate with us. Once an artist contacts us, someone will respond within 48 hours and share a longer intake form, which will request detailed information about the persecution you have suffered. As outlined in the "Documenting Risk" section of this guide, the more information you give us, the more effectively we can serve you.

Once ARC receives this information, our team assesses your needs and determines which organizations can best address them. ARC then connects you directly to these organizations, supporting you throughout the process by helping you fill out and submit applications, advocating for you directly during the organizations' internal review, and generally acting as a facilitator to help remove some of the coordination burden from each party. Even after you receive assistance, ARC continues to help you navigate newfound problems, identify further support, or excel in your current situation.

WHO CAN PROVIDE SUPPORT?

While artists may feel that they are confined to the art world when asking for help, ARC has found that human rights organizations tend to be more effective and proactive than arts organizations at supporting artists at risk. That said, various types of groups can play a useful role, among them artistic freedom organizations, governments or governmental organizations, and international mechanisms.

HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS

In recent years, there has been a major shift in the way that traditional human rights organizations recognize and engage with artists and cultural practitioners. More and more, artists are being mainstreamed as "human rights defenders," even when they do not necessarily identify as such.¹⁰⁸ Because art often expresses cultural identity, bears witness to inhumanity, and calls for social change, it is often inherently involved with human rights defense. This means that artists at risk are frequently eligible for support from organizations that in the past would serve only traditional human rights defenders or victims of human rights violations.

Protection or Emergency Programs

A wide array of human rights organizations around the world have what are typically called "protection programs" or "emergency assistance programs" for human rights defenders. Whenever researching a human rights organization, be on the lookout for these phrases—such programs are typically the branch of the organization that disburses assistance to artists at risk.

Some prominent human rights organizations that have actively supported artists at risk in recent years include:

- [Agir Ensemble pour les Droits de l'Homme \(AEDH\)](#)
- [Freedom House](#)
- [Front Line Defenders](#)
- [ProtectDefenders.eu](#)
- [Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights.](#)

Many human rights organizations have region-specific protection programs. These can be good options if you meet their regional criteria, as they focus on a narrower range of applicants. (See the appendix for a comprehensive list.) Some organizations work together, operating as a sort of consortium of partners. For instance, ProtectDefenders.eu and Freedom House collaborate with a

number of human rights organizations around the world, and artists who apply to them for support may be redirected to another organization within their network.

When contacting such organizations, it is crucial to review their criteria and determine whether they require a **sponsor or partner organization**. Many organizations require artists or human rights defenders to apply through, or with the support of, a third-party organization to help them more efficiently verify each case. In some cases, it may not even be possible to apply for support without the backing of a known and verifiable organization's sponsorship.

Humanitarian Relief

Rather than offering assistance specifically to human rights defenders, a number of human rights organizations have assistance programs for anyone who has suffered a human rights violation. [Amnesty International](#), for instance, has a global relief fund. If you feel that you do not meet the criteria for a human rights defender, you may instead be able to make the case that you suffered a violation at the hands of a state or private parties.

ARTS OR ARTISTIC FREEDOM ORGANIZATIONS

An artist in trouble might first be inclined to turn to arts organizations for support. But the truth is that while there are numerous arts institutions around the world, the universe of those that serve artists at risk is notably smaller. More traditional arts institutions might be able to support artists through solidarity or advocacy, but for tangible assistance

artists are better off contacting organizations dedicated to artistic freedom and general freedom of expression.

Arts Organizations and Institutions

Traditional arts institutions, such as museums and galleries, do not consistently support artists at risk.¹⁰⁹ If you think an arts institution might be able to help you, it is best to do some research to confirm whether this is, in fact, the case. Other traditional arts organizations, such as residency spaces, might help artists looking to relocate. But such programs do not necessarily expedite their application process for artists who are imperiled. While applying for residencies is a wonderful avenue to pursue for temporary respite from your current location, residency programs vary in their application processes, and their timelines may not meet your sense of urgency. We encourage carefully reviewing each organization's procedures to clarify such issues.

Artistic Freedom Organizations

While there is plenty of room for arts institutions to increase their support for imperiled artists, there is a growing field of organizations dedicated to defending artistic freedom. Such organizations specifically aim to straddle the line between art and human rights, working to defend artistic freedom by supporting artists whose creative rights have been infringed upon. While this field is smaller than the human rights field, because their programs are designed expressly to help artists at risk, we often recommend turning to them first.

Writers' Organizations

Alongside organizations dedicated specifically to artistic freedom, there

is an even more well-established field of support for writers and journalists at risk. If you are an artist whose work has a significant writing component, or if you practice journalism, such organizations might be worth pursuing. The PEN network, including [PEN International](#), [PEN America](#), and other regional PEN centers around the world, has small assistance programs for creative writers and journalists at risk. If you are interested in support specifically for journalism, we recommend the organizations that make up the [Journalists in Distress](#) (JiD) network, a consortium of groups that coordinate with one another to assist persecuted journalists. Please note, however, that most of these organizations will only consider supporting you if writing or journalism is your primary practice, makes up a significant portion of your work, or is in some way connected to the threats you experienced.

GOVERNMENTS AND GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Many governments have their own programs or agencies that deal with human rights, including artistic freedom.¹¹⁰ For example, many countries' departments of state, or variations thereof, have international human rights programs that might be able to offer relief or support. These can vary by government and by who is in power within a government, so we recommend that you explore state-based options independently by looking into a country's state department or ministry of foreign affairs.

INTERNATIONAL MECHANISMS

There are a number of international mechanisms and institutions that at-risk artists can turn to for help. Most often, these mechanisms help with public and private advocacy and occasionally material reprieve. For example, Special Rapporteurs—-independent experts working on thematic issues or “special procedures” for the United Nations Human Rights Council—operating in various fields accept “formal submissions” related to their mandates from those who have suffered work-related human rights violations.

If you feel that your risk amounts to a violation of your freedom of expression, you can formally [submit a complaint](#) to the UN [Special Rapporteur](#) on the promotion and protection of freedom of opinion and expression. Another potentially helpful official is the [Special Rapporteur](#) in the field of cultural rights, who focuses on the right to culture, artistic expression, cultural heritage, and more.

Making a formal complaint to a UN rapporteur activates procedures that can, according to the UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, “intervene directly with Governments on allegations of violations of human rights that come within their mandates by means of letters which include urgent appeals and other communications. The intervention can relate to a human rights violation that has already occurred, is ongoing, or which has a high risk of occurring.”¹¹¹ A formal complaint is a great option if you want an influential international body to call attention to your case. Bear in mind, however, that publicity that puts pressure on your government is

not always in your best interest.

Before submitting a special procedure, you should assess the benefits and challenges that it might bring.

Many other international mechanisms exist to support artists who have experienced human rights violations, including:

- [Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\)](#)
- [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees \(UNHCR\)](#)
- [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation \(UNESCO\)](#)
- [European Instrument for Democracy & Human Rights \(EIDHR\)](#).

TYPES OF SUPPORT AVAILABLE

Many types of assistance are available to artists at risk. Usually an artist won't need just one—for instance, if relocating, an artist might need both language classes and an emergency grant for living costs, or both advocacy and publishing opportunities to raise awareness of the artist's plight and work. Over the course of ARC's existence, we have found that the most commonly requested forms of assistance are emergency grants, legal assistance, temporary or long-term relocation, and advocacy. This section provides a short overview of each category, why you might want to pursue it, and several prominent examples of organizations offering such support.

EMERGENCY GRANTS

Sometimes, when an artist is threatened, the simplest response involves financial assistance. Many organizations give urgent emergency grants to artists or human rights defenders whose rights have been violated. Often such grants go to those who have experienced risk as a result of their work, as opposed to those who have suffered human rights violations generally.

Emergency grants can range from small disbursements meant to provide short-term help to large disbursements of medium- or long-term support. Grants can typically cover a range of costs, but some of those most frequently covered include legal costs and trial monitoring,

prison visits, medical costs associated with persecution, relocation costs, equipment replacement, physical or digital security, and dependent support.¹¹² Some, but not all, grants also offer general humanitarian support.¹¹³

Always check the criteria of emergency grants before applying for them, to ensure that you are eligible and that the costs you need covered fall within the scope of the grant. Additionally, many grants are time sensitive—you are eligible for only a certain period of time following your experience of risk. If you think you will need financial assistance, don't wait.

Prominent organizations that disburse emergency grants to eligible artists at risk include:

- [Al Mawred Al Thaqafy \(Arab countries only\)](#)
- [European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights](#)
- [Freedom House](#)
- [Freemuse](#)
- [Front Line Defenders](#)
- [International Federation for Human Rights \(FIDH\)](#)
- [Protect Defenders.eu](#)
- [Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights.](#)

As noted above, there are also many grants specific to those who come under attack for their writing or journalistic practice, including PEN centers and members of the [Journalists in Distress](#) network.

LEGAL ASSISTANCE

When an artist is imprisoned or prosecuted, legal assistance can be vital. The difference between good and bad counsel, or being able to afford such expenses as prison costs, visits, and trial monitoring, can radically affect the outcome of a case.

Many organizations that offer emergency grants, including a number of those mentioned above, provide funds specifically meant to cover legal costs. These grants tend to be applicable only when a case has been launched against an artist, not initiated by an artist.

Some organizations that cover legal costs include:

- [European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights](#)
- [Freedom House](#)
- [Front Line Defenders](#)
- [International Federation for Human Rights \(FIDH\)](#)
- [Protect Defenders.eu](#)
- [Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights.](#)

Many organizations around the world offer direct, pro bono legal assistance and support to artists or human rights defenders at risk. Many law firms around the world also offer pro bono services. If you have a relationship with a particular firm, it is always worth checking to see whether it can provide you with free assistance or advice.

Other organizations that may offer legal services include:

- [Agir Ensemble pour les Droits de l'Homme](#)
- [Association for Civil Rights](#)
- [Comic Book Legal Defense Fund](#)
- [FORUM-ASIA](#)
- [Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa \(IHRDA\)](#)
- [Media Legal Defense Initiative](#)
- [Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights.](#)

Beyond prison and trial assistance, artists may seek immigration assistance. For more on organizations offering immigration-related legal assistance for artists, see the Asylum or Refugee Status section.

RELOCATION

When all else fails, artists may have to consider temporary or long-term relocation.¹¹⁴ Sometimes relocation provides a much-needed respite from threats or attention, a cooling-off period. But it can also be a wrenching experience, pursued when you have no alternative but to flee your home or country and give up the life you have known. In such cases, staying put might mean risking assault, arrest and imprisonment, or even death, and leaving for an indefinite period of time might be the only safe option.

Undertaken as a last resort, relocation entails a number of complications and may require radically altering your life indefinitely.¹¹⁵ It also tends to be one of the hardest and slowest forms of assistance to receive.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, if you find yourself considering relocation, there are several options to consider.

Relocation programs

Numerous programs around the world deal specifically with relocation. Some are expressly for artists at risk,¹¹⁷ while others are for human rights defenders¹¹⁸ more generally, although, remember: *Artists are human rights defenders*; you just have to make the case for yourself.

Relocation programs typically accept applicants who go through a rigorous vetting process, assessing both the caliber of work and the veracity and severity of threats.¹¹⁹ Once accepted, artists can be placed in any number of locations around the world, often as “fellows” or “residents,” for allotted periods of time. Once these periods end, some programs offer follow-up or post-fellowship support.¹²⁰

Some relocations are closer to your home country than others.¹²¹ While we recommend relocating within your country or region whenever possible to minimize emotional and psychological upheaval, the majority of relocation programs accept applicants internationally but operate in the Global North.¹²²

If you are an artist hoping to relocate through a structured program, some of the most prominent ones that offer both international and regional assistance are:

International

- [Artist Protection Fund](#)
- [Artists at Risk—Perpetuum Mobile](#)
- [International Cities of Refuge Network \(ICORN\)](#)
- [Martin Roth Initiative](#)
- [Shelter City—Justice and Peace](#)
- [City of Asylum \(Ithaca, Pittsburgh, Detroit\)](#)—application through ICORN

- [Brown University International Writers Project](#)
- [Harvard Scholars at Risk](#)
- [Scholars at Risk](#)
- [Scholar Rescue Fund](#)

Regional

- [Africa Human Rights Network — AHRN](#)
- [African Defenders—Hub Cities](#)
- [Al Mawred al Thaqafy \(Arab Countries—offers relocation funding but not hosting\)](#)

Many more organizations without formal relocation programs nonetheless earmark **funding specifically for relocation**. Applying for such funds typically requires identifying a host institution that will support you in a third country. This kind of relocation requires much more logistical coordination on your part, as rather than participating in a structured fellowship, you are responsible for things like finding your own host, developing a budget, and arranging for immigration.

One of the best examples is ProtectDefenders.eu’s [EU Human Rights Defenders Relocation Platform \(EUTRP\)](#), a global platform of national, regional, and international organizations that provide temporary relocation services for human rights defenders at risk. In addition to relocation-specific funds, the platform offers a wide range of **mobility grants**,¹²³ intended to help foster international cultural exchange by funding international travel for artists. Although not typically linked to risk, funds like the [Prince Claus Fund](#) and [ASEF 360](#) offer many grants that artists can apply for to fund travel and cultural exchange.

In addition, artists are fortunate that

countless **artist residency** programs around the world accept international applicants, are fully funded, and offer artistic support that human rights defenders programs do not. But those programs are not necessarily attuned to issues of risk and might not accept candidates solely on the basis of persecution. Furthermore, because they are not structured around the needs of at-risk artists, they may not be able to relocate artists urgently, even in emergency situations. For artist residencies, consider browsing databases of residencies such as [TransArtists](#) and [Res Artis](#).

Asylum or Refugee Status

When you aren’t relocating through a structured program, the logistics and difficulties of navigating immigration and customs law may fall to you. Procedures for acquiring visas or legal status vary widely by country.¹²⁴ Some have more restrictive laws, while others are much more lenient—but not necessarily safe to immigrate to.

Once you are in a new place, if you decide that you need to extend your stay for the long term, you may consider seeking political asylum, a process with its own ins and outs that can take a long time and can drastically restrict your ability to travel. When applying for visas, asylum, or citizenship, having adequate counsel and legal representation will greatly help your chances. Grappling with immigration courts without support or advice is incredibly difficult. Whenever possible, we recommend seeking professional legal expertise. Sometimes this help will cost money, but many organizations and law firms around the world also offer pro bono immigration services.

Some that do so include:

- [Artistic Freedom Initiative](#) (immigration to the United States only)
- [CDH Fray Matías](#) (immigration within Latin America only)
- [Cimade](#) (immigration to France only)
- [Consonant](#) (immigration to UK only)
- [International Refugee Assistance Project](#)—IRAP
- [International Rescue Committee](#)—IRC
- [Tamizdat](#) (performing artists only)

The websites of these organizations and others, including [aa-e](#), [the Agency of Artists in Exile](#), also have robust resources pages that offer useful information about immigrants' and artists' rights.

Support for Artists in Exile

If you are forced into exile, the experience can be isolating, emotionally taxing, and disorienting.¹²⁵ Fortunately, a number of organizations around the world exist for the sole purpose of supporting artists in exile, helping them to meet creative communities, learn about local opportunities, acclimate to their new homes, and more. If you are in a third country and are looking for support, consider contacting the following organizations:

- [Agency of Artists in Exile \(aa-e\)](#)
- [Aid A—Aid for Artists in Exile](#)
- [ArteEast](#) (Middle East and North Africa region only)
- [Exiled Writers Ink](#)

ADVOCACY

Around the world, there are countless organizations dedicated solely to

advocacy, which is often the simplest and most effective way to help artists at risk. The release of press statements, petitions, open letters, and the like can raise awareness of human rights violations and lead to media coverage—which can in turn lead to widespread pressure from the public. Advocacy can lean on government or political leaders, and advocacy organizations can coordinate campaigns or concerted efforts around a cause.

If you experience risk as a direct result of your creative expression, getting in touch with an advocacy organization can publicize your plight. If you are arrested, advocates can apply regional or international pressure to the authorities who arrested you. Some advocacy occurs behind closed doors, such as in private letters from government leaders.¹²⁶

Before contacting an advocacy organization, you should determine whether raising awareness will help or hinder your case. Publicizing a human rights violation is often one of the most effective and swift avenues to reprieve—but it can also backfire, provoking retaliation from the regime under pressure in the form of increased scrutiny, criticism, and security threats.

Some of the most prominent advocacy organizations that address violations of artistic freedom include:

- [Amnesty International](#)
- [Article 19](#)
- [Cartoonists Rights Network International](#) (CRNI)
- [Freemuse](#)
- [Human Rights Watch](#)
- [Index on Censorship](#)

• [PEN International](#) and PEN centers around the world.

Many local and regional advocacy organizations work only in specific regions. Depending on where you are in the world, you might consider getting in touch with such organizations, as they could have strong local media contacts and region-specific expertise.

NOTES

¹⁰⁵ For useful literature and recommendations on assessing risk, see “[New Protection Guide for Human Rights Defenders](#),” Protection International, 2009, “[Protection Guide for Human Rights Defenders](#),” Front Line Defenders, 2005, “[Practical Guide for the Protection of Editorial Cartoonists](#),” Cartooning for Peace, 2019, and “[Safety Guide for Journalists](#),” Reporters Without Borders, 2015, e.g.

¹⁰⁶ “[New Protection Guide for Human Rights Defenders](#),” Protection International, 2009, p. 67.

¹⁰⁷ Bennoune 3-4 pp. 3-4.

¹⁰⁸ See Bennoune, “[Cultural rights defenders](#),” e.g.

¹⁰⁹ Arts Rights Justice report: [RIGHTS. Legal Frameworks for Artistic Freedom](#), Laurence Cuny, p. 62, 2019

¹¹⁰ “[Providing Support to Local Human Rights Organizations](#),” ProtectDefenders.eu.

¹¹¹ Information on [submitting information to special procedures](#) is available on the OHCHR's website.

¹¹² See ProtectDefenders.eu's [eligibility and criteria](#) for a useful example.

¹¹³ See [Amnesty International](#) or [Freedom House](#)'s fund for survivors of severe religious persecution, e.g.

¹¹⁴ For one of the most comprehensive study of temporary relocation platforms to date, see Patricia Bartley, Martin Jones, Alice Nah, and Stanley Seiden, “[Temporary Shelter and Relocation Initiatives. Perspectives of Managers and Participants](#),” Martin Roth Initiative, (2019).

¹¹⁵ See Patricia Bartley, “[Wellbeing During Temporary International Relocation. Case Studies and Good Practices for the Implementation of the 2019 Barcelona Guidelines](#),” Martin Roth Initiative, 2020, for a robust discussion of the psychological challenges

associated with relocation and recommendations for how best platforms can ensure wellbeing during relocation.

¹¹⁶ See Bartley et al. p. 29, for a discussion of lengthy processes associated with obtaining visas, e.g.

¹¹⁷ See [Artist Protection Fund](#), e.g.

¹¹⁸ See [Shelter City, Defenders in Dordrecht](#), and [Scottish Human Rights Defender Fellowship](#), e.g.

¹¹⁹ Nathalie van Schagen, “[Collaboration Between Temporary Relocation Initiatives. Potentials, Challenges and Next Steps](#),” Martin Roth Initiative, 2020.

¹²⁰ Bartley et al. p. 15.

¹²¹ Ibid. p. 11.

¹²² Ibid. p. 12.

¹²³ For the most comprehensive list of mobility grants available to artists, see [On the Move](#), a network that aims to facilitate cross-border mobility in the arts and culture sector, contributing to the building of a vibrant European shared cultural space that is strongly connected worldwide.

¹²⁴ Bartley et al. p. 29, e.g.

¹²⁵ See Bartley, “[Wellbeing During Temporary International Relocation. Case Studies and Good Practices for the Implementation of the 2019 Barcelona Guidelines](#).”

¹²⁶ The OHCHR's special procedure mechanisms, e.g., “can intervene directly with Governments on allegations of violations of human rights that come within their mandates by means of letters which include urgent appeals and other communications.” Information on [submitting information to special procedures](#) is available on the OHCHR's website.



6

RECOVERING FROM RISK

For artists who have faced severe risks, threats, or dangers, trauma support and medical services are critical to heal the mental and physical wounds. It is crucial that survivors are given the time, space, resources, and support to recuperate safely.¹²⁷ Many organizations that serve refugees, asylees, and victims of torture offer specialized services to aid every step of the recovery and rehabilitation process, from individualized health care resources to community events.¹²⁸

The trauma and medical support services offered by these organizations cast a wide net—they acknowledge the variety of ways that these scarring experiences can affect an individual's mental and physical well-being, and they target the nuanced and individualized nature of recovery and healing. These services can include but are not limited to physical and mental health resources, community building opportunities, and support services for reentering society. Physical health resources can include access to nursing and primary care clinics, ongoing monitoring of physical mobility and preexisting conditions, and massage and physical therapy. Mental health resources include rehabilitation and direct healing services for survivors such as specialized psychiatric and psychological care, counseling, social work, specialized therapists, targeted support groups, outpatient rehabilitation services, and referrals to inpatient rehabilitation. Many programs pair those seeking support with caseworkers to provide ongoing case management and the development of a specialized treatment plan tailored to the individual's needs. Community-building opportunities can include demographic-specific support and therapy groups as well as organized recreational community activities such as sports teams, youth programming, and partnerships with community organizations. Social support services aimed at easing individuals' reintegration to society include language learning assistance, financial fluency programs, professional development, and accompaniment to public spaces such as museums, grocery stores, and parks.

Seeking assistance from these organizations typically entails a referral process in which an application must be filled out detailing the background and circumstances of the individual seeking support. Referrals can be filled out by anyone who can speak to the experience of the applicant—a medical professional, family member, or friends—and in many cases the artist seeking support can complete a self-referral and fill out the referral forms. For example, [Companion House](#), an organization offering trauma support services, has a [referral form](#) on its website that allows for self-referral. The forms ask for basic demographic information as well more detailed descriptions of the experiences and trauma that have led the applicant to ask for assistance. By contrast, the [Association for Services to Torture and Trauma Survivors](#) does not allow self-referral and requires that its [referral form](#) be completed by someone else.

In the event that an application cannot be found on an organization's website, consider calling or emailing any accessible contact information provided to inquire about its services. For example, while [Physicians for Human Rights](#) does not have a formal application on its website, the organization welcomes prospective clients to [send an email](#) to its offices to inquire about services.

SEEKING REDRESS FROM TORTURE

Torture, or the threat of torture, is a common method used by oppressive governments and political forces to censor and silence artists.

Many organizations work on behalf of individual victims of torture by mounting advocacy campaigns, providing thorough documentation of cases, monitoring the treatment of detainees, and taking other steps to ensure swift justice and accountability. Such organizations can both support you in your current situation and actively work to prevent mistreatment in the future. They can work with you proactively to meet your needs and ensure your safety, offering relocation or mobility services. In instances of detainment or imprisonment, some organizations offer direct legal assistance and can fight for your quick and just release. In the event of past or ongoing injury from torture, they can act as a resource for direct medical assistance. In addition, many offer access to emergency funds to pay for sudden, unexpected expenses even if they don't provide those services themselves.

To seek support from these organizations, artists can typically contact them and give background on their situation to have their needs assessed. For example, the [World](#)

[Organization Against Torture](#) provides a [form](#) on its website that asks for basic demographic information as well more detailed descriptions of the experiences and trauma that have led to the request for assistance. Upon completion, this form can be sent to the organization's intake office—victims@omct.org—for review. For other organizations, the process is less formal. At [Agir ensemble pour les droits de l'homme](#), for instance, requesting access to emergency funds simply involves contacting the emergency fund staff, at which point an applicant's needs can be adequately assessed and funds can be distributed accordingly. Similarly, in the event that an organization does not have an application or explicit guidelines for requesting support on its website, consider calling or emailing any contact information listed to inquire about accessing services.

Other organizations offering resources and assistance to artists who experience torture:

- [African Centre for Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture Victims](#)
- [American Civil Liberties Union \(ACLU\)](#)
- [Amnesty International](#)
- [The Association for Services to Torture and Trauma Survivors](#)

- [The Center for Justice & Accountability](#)
- [The Center for Victims of Torture](#)
- [Committee Against Torture](#)
- [Dignity](#)
- [Freedom from Torture](#)
- [International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims](#)
- [Redress](#)
- [Reprive](#)
- [UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture.](#)

REFUGEE-SPECIFIC ASSISTANCE

For artists who have experienced danger in their homelands as a result of their work or human rights activity, applying for asylum or refugee status in a new country can be a crucial step toward a safe and secure future. But being displaced can itself be incredibly traumatizing, and the process of applying for and receiving asylum can be daunting. Fortunately, a number of organizations serve refugees and asylum seekers.

Many of these organizations assist first and foremost with the process of applying for and securing asylum. They often pair incoming refugees with caseworkers who manage every step of the individuals' application and resettlement. This assistance can take many forms, from providing information on how to apply to offering direct

services like pro bono or subsidized legal assistance, legal funds, and immigration help. These organizations and their devoted caseworkers also aid with relocation and mobility, to ensure that clients can live safely during and after the application process. Services might include connecting refugees with resources and emergency funds to provide medical help, temporary relocation or shelter, and basic necessities like food and clothing.

Procedures vary by organization. For example, many—such as the [International Refugee Assistance Project](#)—offer robust resources on their websites that spell out the application process depending on your personal circumstances. On the [Get Legal Info page](#) of the site, visitors can answer a series of background questions that,

upon completion, trigger a specific set of guidelines for what steps must be taken to apply for refugee or asylum status, including what forms need to be filled out and where they must be submitted. This page also gives visitors the option to request further assistance from an individual caseworker. Other organizations accept incoming cases primarily through a referral process in which service providers refer eligible clients for support. In the event that an artist does not yet have an established relationship with a service provider, there is typically an option for the individual to contact the organization directly—for example, while the [Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services' referral form](#) is open only to service providers to refer their existing clients, the organization welcomes individuals seeking support to [visit or contact its offices](#) themselves.

Other organizations that offer refugee assistance:

- [International Rescue Committee \(IRC\)](#)
- [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees \(UNHCR\)](#)
- [The AIRE Centre](#)
- [Artist Mobility](#)
- [Canberra Refugee Support](#)
- [CDH Fray Matías](#)
- [International Centre for Human Rights](#)
- [Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services \(MARSS of Australia\)](#)

NOTES

¹²⁷ See Front Line Defenders, "[Wellbeing and Stress Management](#)" and Bartley, "[Wellbeing During Temporary International Relocation. Case Studies and Good Practices for the Implementation of the 2019 Barcelona Guidelines.](#)"

¹²⁸ For artists who have relocated to avoid threats, safe return to their home countries is often crucial to recovery. For a discussion of challenges to and recommendations for safe return after temporary relocation, see Stanley Seiden, "[The Challenges of Safe Return. Supporting Civil Society Actors After Temporary Relocation.](#)" Martin Roth Initiative, 2020.

CONCLUSION

Around the world, state and non-state actors regularly violate the right to artistic freedom, and artists find themselves harassed, attacked, imprisoned, tortured, and even killed. Some repressive and nationalist regimes use legislation to curtail artistic freedom—by regulating the cultural sector and determining what can be created; by muzzling and imprisoning artists through laws that govern cybersecurity, antiterrorism, defamation, and anti-state activities; and by prosecuting artists for spurious economic crimes. Alongside government actors, non-state agents like extremist groups, private telecommunication companies, and powerful corporations can threaten artistic freedom, cracking down on those who don't align with their narratives or using arbitrary content regulation standards to disrupt free expression. These threats both rob artists of their ability to express themselves and deprive the public of the artists' contributions, insights, and inspiration.

But there are steps that can mitigate these threats. We hope that the strategies outlined in this guide give artists a better understanding of the risks as well as a stronger capacity to prevent, prepare for, respond to, and ultimately overcome repression.

At the most fundamental level, there are several takeaways from this manual that we recommend artists always keep in mind:

You can never be too prepared

Hopefully, you will never have to employ the strategies outlined in this manual. But artists all over the world can unexpectedly find themselves facing a range of threats for a range of reasons. You don't need to be a political artist calling for radical social change to come under attack. We therefore believe that artists can never be too prepared for risk and that you should proactively follow many of the protocols outlined in this guide.

These protocols include:

- a. conducting a risk assessment of your work to determine whether it might incite backlash**
- b. strengthening your security, especially through cybersecurity measures such as the encryption of messages and two-factor authentication**
- c. building a strong support network**
- d. designing an emergency plan to be ready in case the need arises.**

Document as much as possible

If you are threatened, remember to keep thorough records without further compromising your safety. Having evidence of harassment, even if it is as basic as a written log that tracks when and what occurred, will be crucial down the line if you need to turn to organizations for assistance. Those organizations will always take steps

to verify your case, and the more information you have on hand, the faster this vetting process will be.

Timing is everything

If you are harassed, remember that speed is key. Many organizations have restricted time frames for their services and will provide emergency support only if the harassment occurred recently, usually within a matter of months and not much longer than a year. If you need assistance, we suggest seeking it early.

Artists are human rights defenders

While many organizations exist specifically to support artists at risk, the field of human rights support is much larger and better equipped. Increasingly, organizations that assist human rights defenders in general are recognizing that artists act in the defense of human rights. When contacting human rights organizations for support, it is crucial to present yourself not solely as an artist but also as an agent acting in defense of human rights, whose defense has put you at risk. Artists express cultural identity, bear witness to inhumanity, and encourage social change—all of which are forms of human rights defense.

You are not alone

Facing persecution can be an isolating and taxing experience. While the institutions designed to support you may feel distant and intimidating, you must remember that you are not alone. There are organizations all over the world whose missions are solely to protect and assist people in situations like yours, and there are countless artists across the globe who have undergone similar situations, who will stand by your side

and help you through travails that they too have endured. Don't lose hope.

As Ralph Waldo Emerson noted, "By descending down into the depths of the soul, and not primarily by a painful acquisition of many manual skills, the artist attains the power of awakening other souls."¹²⁹ Artists are at the center of social change and the just, equitable, and sustainable development of societies. Through their work, they represent cultural identities and tell stories that help us understand difference and envision more inclusive societies, give voice to social movements, challenge orthodoxies, stimulate innovation, reinvent media, and effect change by advancing the discourse of society. If you find yourself at risk, do not give up, and do not lose sight of the importance of your work.

In addition to strategies and recommendations, this manual features an appendix with a list of resources, advice from prominent artists who have experienced risk, further data on threats to artistic freedom, and more. If you need assistance, we also recommend exploring the more than 800 resources available on the [Find Help](#) page of ARC's database, or you can [get in touch with ARC](#) directly. Additionally, this guide will be continually updated as trends and recommendations change.

Please take care, stay strong, and stay safe.

NOTES

¹²⁹ Emerson: *Essays and Lectures*, Library of America, 1983, p. 244.



ARTISTS' VOICES

Aslı Erddoğan

Discipline: **Writer**

Country: **Turkey**

Threats: **Arrest, prosecution**

When: **August 2016–present**

Current Status: **In exile**

Aslı Erdoğan is a renowned novelist and human rights activist known for works like *The Stone Building and Other Places* and her columns at *Özgür Gündem*, a pro-Kurdish daily newspaper. On August 16, 2016, Erdoğan was detained in her home by Istanbul police as part of a police raid of *Özgür Gündem*, which was shut down by decree as part of the countrywide state of emergency following the failed coup of July 15. Twenty of her colleagues were also detained. Turkish courts stated that the paper published “propaganda for the PKK,” the Kurdistan Workers Party, which is listed as a terrorist group, and acted “as its de facto news outlet.” On December 29, when the trial began, Erdoğan was granted a conditional release from detention but subjected to a travel ban. When the ban was lifted, in June 2017, Erdoğan fled to Germany in self-imposed exile to avoid prosecution. Her trial and that of her colleagues continued in absentia until she was finally acquitted on February 14, 2020. But just four months later, a public prosecutor appealed her case to a higher court in Istanbul. She now faces renewed charges of sedition, membership in a terrorist organization, and use of propaganda.

“I didn’t really know what was going on outside. Actually, I was shocked when I got out of prison. I didn’t know that there was so much support for me. But I think I contributed by writing letters. I wrote a few letters from prison, and they had an effect. Literature defeats every dictator imaginable.”

When I was working for the newspaper *Radikal*, nobody really wrote about torture victims, especially in the press. Nobody wrote about Black people, nobody wrote about Turks, or Roma. I took the little stories, always personal stories, of the victim. And then I started to learn. I thought I knew Turkey because my parents were leftists—I had seen police violence, I had lived with Black people, I had seen the violence of both the state and society. But I didn’t know what the Kurds were going through. I didn’t know what the Roma were going through. The more I wrote, the more I was surprised by Turkey. And as I was one of the very few who wrote about such things, people started coming to me with their stories, for me to write. It was the most beautiful part of my career.

I was continuously threatened by the police. But they didn’t do anything major, they didn’t put me in jail—they could have, but they did not. What they did was, for five consecutive days, every time I entered my apartment and went into the living room, the phone rang. On the second day, you get suspicious. And by the fourth day, you start to get so paranoid, so scared. You know, these are psychologically calculated things.

The threats didn’t change my writing, but they changed my psychology. I became a more paranoid person, I became more and more reluctant to leave the apartment. I think that the only support I received was from five female writers who came together to defend me and my book. And they too received pressure from many writers. One of them was threatened that she would never publish her books again. Until I went to prison, I think the only other support came from the Kurds.

But when I went to prison, everything changed. Suddenly people were very supportive and very much in solidarity. Prison was, in a way, a positive change in my life. People discovered, at least, that I was telling the truth.

I do believe in what I write about. I do believe that the story of the victim must be told. And I keep carrying on as much as I can. At least I didn’t give in to fear while I was in prison. I stood on my own path. So this is another lesson I learned, that fear is manageable. And also I learned that solidarity is not just a fancy word. It exists, and it helps—it has to.

Photograph by Carole Parodi



BETTY TOMPKINS

Discipline: **Visual artist**
Country: **United States**
Threat: **Censorship**
When: **1973–present**
Current Status: **Censored**

Betty Tompkins' large-scale photo-realistic paintings of heterosexual intercourse between 1969 and 1974 remained practically unknown until 2002, when they were exhibited together for the first time in New York. This long-awaited exhibition had an immediate impact, broadening the repertoire of first-generation feminist-identified imagery while presaging the contemporary depiction of explicit sexual and transgressive themes. Over the course of her career, Tompkins has been censored numerous times, running afoul of French and Japanese customs agents as well as social media platforms.

“The minute you stop working, they won. You’ve lost. You’ve lost it all. The thing is, the world is not fair, and there’s no guarantee that the world is going to be nice to you. So that choice is yours: Do you want to win at this, or do you want to lose at it? And to me, losing is when you stop doing it. Winning has nothing to do with material success—getting grants or having shows, any of that stuff. What’s important is you don’t lose yourself to yourself.”

I started sex themes in 1969. I was 24 years old and had just finished grad school. I moved to New York, and my first husband had a collection of porn photos that he had gotten before he met me. As a young artist—and now at 75—I wasn’t interested in pretty pieces, and I wasn’t interested in easy pieces. Once I thought about it and articulated it to myself, it was pretty easy for me to walk into galleries and search for that same attitude. Most of the time, I didn’t find it. When I started to look at my first husband’s porn collection, I said, “Oh my god, this is it!” These images, they’re gorgeous. They looked like abstract paintings.

The first time I was censored was in 1973. I was still in my 20s. I was invited to be in a show in Paris, and the curator came, picked out two paintings, and the shippers came and wrapped everything up. This was pre-voicemail, pre-internet, so everything was slow and expensive. To call Paris in 1973 was a lot of money. I was young and I was broke. Eventually I got a letter from the curator saying that my work had been held at customs. It was being charged as pornographic. The only way to get it out was to have it repatriated to the United States.

When I was censored again, in Japan, I reached out to one of the curators of the Lyon Biennale and to some critics I had met. I didn’t reach out to just strangers. I had some sort of real connection with everybody I got in touch with. Eventually, customs let them go.

In spring 2019, my Instagram account was taken down. One day the whole thing just wasn’t there. That really upset me, because you cannot be a visual artist right now without having

an Instagram. I had a bunch of shows coming up. That one really laid me low. It was three days of being totally hysterical. But I refused to take it. Around a thousand people wrote in to Instagram, saying: “Restore this account. It’s art. It’s not porn.” My dealer, who’s in Belgium, did a whole article about it. He did an interview about it, and he got the attention of lots of people. It was very generous. They were working furiously behind the scenes to get things going. Three days later, I checked Instagram, and there was my account.

If you get censored, talk to everybody you know and ask them if they can suggest somebody for you to talk to who might have a solution. You have to reach out, you have to keep reaching out, and reach out to whatever entity it is that censored you. Nobody gets through any of these events without help. Part of being a professional writer or artist is building up a professional network. Surround yourself, and you give as well as take.

Photograph by Grace Roselli

DREAD SCOTT

Discipline: Visual artist

Country: United States

Threat: Censorship, death threats

When: 1989–present

Current Status: Threatened

Dread Scott makes revolutionary art to propel history forward. He first received national attention in 1989 when his art became the center of controversy over its transgressive use of the American flag while he was a student at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. President G.H.W. Bush called his art “disgraceful” and the entire U.S. Senate denounced and outlawed this work. Scott plays with fire—metaphorically and sometimes literally—as when he burned \$171 on Wall Street and encouraged those with money to burn to add theirs to the pyre. His works can be hard-edged and poignant, working in a range of media including performance, photography, screen-printing, and video. Scott is a recipient of grants from the Creative Capital Foundation, the Open Society Foundation, the Pollock Krasner Foundation and United States Artists (an arts foundation not affiliated with the US government). He has been included in exhibitions at MoMA PS1, the Walker Art Center and the Whitney Museum of American Art. His work is in the collection of the Whitney Museum and the Brooklyn Museum, and has been featured on the cover of *Artforum* and the front page of *NYTimes.com*.

“Try to deeply understand the world. If you make work about something controversial, make sure you’re right. When work is threatened, stand up for the work and do it publicly. Rally support. Expand your team. If people are trying to kill you, make sure other people know they are trying to kill you. Finally, if it’s worth it, don’t back down.”

By the time I was 22 or 23 years old, I wanted to make sure that my art was in sync with where my political views were going. When I was 24, I had an artwork, *What is the Proper Way to Display a U.S. Flag?*, that became the center of a national controversy over its transgressive use of the American flag. I received death threats, bomb threats were phoned in to my art school that forced the school to close for a couple of days. The piece was outlawed by the federal government, and George W. Bush called it “disgraceful.” It’s significant to realize that art can be so powerful that the strongest government in the world—with its nuclear arsenal, its police, its air force, army, navy, and marines—could go so far as to gut the First Amendment to suppress art. Because the ideas can actually matter.

There was a year and a half when I was not alone a single moment. I didn’t have security, but I relied on my friends. I had to move about 25 times while staying on couches. I wasn’t just an individual on my own—there were various organizations and activists that were assisting me at the time. Ironically, even though that work is taught in classes as part of Art History 101, it is effectively banned. It hasn’t been shown in 15 years, and frankly it would be difficult to show. You’d have to be a major museum with security and be willing to withstand the punitive and retaliatory retorts to funding and possibly violence, even though the work is legal. Even though I didn’t directly suffer violence, the calculations that museums and galleries have to undergo to be able to show this work becomes a huge burden, a cost, recourse, an emotional and political question.

A Man Was Lynched by Police Yesterday, which was made in 2015, was an update of a banner that the NAACP used to fly the day after anybody was lynched in the 1920s and ‘30s. I added the words “by Police” to that banner, and when it was displayed by a gallery in New York the gallery was threatened with evictions and death threats. Instagram has also banned my work. When Trump called all these countries “shithole countries,” I posted a photo that replaced his mouth with an asshole. Instagram said that violated community standards. Trump saying these things doesn’t violate community standards, but talking about it does? They threatened to shut down my account. They found what I posted more threatening than when users say online that Black people are monkeys.

I actually think that the world as it exists right now is profoundly unjust and is deadly to millions of people, and it doesn’t need to be that way. While perhaps I could choose to have greater safety individually, the greatest safety I have is in trying to change the world. People need to have the courage to make art that fights for a radically different, far better world. I welcome all sorts of colleagues and comrades. When people look back on this era, they’ll say the artists in this area were on fire for doing work and making governments quake in their boots. We need to find a way to help dissident artists, especially in this country. Dissident artists are not something that only happens in other extreme, repressive countries.

Photograph by Sebastian Kim / AUGUST



VALSERO

Discipline: **Rapper**

Country: **Cameroon**

Threats: **Imprisonment, threats, censorship**

When: **2019**

Current Status: **Released**

Gaston Philippe Abe Abe, popularly known by the stage name “Valsero,” is a Cameroonian rapper, activist, and human rights defender who creates politically responsive music. He began his solo career in 2008, in the midst of a heated political climate in Cameroon after President Paul Biya, in office since 1982, dissolved presidential term limits. Valsero’s first solo album, *Politiquement Instable*, established him as a leading voice for young Cameroonians who opposed the regime’s authoritarian tactics. Although many TV and radio stations avoided playing the album in fear of retaliation, it became such a potent popular force that Valsero’s adoring fans started calling him “Général Valsero.” His lyrics call for greater accountability and transparency from the government and more democratic processes for the country. On January 26, 2019, he was arrested at a political demonstration and held without bail while awaiting trial for spurious charges that could have carried a punishment as grave as the death penalty. He was freed on October 5, 2019, following international outcry.

“What made me dangerous and what makes many artists in their country dangerous is their capacity to mobilize people. If they manage to rally people around their discourse, if they manage to become a reference upon which people can lean, then they become like fuel.”

I started to think about society before singing about it. I was very engaged in deprived neighborhoods before I started making music. I left my house at a very early age and found myself on the streets. It was a place that taught me a lot about solidarity but also about people's distress, poverty, life's precariousness, societal desertion. Rap music was carrying all these voices, all these grievances. Especially American rap, which I found to be very politically committed. I told myself, if I can't be a journalist, if I can't be a professor or a great politician, I can be an artist who can carry these voices.

I started having problems when I moved on to denouncing people in my songs. Originally I was talking about social issues, and as long as you don't point your finger at anybody—as long as you speak generally, saying there is trash everywhere, there are no schools, life in the poor neighborhoods is difficult, it's rotten—as long as you only make observations, you stay safe. As volatile as these concepts might be, as soon as you move from stating things to denouncing them, then you become dangerous.

I began feeling it when show promoters started avoiding me. There is also this capacity for people to take personal initiative. A police commissioner can put you in jail for nothing, because he walked by and found that what you were saying was not “normal.” I think most artists who get arrested in Africa discover the existence of organizations that are able to help once they are already in prison. When I went to prison in 2019, I did not know about these organizations. My friends searched for solutions. We received a lot of psychological support,

a little financial support. I think financial support is extremely important: Living in prison is very expensive, surviving in prison is very expensive, lawyers are very expensive.

Personally, I did not receive huge support from Cameroonian artists. Many justified my imprisonment. But there are artists who have put their art in the service of human rights protection, of liberty, of democracy. It is a small handful in each country. Today we are lucky enough to function as a network. I received a lot of support from these foreigners, be it Tiken Jah Fakoly, Khadja Nin, or my friend Bobi Wine, my buddy Didier Awadi.

From the very first threat, you need to alert the world, you need to attract attention, ring the alarm. Only the protection of the outside world, only the accompaniment of the outside world, only the fact that the world speaks, only global advocacy can put pressure on dictatorships.



KUBRA KHADEMI

Discipline: Performance and visual artist
Country: Afghanistan
Threats: Harassment, death threats
When: 2015
Current Status: In exile

Kubra Khademi is an Afghan performance artist and feminist currently based in Paris. Her work explores her experience as a refugee and a woman. She studied fine arts at Kabul University and at Beaconhouse National University in Lahore, Pakistan. In Lahore she began to create public performances, a practice that she continued upon her return to Kabul, where her work actively engaged the ways that extreme patriarchal politics dominate Afghan society. In 2015, after her performance piece *Armor*, about sexual violence, received immense backlash, Khademi was forced to flee her home country.

“Don’t explain anything to anybody—nobody owes that. I did, and that was not right, because artwork needs to be done. It needs to exist. The artist has the responsibility of doing that, and she should not have to explain it to anybody. We have the right to express ourselves, and if people ask why, just let the question go without any answer, because nobody is entitled to it.”

I always introduce myself as an artist, but I never considered myself an activist. Of course, the issues that I am interested in as a female or feminist artist are about the condition of women and the situation of women’s lives in my country. I never heard the term “feminism” when I was a child. I didn’t have that education or access to those kinds of resources. But unconsciously I was reacting to a lot of things—I was just drawing girls and women.

In Afghanistan I faced violence. It’s not something new. Violence is something that as a woman you live with on a daily basis. Being a woman artist and being a man artist in Afghanistan are two different things—it’s two different worlds. I was kind of in exile in my country because I was a woman in my country.

I strongly feel that exile has been a second life for me. It’s good and bad, it’s violence and also freedom. Because I am so free here compared with my country, as a woman and as an artist. But at the same time, from another angle, I see how I am still being affected by the 2015 violence.

When I remained alive and came to France, a lot of Afghan intellectuals who were also in Europe stopped defending me. They said it was like I just saved myself now and closed the door for other young women who want to do something for the country. So I entered a second level of being criticized, for the fact that I remained alive. They suggested that I had to resist, I had to stay in Afghanistan, I had to face the consequences there, which is basically saying that I had to be killed—they don’t say it directly, but that’s what it means.

A close-up portrait of Hamed Sinno, a man with dark hair and a beard, wearing a red patterned shirt. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a serious expression. The background is a patterned fabric.

HAMED SINNO

Discipline: **Musician**
Country: **Lebanon**
Threats: **Harassment, death threats**
When: **2019**
Current Status: **In exile**

Hamed Sinno has amassed a huge following in his home country as the lead singer and co-founder of Mashrou' Leila, one of the biggest bands in Lebanon. Hamed proudly embraces his queer identity and is an LGBTQIA+ advocate in both his songs and his life. As a result, he has faced years of backlash and harassment. The hate campaign reached a boiling point in August 2019, when organizers of the Byblos International Festival, one of the country's biggest music events, where Mashrou' Leila were slated to play, received death threats and were accused of blasphemy due to Hamed's lyrics and social media posts. Hamed now lives in the United States.

“It’s not a situation that can be improved except through constantly fighting. My only advice would be that it’s worth it. That it matters. That it’s a really shitty and terrible way to have your dreams come true, to have to fight with your teeth for the whole of your career. But it’s worth it.”

I was always someone who, by Lebanese standards, was not very gender conforming. I quickly started finding myself in music, and the anxiety that I felt about constantly being bullied, of constantly feeling like I was outside—music was the thing that would keep me off the ledge.

I feel like it's impossible for music to not be political because at this point it's impossible for anything to not be political. You're always consenting to or dissenting from the status quo, and it's impossible to escape that power structure. If you're not using the medium and your platform to address that power structure, then you're basically consenting to that structure and the way power is distributed, the way capital operates, the way audience expectations inform the kind of music that gets produced.

From the beginning, the harassment started immediately. My studio space in college would get vandalized by people spraying slurs about my sexuality on my equipment or on my artwork or on the walls. There was a lot of intimidation in the press from the get-go, people using tropes that have been historically used against the queer community in Lebanon. For example, in Lebanon and other places in the Arab world, people asking for LGBT rights have long been labeled as “agents of Western imperialism,” as if non-heterosexuality was invented in the West.

I remember one incident in Tunis where we had to hire a security team. The band was starting to get bigger, and we were starting to get into weird, uncomfortable situations with some of the fans, and the harassment from people who were

bothered by the band was starting to get a little more intense. And when the security team found out I was not straight, they also started threatening us, which was funny.

I never felt entitled to ask other artists for support. I always felt almost embarrassed. When support came, if it came, that was great, but it rarely came from other artists in the region. The music scene is very masculine and very male driven, so there's been a lot of homophobia, a lot of resentment that the band was doing so well. So I never really felt like we had allies in the Arab music scene outside of Lebanon.

In Lebanon we got a lot of assistance from various human rights organizations and from the arts community. Honestly, what happened was very special: They organized a concert when ours got canceled, so there were all these bands that came out and played to support our band. There were all these actors and visual artists and musicians and theater people who came together, and it stopped being just about the band—it became about freedom of speech, and that was really beautiful to see.

A black and white portrait of Maria Alekhina, a woman with long, wavy hair, looking slightly to the left. She is wearing a dark top and a necklace with a large pendant.

MARIA “MASHA” ALEKHINA

Discipline: **Activist and member of the art collective Pussy Riot**
Country: **Russia**
Threats: **Arrest, imprisonment**
When: **August 2016–present**
Current Status: **In exile**

Masha Alekhina was one of the original members of Pussy Riot, the feminist art and protest collective founded in 2011. They reached international prominence the next year after performing a song called “Punk Prayer,” which criticized the Orthodox Church’s support for President Vladimir Putin, in Moscow’s Cathedral of Christ the Saviour. A few weeks later, Alekhina, Yekaterina Samutsevich, and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova were arrested for the stunt and charged with “hooliganism motivated by religious hatred.” They were held without bail until their trial in late July, when they were each convicted and sentenced to two years in prison. Samutsevich was released on probation in October 2012, but Alekhina and Tolokonnikova remained in prison. Following international outcry, they were released in December 2013. Since then, Alekhina has continued to fight for human rights through Pussy Riot and individual activism and writing.

“It’s very useful to know the law and know your rights. You cannot go through this shit without mistakes. You have the right to make mistakes, and you shouldn’t crucify yourself for your mistakes. But you can know your rights—spend time and learn this.”

I’m not a musician at all. And you should know that Pussy Riot is not a musical band. It’s a collective of people who are making political art in different ways. “Documentors” are the most important people. Because if you do not have documentation of an action, you do not have an action at all.

The first time I was arrested was in Red Square during a Pussy Riot action, “Putin Pissed His Pants.” We spent four hours in the police station, and that’s it. The second time was a bit tough, after “Punk Prayer.” We were not touched, no police, nothing. But after 24 hours, some people were waiting for me near my flat. I was coming home from the kindergarten with my son, so that was quite problematic. We started to run away, but after one week they caught us and gave us two years.

Today I’m not allowed to have a bank account in Russia, so all my bank accounts are closed. I have about 5,000 euros in fines for my two last activities. Before this blocking of accounts, I had an official travel ban, so I was not allowed to travel or to cross Russian borders for a year.

When I was arrested for “Punk Prayer,” after one week I was transported to a Moscow jail, where I spent eight months during the so-called investigation. We had TV there, and every day we were watching state TV and news. They were calling us witches, bitches, enemies of the people, enemies of the state. They started to construct this idea that we were against all the good, all the saints.

There are no mechanisms to protect yourself 100 percent. That’s not possible. Because we are not government, we don’t have state power. But we have our brains and hearts, and we are doing good things. If your mobile phone is in your hands, write everywhere you can write. Write on social media: “I’m arrested.” “They’re bringing me to this location.” “Come there and help me.” And then you should spread this message and link your social media message to all the journalists you know. And your lawyer should spread this message to all the human rights organizations you know together. So that, very fast, everyone will know what is going on with you and provide support. When you put a light on their activities, you protect yourself.

NANFU WANG

Discipline: Documentary filmmaker

Country: China

Threats: Censorship, harassment

When: 2016–present

Current Status: Censored

Nanfu Wang is a Chinese-born American filmmaker, best known for documentaries like *One Child Nation* and *Hooligan Sparrow*, which explore human rights, activism, and social history in China. Born in a remote farming village in Jiangxi Province, Wang came to the United States in 2011 and became interested in film through her graduate studies at the journalism school of Ohio University and later at New York University's News and Documentary program. Her first film, about the Chinese gender activist Ye Haiyan, debuted at the Sundance Film Festival in 2016. Since then, as Wang's international reputation has grown—*One Child Nation*, about China's one-child policy, was shortlisted for Best Documentary Feature at the 92nd Academy Awards—so has the animosity shown toward her by her home country. Her work is consistently banned, false narratives about her are spread online, and she and her crew face continued risks from authorities whenever they film in China.

“Think about the worst that could happen. That’s not to deter you from doing it, but it’s so you can plan for the worst and prepare for it. Think each of the scenarios through and have a plan.”

Making my first film changed me a lot—my worldview, my political views, and myself. I became an activist. I had decided to go back to China and make a film about a women’s rights activist. It was the first time in my life I had been to a protest in China. Only six people were standing in the street holding up signs. It was prohibited, and it was “bad” enough that the government arrested the activist I was making the documentary about and a few others. Because I was there holding a camera, the government and police turned against me, too. They started coming after me, and my family and friends wanted to know what I had documented. I felt the power, the violence, the suppression, the surveillance. All of those things were very abstract and invisible before. The entire process of each encounter with authorities and the government and their aggression changed me into an activist.

People asked me, “Are you a filmmaker? Are you an artist? Or are you an activist?” Why would you have to choose between them, and why does one have more weight over the other? If the definition of an activist is someone who takes action after seeing something that makes them want to change and do something, then a filmmaker is an activist: The action is simply to document and film and tell that story. My activism is trying to be a witness and then to share what I’ve witnessed with more people.

I learned what tactics the government uses to intimidate, to track, to surveil people. Being aware of those tactics, when I made another film in China I learned how to anticipate and prepare for the worst. When filming in China, it’s important to have communication

security, because if any communication is leaked or monitored by the government beforehand, then we couldn’t even begin to do anything. We really make sure all communication within the crew and with the subjects is secure. Also, we need to be prepared if someone encounters the police: What do we say, what do we do, and what is the action we trigger if something really urgent happens? For all of those possibilities, we have plans in place, so we know that if something bad happens, we could minimize the consequence.

Photograph courtesy of the MacArthur Foundation

A black and white close-up portrait of Oleg Sentsov, a man with short dark hair and a slight stubble, looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The background is dark.

OLEG SENTSOV

Discipline: **Filmmaker**

Country: **Ukraine**

Threats: **Imprisonment, torture**

When: **2014–19**

Current Status: **Released**

Oleg Sentsov, a Ukrainian director best known for his 2011 film, *Gamer*, lived in Simferopol, the capital of Crimea, and was active in protests against Viktor F. Yanukovich, the former pro-Kremlin president of Ukraine. As Russia seized control of Crimea in 2014, Sentsov became an outspoken critic of the annexation. In May 2014, he was detained, and in August 2015 he was sentenced to 20 years in a Russian prison on charges of terrorism. During his detention, he was unsuccessfully tortured to extract a confession. He continued to write and even direct from his prison cell. On May 14, 2018, Sentsov declared an indefinite hunger strike, which lasted for 145 days. Meanwhile, international outcry over his detention mounted. On September 7, 2019, Sentsov was freed as part of a historic prisoner swap between Russia and Ukraine. He continues to fight for freedom of expression and freedom for other Ukrainian political prisoners. Sentsov was the winner of the 2017 PEN/Barbey Freedom to Write Award.

“In prison, I was writing a lot of books. You have a lot of time in prison. So it’s the perfect time for art, to be honest. The problem with prison isn’t dying—it’s staying alive, staying a person, maintaining a sense of personhood. My art helped me stay a person, and treat other people like human beings.”

My time in the revolutionary movement is completely separate from my artistic career. The moment when Russia brought its army into my homeland, Crimea, it was logical to me that I would protect my homeland. Two months before the arrest, I worked very hard, helping soldiers, organizing protests, printing informational material, talking to international media about what was going on there. What happened next was that Russian FSB agents had this idea to show everyone, the rest of the world, that there are terrorists in Crimea and it’s Ukraine who is an aggressor, and Russia is the one trying to save Crimea from the aggressor. Then they picked four activists and detained them, tortured them, and tried to extract from them that they were trying to launch a terrorist attack. Among those four people, I was the most well-known, the oldest, the one with connections, specifically because I had also taken part in the revolution in Kiev. That’s why they wanted to cast me as a leader of this terrorist group.

I managed to send a message to journalists I knew, and the support of the community started immediately, and then the international community, and that really helped to stop this. Fortunately, the government did not put pressure on my mom and my kids, who had to stay in Crimea. However, from the general public, there was a certain distancing in the beginning. But then in the end, when more information was available, I had a lot of support, especially from the Crimean Tatar community. There were some letters that I received during this first year of isolation, and from them I could at least get the sense that a movement was starting.

I was traveling from one prison to the next, but they were basically camps—penal colonies where you stay in one big building with other prisoners. They don’t want you to stay a person anymore, so it’s a constant fight for your dignity. In one camp, for example, they force you to march around as a group in a very specific order, like a parade during the World War victory celebrations. They make all the prisoners do this together. This is a passive way of losing your dignity. What I was doing was saying, “No, I’m not going to do that.” And I was walking as I pleased, without other prisoners, and as a result I was put into the isolation room, I was punished. That was happening for half a year before the hunger strike. But as soon as the hunger strike started, things changed.

My experience is facing Russia as an aggressor. And there is no advice that you could give to Russians to avoid prison—only sitting in your car with a Russian flag and keeping your mouth shut. This is the only thing you can do to save yourself, and even then it’s not certain. My advice is not to protect yourself but really to go and fight. Because this is the only way the situation in Russia can be changed.



SHAHIDUL ALAM

Discipline: **Photographer**

Country: **Bangladesh**

Threats: **Arrest, imprisonment, torture**

When: **August 2018**

Current Status: **Released on bail**

Shahidul Alam is a celebrated photographer and writer who has devoted his life's work to telling the stories and showing the perspectives of marginalized communities in Bangladesh—from targets of the late dictator Hussain Muhammad Ershad to cyclone survivors, Rohingya refugees, and victims of extrajudicial killings. Although Alam's work has been well received throughout the world, he has not been spared from government repression in his own nation. Throughout his career, he has faced backlash from rulers, politicians, and others who feel that his work has threatened their power. The retaliation culminated in August 2018, when he was arrested while documenting and reporting on the brutal suppression of student protests in Dhaka. After spending 107 days in confinement, during which he was tortured and went on a hunger strike, international outcry led to his eventual release on permanent bail.

“I’m an artist because art is so powerful. I write because words are so powerful. The point of the exercise is my activism, not the art itself. And if tomorrow words cease to have an effect, I would give it up. If tomorrow photography ceases to have an effect, I would give it up, I would pick up whatever else is needed. I believe a fairer world can and must exist. I am just one of many in a community that is fighting for its rights.”

I grew up in Bangladesh. I'd seen a genocide, I'd seen the War of Liberation, I'd seen what happened to people, so social justice was what I wanted to do, that was my *raison d'être*. I didn't know how I would do it. It was that need for social justice that made me look for the tool that I would use.

In 1991, we had a full-page spread in *The New York Times*, and to my knowledge that was the only picture story of the cyclone in Bangladesh that was not about bodies, not about death. It was about people, their tenacity, their resistance, and their reason to live, if you like. So I thought: “Okay, you can intervene, you can make a difference, you don't simply need to follow the guidelines. You can be your own storyteller.” We had recently had a change of government, but the new government also acted as a dictator. The opposition promised change and were voted in, but even under the new government, extra-judicial killings and disappearances continued. That's when I started doing my work on extrajudicial killings.

Right from the beginning, I was challenging the power structures. During General Ershad's time, I had a loaded gun pointed at my head. We were building the Drik Picture Library, our gallery, and the armed civilian cadre of the government stopped it. I was briefly arrested. Ershad was deposed, but the new government began using the military to round up opposition activists prior to a rigged election. Drik was where the protest took place, so soon after that I got stopped in the streets and was stabbed eight times.

Repression escalated further under the present regime. On August 4, 2018, I was walking in the streets and again I got

attacked. My equipment got smashed, I got roughed up. But I continued reporting, and that night I took pictures close to the party office, which became a flashpoint. On August 5, I gave an interview to Al Jazeera. I went back out again, I was shooting, I was livestreaming. I came back and was uploading pictures in the flat when the doorbell rang. That night, I was questioned and tortured. I later spent over a hundred days in jail.

But during this time, organizations like ARC and PEN America and so many people across the globe, and people in Bangladesh, felt this was the time to stand up, so they came out onto the streets. Sadly, with notable exceptions, the established cultural players, educators, and intellectuals did not say a thing. But activists did, and my students did, and at the grassroots level many, many people came on board and they performed in the streets and drew graffiti on the walls and protested and had press releases—they did everything that was necessary. And of course by then there was this massive global campaign. We also had the best lawyers in the country representing me, many of them pro bono, and we took the challenge. My family made the very brave decision that they were not going to compromise and make a deal. Rather, they were going to challenge the government, they were going to challenge the legality of this case. My bail was turned down five times, and on the sixth attempt I was finally given bail. The case still hangs over me, and I potentially face 14 years in prison if convicted. But now we are actually challenging the law itself, and that has opened the door to many other people who feel they, too, can challenge the law.

A portrait of Tania Bruguera, a woman with long brown hair, wearing a black jacket with a small blue and white ribbon pin on the left chest. She is sitting on a brown couch in a room with framed artwork on the wall and a wooden chair in the background.

TANIA BRUGUERA

Discipline: Performance artist
Country: Cuba
Threats: Arrest, harassment
When: 2014–present
Current Status: Threatened

Tania Bruguera is an internationally noted performance and installation artist and activist from Cuba who engages political and social issues through her work. She has helped promote the term “artivism,” which blends art and political action to protest and raise awareness of injustices. Her work has been shown in major arts institutions around the world, including the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Tate Modern in London. She has been arrested and jailed countless times throughout her career for her socially conscious artwork and activism, including, most recently, in June 2020. Besides her artistic practice, she runs INSTAR (Institute of Artivism Hannah Arendt), a “hub for civic literacy” in Havana that aims to be a space for performance and the expression of ideas centered on rethinking policy and generating social change.

“One of my strategies is using art as a way to say things that otherwise as a citizen I cannot say. I think art that tries to look at society, art that tries to be political, is related to activism because activism is not only to go out in the street and protest—activism is the daily fight against something that is wrong.”

Cuba wanted art to be propaganda. They wanted artists to talk about what happened, but only the good things. So many artists, in order to not be censored, talk about the good things as irony. They don't see themselves as activists—they see themselves as artists trying to work through censorship.

The government has seized the right to define who is and is not an artist. In Cuba, more and more, the censors are highly educated arts people. There is also a lot of harassment on the internet—a lot of harassment. But I am very proud to say that the activist community has learned how to deal with it. The activists started a campaign on the internet to help people understand what these threats are, showing that the Ministry of Culture now has a big cyber army and a lot of hackers.

I think activism is a way of being in the world, not an activity that you do two days a week. Injustice builds upon previous injustice. One piece of advice that I give people that I had to give myself—because sometimes this work is very disheartening, it's fight and fight and fight and fight, and you achieve very little in comparison to the energy you've given: If something feels wrong to them, even if they don't understand the causes, they should fight it. Many times, society trains us to silence ourselves, our own pain and our own sense of self-respect, our own sense of justice. So hear yourself, because this is who you really are. What you agree with is who you really are. If you want to be an activist, don't expect much and do a lot. And persist. It's not a short run, it's a long, long run.

And also be creative: The best cases that I've seen of people succeeding are those who disrupt the system by presenting something that the people in power don't know how to deal with. This gives you an advantage.

It's not really hope in the abstract sense that motivates me. It's like an energy that lets you continue even if nothing is happening. This hope can be transformed into a new case, into a new battle.

Photograph by Claudio Fuentes

A close-up portrait of Wanuri Kahiu, a Black woman with her hair styled in intricate braids. She is wearing a white collared shirt under a dark blue and white patterned jacket. She has a serious expression and is looking directly at the camera. She is wearing large, silver, leaf-shaped earrings.

WANURI KAHIU

Discipline: **Filmmaker**
Country: **Kenya**
Threats: **Censorship, harassment**
When: **2008–present**
Current Status: **Censored**

Wanuri Kahiu is an internationally acclaimed filmmaker, best known for *Rafiki*, a feature-length film that made waves after it premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in 2019. *Rafiki*, the story of two girls who fall in love and struggle with their relationship in a conservative, homophobic society, became a global cause célèbre when it was banned in Kenya. Kahiu and her crew faced severe backlash and harassment but fought back by taking their case to court and attempting to rescind the ban on the grounds that freedom of expression is enshrined in Kenya's constitution. Although the government lifted the ban just long enough for the film to qualify for an Oscar, as of today the ban remains in effect. Kahiu is also a founding member of AFROBUBBLEGUM, a collective of African artists whose ambition is to create “fun, fierce and frivolous” work.

“I recommend agitating and I recommend fighting. Any voice that stands up for kindness is necessary. Any voice that stands up for humanity is necessary—any voice. But I would strongly recommend being careful about the energy you let in and finding ways to direct your energy, and finding ways to refresh your energy.”

It's very hard to think that your imagination can be a threat, to think that your art can be troubling or radical. Not even radical but dangerous. I had never thought of myself as an activist. Even when I was making *Rafiki*, I didn't think of myself as an activist. Because I'm just creating. I'm creating what I feel, I'm creating what I'm responding to. It's just me creating worlds and hoping that the worlds are the kinds of places that I want to be a part of.

I know that the world I live in—and especially the Kenya that I live in—is conservative. I know that there'll be pushback. When I work, I try to be careful. Even when thinking of *Rafiki*, we wanted to make sure that we didn't break the law in making it. We hired a lawyer to work with us before we submitted the script for approval for a film license.

We talked about it with the primary actors—the girls, the parents. We said: Make sure you have a support system as you make this film. Make sure your family knows about it before you make it. We advise that you tell your family. Don't go into this film without somebody who understands and believes in this vision.

The Kenya Film Classification Board asked us to change the ending of *Rafiki* because it was not “remorseful enough.” Asking somebody to change a film is censorship. When we said no, they banned the film. I was really worried, because at that point the head of the Classification Board was also threatening to arrest me.

The only time I reacted was when we decided to sue and ask for the film to be screened for seven days. We won.

We knew that the moment we went to court, they couldn't arrest me. We're not only trying to overturn the ban—I think overturning the ban is neither here nor there. What is important is to establish a case that supports freedom of expression. I think that freedom of expression and freedom of speech are rudimentary rights.

Fighting can feel really lonely. I took a complete social media break. I needed the emotional capacity for the fight and moved away from spaces like social media, where it felt like I was constantly being attacked. I went to therapy. I think it is important for any artist doing controversial work to have a therapist. And having people who were helpful really got me through everything.



YULIA TSVETKOVA

Discipline: Visual and theater artist
 Country: Russia
 Threats: Arrest, prosecution
 When: November 2019–present
 Current Status: On trial

Yulia Tsvetkova is a visual artist and theater director from Komsomolsk-on-Amur, in Russia's Far East region. Tsvetkova's work often engages LGBTQIA+ and feminist themes, including frank examinations of the female body. This work, along with her activism and educational efforts on behalf of the LGBTQIA+ community, eventually drew the attention of the authorities in Russia, where homophobia runs rampant and the dissemination of "gay propaganda" is prohibited by law. After Tsvetkova created two LGBTQIA+-themed social media pages that featured artwork by women and promoted female empowerment and body positivity, the authorities charged her with "production and dissemination of pornographic materials," which could result in a sentence of up to six years in prison.

“Never underestimate what may happen. Art is so important, and governments understand that. They’re so afraid of freedom of choice, of thought, that they would do anything to stop it. So remember how important your art is.”

When I discovered activist theater, that is when art began to make sense to me. With art, we can change something in the world and its people. But the criminal charges pretty much stopped my entire life. All my work, all my projects, all my plans, thoughts—all of that was ruined. I can compare it to a car crash. You drive, and the crash happens, and you are there in ruins, and it's very hard to do something.

I was charged with pornography distribution, and after that they searched my house and my mom's workplace. We had to be searched in the most private places. I didn't have much legal support back then. I didn't have a lawyer. They give you a so-called state lawyer, who pretty much does nothing.

I reached out to some of the people I knew from my activist past—feminist and LGBTQIA+ activists. People offered to find me a lawyer, and a journalist came, too. When I see people who are kind, who are strong, who are brave, that helps me to go through all the nightmares. I think what's even more important for me: when people who are not human rights defenders, who are not activists, who do not support human rights globally, speak out. It means a lot when people who are not into politics support you. They speak about why the personal is political, why body positivity is political, and that means a lot.

I think that a big part of coping is to tell my story over and over and over. In a way, it's hard to live it again and again, but there's something about speaking out that shuts down the thoughts about the policemen, teachers, and people who want to kill me. I don't allow myself to think about the future.

So I just live in the here and now, and that is, in a way, a very interesting spiritual experience, like the Zen experience, where you just live in the moment.

What policemen do is they make you silent. They make you unimportant. They don't hear your voice. Speaking with the media, speaking to journalists, speaking to you right now, it's like becoming myself again. I think when journalists become silent, that is the beginning of the end. When art becomes silent, it's the beginning of the end. When artists don't succumb to threats and fear, when they fight for freedom of speech, for freedom of thought, they are heroes. I think people who are doing that in Russia right now are heroes.

APPENDIX

This appendix aims to provide a list of global organizations that offer a wide range of support to persecuted artists. This list is by no means exhaustive and many more resources can be found on ARC's searchable database, which is constantly growing. Furthermore, this list is organized by each organization's **primary** service, *not* their exclusive service. Whenever an organization administers more than one form of support, this has been listed, but we always recommend checking their websites for specific information as types of assistance can evolve and organizations may offer a vast array of options not fully reflected here.

EMERGENCY FUNDS

International

Agir Ensemble pour les Droits de l'Homme (AEDH)

Region: Global

Description: AEDH's emergency fund aims to protect human rights advocates and to respond rapidly to their calls for help when they are threatened or persecuted. How AEDH intervenes depends on local context, the amount of danger the human rights advocates are in, and the nature of the request by the human rights advocates.

Services offered: Emergency Funds, Immigration and Legal Services, Temporary Relocation, Trauma Services

Website: agir-ensemble-droits-humains.org

Contact: Fill out the [contact form](#) on their website

Civil Rights Defenders

Region: Global

Description: Civil Rights Defenders (CRD) is an international human rights organization based in Stockholm, Sweden. CRD partners with and supports human rights defenders who work in some of the world's most repressive regions on four continents.

Services offered: Emergency Funds, Advocacy, Lobbying and Policy Development, Professional Networks, Training

Website: crd.org

Email: info@crd.org

Telephone: +46 (0) 8 545 277 30

Freedom House

Description: Freedom House is an independent watchdog organization that advocates for human rights and free expression. It issues reports on human rights violations that are cited by a wide number of respected sources. Emergency grants are available to organizations and individuals under threat or attack due to their work.

Services offered: Emergency Funds, Advocacy, Immigration and Legal Services, Temporary Relocation

Website: freedomhouse.org

Telephone: +1 202 296 5101

Front Line Defenders

Region: Global

Description: The mission of Front Line Defenders is to protect human rights defenders at risk. It provides emergency support to those directly threatened as well as protection grants to organizations and individuals that help improve security.

Services offered: Emergency Funds, Advocacy, Security Training and

Development, Training

Website: frontlinedefenders.org

Email: info@frontlinedefenders.org

Telephone: +353 1 210 0489

ProtectDefenders.eu

Region: Global

Description: ProtectDefenders.eu is the European Union Human Rights Advocates mechanism established to protect defenders at high risk and facing the most difficult situations worldwide. It is led by a consortium of 12 NGOs and offers swift response to support human rights advocates at risk through temporary relocation or emergency financial support. The consortium is made up of Front Line Defenders, Reporters Without Borders, OMCT, FIDH, ESCR-NET, ILGA, Urgent Action Fund, Protection International, Peace Brigades International, EMHRF, FORUM-ASIA, and EHAHRDP.

Services offered: Emergency Funds, Temporary Relocation

Website: protectdefenders.eu

Email: contact@protectdefenders.eu

Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights

Region: Global

Description: Urgent Action Fund for Women's Rights is a global women's fund that protects, strengthens, and sustains women and transgender human rights defenders at critical moments. The fund intervenes when activists are poised to make great gains or face serious threats to their lives and work. It responds to requests from women's human rights defenders within 72 hours and has funds on the ground within 1-7 days.

Services offered: Emergency Funds

Website: urgentactionfund.org

Email: urgentact@urgentactionfund.org

Telephone: +1 415 523 0360

World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)

Region: Global

Description: OMCT works for, with, and through an international coalition of over 300 non-governmental organizations, called the SOS-Torture Network. It fights against torture, summary executions, forced disappearances, arbitrary detention and all other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment by providing emergency funding, housing, or legal assistance, as well as informational resources.

Services offered: Emergency Funds, Advocacy, Immigration and Legal Services, Trauma Services

Website: omct.org

Email: omct@omct.org

Telephone: +41 22 809 4939

Africa

DefendDefenders

Region: Sub-Saharan Africa

Description: DefendDefenders, known as The Protection Program of the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Advocates Project (EHAHRDP) until 2015, protects human rights defenders in the African region, focusing its work on Burundi, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda. Resources for various types of defenders are available on the website, as well as an emergency hotline for human rights defenders.

Services offered: Emergency Funds, Professional Networks, Regional Assistance, Training

Website: defenddefenders.org

Email: info@defenddefenders.org

Telephone: +256 783 027 611

Asia

FORUM-ASIA

Region: Asia

Description: FORUM-ASIA focuses on protecting the human rights of all individuals, groups, and peoples in Asia. It does so through advocacy, capacity-building, and the provision of emergency funds to threatened human rights defenders. Temporary relocation support, trial observation, and various other types of assistance can be provided.

Services offered: Emergency Funds, Advocacy, Immigration and Legal Services, Temporary Relocation, Training

Website: forum-asia.org

Email: hrd@forum-asia.org

Telephone: +66 (0) 2 1082643-45

Middle East and North Africa

Al Mawred Al Thaqafy

Region: Arab countries

Description: Al Mawred Al Thaqafy (Culture Resource) aims to support artistic creativity in the Arab region and to encourage cultural exchange between intellectuals and artists throughout a wide range of services and programs. Al Mawred Al Thaqafy provides temporary residencies, emergency funds, and mobility funds. Only artists, writers and cultural managers from Arab countries can apply.

Services offered: Emergency Funds, Temporary Relocation, Travel Funds

Website: mawred.org

Email: artist@mawred.org

Telephone: Office: +961 01 360 415 //

Mobile: +961 81 776 797

TEMPORARY RELOCATION

International

Artist Protection Fund (APF)

Region: Global

Description: APF at the Institute of International Education (IIE) makes life-saving fellowship grants to threatened artists and places them at host institutions and art centers in safe countries where they can continue their work and plan for their future.

Services offered: Temporary Relocation

Website: iie.org

Email: apf@iie.org

Artists at Risk (AR) - Perpetuum Mobile

Region: Global

Description: Artists at Risk (AR), initiated and curated by Perpetuum Mobile, aims to provide residencies and professional support to threatened artists and art-practitioners from all corners of the globe. AR-Safe Haven Residencies are located in numerous locations throughout Europe, including Norway, Italy, Greece, and Finland.

Services offered: Temporary Relocation

Website: artistsatrisk.org

Email: perpetualmobi@gmail.com

Telephone: Wire (@ar, @iv, @maamu)

Brown International Writers Project

Region: Global

Description: The International Writers Project at Brown University provides institutional, intellectual, artistic, and social support to writers who face personal danger and threats to their livelihood in nations throughout the world. Each academic year, the project sponsors a resident fellowship for one writer who feels unable to practice free expression at home. A 10-month fully funded living stipend and office is provided.

Services offered: Temporary Relocation

Website: brown.edu

Email: writing@brown.edu

Telephone: +1 401 863 1000

Centre for Applied Human Rights, University of York

Region: Global

Description: The Centre for Applied Human Rights runs a fellowship for human rights defenders at risk. Since 2008, the center has hosted over 61 defenders from a number of countries, including Sri Lanka, Kyrgyzstan, and Papua New Guinea. During the fellowship, the recipient has the opportunity both to recuperate from persecution and develop their skills. The human rights defender must currently undertake significant human rights activities.

Services offered: Temporary Relocation

Website: york.ac.uk

Email: cahr-admin@york.ac.uk

Telephone: +44 (0) 1904 325830

Cité internationale des arts

Region: Global

Description: The Cité internationale des arts is an artist-in-residence building which accommodates artists of all specialities and nationalities in Paris. Each year, more than 1,000 artists from 55 countries make use of the 325 residency workshops offered by the foundation. The Cité internationale des arts workshops are each operated by country specific organizations and universities. Applicants are encouraged to apply for residencies offered by institutions located in their home country.

Services offered: Residencies

Website: citedesartsparis.net

Email: contact@citedesartsparis.fr

Telephone: +33 (0) 142 78 71 72

City of Asylum - Detroit, Ithaca, Las Vegas (Black Mountain Institute), and Pittsburg

Region: Global

Description: The City of Asylum programs, part of the global ICORN network, provide safe haven to writers who have been persecuted for their literary work, so that they may live and write freely without censorship, risk of imprisonment, or threats against their lives.

Services offered: Temporary Relocation, Exhibition and Performance Opportunities, Professional Networks, Publishing Opportunities

Website: cityofasylumdetroit.org //

<https://ithacacityofasylum.com> //

<https://blackmountaininstitute.org> //

<http://cityofasylum.org>

Email: hello@cityofasylumdetroit.org

// ithacacityofasylum@gmail.com //

blackmountaininstitute@unlv.edu //

contact@cityofasylumpittsburgh.org

Telephone: Detroit: +1 313 288 9747 // **Las**

Vegas: +1 702 895 5542 Pittsburgh: +1 412 435 1110

Hamburg Foundation for the Politically Persecuted

Region: Global

Description: The Hamburg Foundation for the Politically Persecuted offers a safe haven for one year to human rights defenders. Scholarships are given based on recommendations by relevant organizations and individuals.

Services offered: Temporary Relocation

Website: hamburger-stiftung.de

Email: kontakt@hamburger-stiftung.de

Telephone: +49 40 42863 5757

International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN)

Region: Global

Description: ICORN is an independent organization of cities and regions

offering shelter to writers and artists at risk, advancing freedom of expression, defending democratic values, and promoting international solidarity. To date, more than 70 cities have signed up for the network, bringing long-term, but temporary, shelter to those at risk as a direct consequence of their creative activities.

Services offered: Temporary Relocation

Website: icorn.org

Email: icorn@icorn.org

Telephone: Executive Director: +47 51 50 71 25 // Programme Director: +47 51 50 79 17 //

Protection Manager: +47 51 50 79 40

Martin Roth Initiative

Region: Global

Description: Martin Roth Initiative protects artists who are committed in their home country to the freedom of art, democracy, and human rights. Successful candidates are provided with a monthly scholarship and temporary residence in Germany or third countries for a duration of 12 to 24 months.

Services offered: Temporary Relocation, Monitoring and Reporting

Website: martin-roth-initiative.de

Email: info@martin-roth-initiative.de

Telephone: +49 (0) 30 284491 76

SafeMUSE

Region: Global

Description: Safe Music Havens Initiative is a membership association offering persecuted musical artists a safe place to stay and work for an agreed period of time.

Services offered: Temporary Relocation, Exhibition and Performance Opportunities, Training

Website: safemuse.org

Email: je@online.no

Telephone: +47 913 078 802

Scholar Rescue Fund

Region: Global

Description: The Institute of International

Education's Scholar Rescue Fund (IIE-SRF) is the only global program that arranges and funds fellowships for threatened and displaced scholars at partnering higher education institutions worldwide. At the heart of IIE-SRF is the idea that each scholar they support is a beacon of hope in our world.

Services offered: Temporary Relocation

Website: scholarrescuefund.org

Email: srf@iie.org

Telephone: +1 212 205 6486

Scholars at Risk (SAR)

Region: Global

Description: SAR is an international network of higher education institutions committed to promoting academic freedom and protecting threatened scholars. SAR arranges temporary research and teaching positions at institutions in its network for scholars facing grave threats to their lives, liberty, and well-being. SAR also engages in advocacy and monitoring activities around issues of academic freedom.

Services offered: Temporary Relocation, Advocacy, Monitoring and Reporting, Training

Website: scholarsatrisk.org

Email: scholarsatrisk@nyu.edu

Telephone: +1 212 998 2179

Shelter City

Region: Global

Description: Shelter City is a national initiative of Justice and Peace, in collaboration with Dutch cities, focusing specifically on the protection of human rights advocates. When human rights advocates are under intense pressure because of their work, they can apply for a three-month temporary shelter in one of the eight Dutch Shelter Cities: Amsterdam, The Hague, Middelburg, Maastricht, Nijmegen, Utrecht, Tilburg, and Groningen.

Services offered: Temporary Relocation

Website: sheltercity.org

Email: sheltercity@justiceandpeace.nl

Telephone: +31 70 763 14 99

Africa

Africa Human Rights Network Foundation (AHRN)

Region: Sub-Saharan Africa

Description: AHRN facilitates, through various activities, the promotion, protection and capacity building of Human Rights Defenders and Human rights organizations in the Great Lakes region, and thus strengthens the role of Civil Society in the region. AHRN seeks a better Great Lakes Region without human rights violations.

Services offered: Temporary Relocation, Language Classes, Regional Assistance, Training

Website: ahrnfoundation.org

Email: info@ahrnfoundation.org

Telephone: +31 6 82234004

AfricanDefenders

Region: Sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa

Description: AfricanDefenders (the Pan-African Human Rights Defenders Network) is a network of five African sub-regional organizations, dedicated to the promotion and protection of human rights defenders across the African continent. The Ubuntu Hub Cities initiative is a relocation initiative for HRDs at risk across Africa. Any human rights defender at risk, threatened or persecuted for their work can apply for temporary relocation.

Services offered: Temporary Relocation, Advocacy, Awards, Regional Assistance

Website: africandefenders.org

Email: panafrica@defenddefenders.org

Telephone: +256 39 0202133

Hammerl Arts Rights Transfer (HART)

Region: Southern Africa

Description: HART is a fully-funded fellowship in recognition of excellence in human and creative rights, offering a 6-month or 12-month residency in Johannesburg.

Services offered: Temporary Relocation, Advocacy

Website: facebook.com/hart.southern.africa

Email: michael.schmidt@riseup.net

Telephone: +27 (0) 82 334 6665

LEGAL ASSISTANCE

International

Artistic Freedom Initiative (AFI)

Region: Global

Description: Led by immigration and human rights attorneys, Artistic Freedom Initiative (AFI) facilitates pro bono immigration representation and resettlement assistance for international artists at risk seeking to relocate to the USA. AFI is also a member of the NYC Safe Havens program, a temporary relocation program for artists at risk. Tamizdat is a program within AFI that facilitates international cultural exchange.

Services offered: Immigration and Legal Services, Temporary Relocation

Website: artisticfreedominitiative.org

Email: info@artisticfreedominitiative.org //

Tamizdat - matthew@tamizdat.org

Avant-Garde Lawyers (AGL)

Region: Global

Description: Avant-Garde Lawyers (AGL) is a collective of lawyers who utilize legal frameworks to protect and promote artistic expression.

Services offered: Legal Services

Website: avantgardelawyers.org

Email: contact@avantgardelawyers.org

Telephone: +33 (0) 601318533

Asia

Thai Lawyers for Human Rights (TLHR)

Region: Southeast Asia

Description: Thai Lawyers for Human Rights (TLHR) is a Thai organization working to raise awareness about human rights violations and provide free legal support to people whose rights have been violated. The organization runs a 24-hour hotline and uses the information gathered to disseminate public awareness and advice for those summoned or arrested.

Services offered: Legal Services, Advocacy

Website: tlhr2014.com

Email: tlhr@tlhr2014.com

Telephone: 092 271 3172 // 096 789 3173

Latin America

Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS)

Region: Argentina

Description: The Center for Legal and Social Studies is an Argentine human rights organization founded in 1979 during the last military dictatorship. It promotes the protection of human rights and their effective exercise, justice and social inclusion- both nationally and internationally. In its early years, CELS fought for truth and justice for the crimes committed under State terrorism.

Services offered: Legal Services, Advocacy

Website: cels.org

Telephone: (+54 11) 4334 4200

Contact: Fill out the [contact form](#) on their website.

Cubalex

Region: Cuba

Description: Cubalex is a non-profit organization that through national and

international law defends and promotes human rights as a form of social transformation, in order to achieve the reestablishment of democracy and rule of law in Cuba. Cubalex provides free legal assistance and advice to victims of human rights violations and groups in vulnerable situations in Cuba.

Services offered: Immigration and Legal Services, Lobbying and Policy Development

Website: cubalex.org

Email: info@cubalex.org

ADVOCACY

International

Amnesty International

Region: Global

Description: Amnesty International campaigns for a world where human rights are enjoyed by all. It primarily advocates around human rights issues and provides training for human rights defenders.

Services offered: Advocacy

Website: amnesty.org

Regional email addresses: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/about-us/contact/>

Article 19

Region: Global

Description: ARTICLE 19 is campaigning with people around the world for the right to exercise their rights. They work on behalf of freedom of expression wherever it is threatened. They operate offices in Bangladesh, Brazil, Kenya, Mexico, Tunisia, Senegal, and the UK and are in collaboration with 90 partners worldwide.

Services offered: Advocacy, Monitoring and Reporting, Training

Website: article19.org

Email: info@article19.org

Telephone: +44 20 7324 2500

Cartooning for Peace (CFP)

Region: Global

Description: CFP's primary mission is to provide assistance to editorial cartoonists. CFP uses campaigns, advocacy work, operational support, networking and other ways to help cartoonists find the support they deserve. One of CFP's major assets is its network of cartoonists and the solidarity such a network brings to life.

Services offered: Advocacy, Awards, Emergency Funds, Professional Networks

Website: cartooningforpeace.org

Email: foundation@cartooningforpeace.org

Cartoonists Rights Network International (CRNI)

Region: Global

Description: CRNI is an organization that defends creative freedom and the human rights of threatened cartoonists by raising public pressure on governments to end repression against cartoonists.

Services offered: Advocacy, Awards, Professional Networks

Website: cartoonistsrights.org

Email: director@cartoonistsrights.org

Freemuse

Region: Global

Description: Freemuse is an independent international organization advocating for and defending artistic freedom of expression. It monitors and documents violations of artistic freedom, exposes laws and policies that enable and sustain these violations, and leverages evidence-based advocacy for systemic structural changes at national, regional, and international levels.

Services offered: Advocacy, Emergency Funds, Monitoring and Reporting

Website: freemuse.org

Email: freemuse@freemuse.org

Telephone: +45 3332 1027

Human Rights Watch

Region: Global

Description: Human Rights Watch is renowned for its campaigns on behalf of human rights around the world. It often engages in targeted advocacy through coordination with other human rights organizations. HRW frequently produces reports on human rights violations in a number of countries.

Services offered: Advocacy, Monitoring and Reporting

Website: hrw.org

Contact details for offices: www.hrw.org/contact-us

Index on Censorship

Region: Global

Description: Index on Censorship is a nonprofit that campaigns for and defends free expression worldwide. It publishes work by censored writers and artists, promotes debate, and monitors threats to free speech through campaigns and events, a quarterly magazine, and an Awards Fellowship given annually to people or organizations who have done outstanding work to tackle free expression threats in the fields of arts, journalism, campaigning, and advocacy.

Services offered: Advocacy, Awards

Website: indexoncensorship.org

International Coalition for Filmmakers at Risk (ICFR)

Region: Global

Description: International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR), International Documentary Festival Amsterdam (IDFA) and the European Film Academy (EFA) joined forces to create the International Coalition for Filmmakers at Risk (ICFR), a permanent organization aimed at supporting filmmakers facing political persecution for their work. The coalition coordinates campaigns, publicizes cases of filmmakers in peril, and provides lobbying

representation.

Services offered: Advocacy

Website: <https://iffr.com/en/icfr>

Email: tiger@IFFR.com

Telephone: (+31) 10 890 90 90

International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX)

Region: Global

Description: IFEX is a network of organizations supporting freedom of expression as a fundamental human right. IFEX mainly acts through its campaigns, drawing attention to threatened or murdered individuals, coordinating efforts, and strengthening advocacy groups through conferences, workshops, and more. For individuals who need assistance, IFEX provides a list of distress funds, grants, and fellowships, along with a network page that can help those in several countries.

Services offered: Advocacy, Conferences, Directories, Professional Networks, Regional Assistance, Training

Website: ifex.org

Email: rkay@ifex.org

Telephone: +1 416 515 9622

National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC)

Region: North America

Description: The National Coalition Against Censorship works to promote freedom of thought, inquiry, and expression and opposes censorship in all its forms. NCAC provides assistance to artists, curators, and museum directors being threatened by censorship and, through a series of programs, also educates youth on the importance of free expression.

Services offered: Advocacy, Lobbying and Policy Development, Monitoring and Reporting, Workshops

Website: ncac.org

Email: ncac@ncac.org

Telephone: +1 212 807 6222

PEN International & PEN Centers

Region: Global

Description: PEN International promotes literature and freedom of expression and is governed by the PEN Charter and the principles it embodies: unhampered transmission of thought within each nation and between all nations. PEN Centers exist in over 140 countries worldwide. Their campaigns, events, and programs connect writers and readers, strengthen freedom of expression, defend linguistic rights, and promote quality education at the national, regional, and international level across the globe.

Services offered: Advocacy, Conferences, Emergency Funds, Professional Networks, Publishing Opportunities

Website: pen-international.org // <https://pen-international.org/centres>

Email: info@pen-international.org

Telephone: +44 (0) 20 7405 0338

Physicians for Human Rights

Region: Global

Description: PHR investigates and documents human rights violations, gives voices to survivors and witnesses, and plants seeds of reconciliation by ensuring that perpetrators can be held accountable for their crimes. PHR believes that medical ethics are deeply bound to the protection of human rights.

Services offered: Trauma Services, Monitoring and Reporting

Website: phr.org

Email: communications@phr.org

Telephone: +1 646 564 3720

Protection International

Region: Global

Description: Protection International provides tools and strategies to people who defend human rights in order to protect themselves. It supports individuals,

organizations, networks, and communities whose human rights are being violated through threats, judicial harassment, stigmatization, or other forms of repression.

Services offered: Advocacy, Lobbying and Policy Development, Professional Networks, Regional Assistance, Training

Website: protectioninternational.org

Contact: Fill out the [contact form](#) on their website

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

Region: Global

Description: OHCHR is the leading UN entity on human rights. The OHCHR provides assistance in the form of technical expertise and capacity-development in order to support the implementation of international human rights standards on the ground. It assists governments, which bear the primary responsibility for the protection of human rights, to fulfill their obligations and supports individuals to claim their rights. Moreover, it speaks out objectively on human rights violations.

Services offered: Advocacy

Website: ohchr.org

Email: InfoDesk@ohchr.org

Telephone: +41 22 917 9220

UNESCO

Region: Global

Description: UNESCO is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. It seeks to build peace through international cooperation in Education, the Sciences and Culture. UNESCO's programmes contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals defined in Agenda 2030, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015. UNESCO develops educational tools to help people live as global citizens free of hate and intolerance.

Services offered: Advocacy

Website: en.unesco.org

Telephone: +33 (0) 1 45 68 10 00

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Region: Global

Description: UNHCR is a global organization dedicated to saving lives, protecting rights and building a better future for refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people. The primary purpose at UNHCR is to safeguard the rights and well-being of people who have been forced to flee.

Services offered: Advocacy, Humanitarian Assistance

Website: unhcr.org

Telephone: +41 22 739 8111

Africa

Amani: Africa Creative Defence Network

Region: Africa

Description: Amani was established to help provide rapid responses to artists at risk in Africa, coordinate adequate support when artists and cultural professionals in Africa face danger because of their work, and support regional safe havens in Africa. It is made up of: Africa Human Rights Network (AHRN), Al Mawred al Thaqafy, Alert-Art-Afrik, ARC, Arterial Network, Freemuse, Hammerl Arts Rights Transfer (HART), The Museum of Movements, PEN Uganda, Safe Havens, and Southern Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (SAHRDN).

Services offered: Advocacy, Emergency Funds, Temporary Relocation

Website: <https://artistsatriskconnection.org/story/amani-africa-creative-defence-network>

Email: arc@pen.org

Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa (IHRDA)

Region: Sub-Saharan Africa,
Description: IHRDA is a pan-African human rights organization working to promote awareness of human rights and improve the use and effectiveness of the African Human Rights system by offering pro bono legal counsel, conducting training and workshops, and publishing information.
Services offered: Advocacy, Immigration and Legal Services, Training, Workshops
Website: ihrda.org
Email: ihrda@ihrda.org
Telephone: Office: +220 44 10 413/4 // **Cell:** +220 77 51 200

Southern African Human Rights Defenders Network (SAHRDN)

Region: Sub-Saharan Africa,
Description: SAHRDN is a regional human rights defenders network consisting of representatives from human rights organizations in ten countries in Southern Africa. Founded with the primary mandate to coordinate the protection and security of HRDs in the region and enhance their ability to work in their particular countries in the face of state-driven or supported repression, SAHRDN focuses on the most vulnerable and marginalized W/HRDs, operating mostly in remote communities, who are unaware of protection mechanisms available and are often left behind.
Services offered: Advocacy, Awards, Conferences, Regional Assistance, Workshops
Website: <http://www.southernafricadefenders.africa/>
Email: info@southernafricadefenders.africa // protection@southernafricadefenders.africa
Telephone: +27 78 125-1062

Middle East and North Africa

Center for Human Rights in Iran

Region: Middle East and North Africa
Description: The Center for Human Rights in Iran (CHRI) comprises award-winning journalists, researchers, and human rights advocates collaborating to document real-time, on-the-ground human rights conditions in Iran. CHRI's team regularly disseminates comprehensive reports, briefing papers, breaking news articles and continuous news updates, press releases, blogs, videos, audio podcasts, and interactive online projects.
Services offered: Advocacy, Lobbying and Policy Development, Monitoring and Reporting
Website: iranhumanrights.org
Email: info@iranhumanrights.org
Telephone: +1 347 689 7782

Latin America

CEJIL

Region: Latin America
Description: CEJIL's mission is to contribute to the full enjoyment of human rights in the Americas through the effective use of the tools of the Inter-American System and other International Human Rights Law protection mechanisms.
Services offered: Advocacy
Website: cejil.org
Contact: Fill out the [contact form](#) on their website

Fundación Acceso\Costa Rica

Region: Central America
Description: Fundación Acceso is united by the mission of mitigating the permanent and growing violation of the rights related to the physical, technological and psychosocial

security of populations in a situation of vulnerability and/or risk in Central America.
Services offered: Advocacy, Regional Assistance
Website: acceso.or.cr
Email: info@acceso.or.cr
Telephone: +506 2253 9860

Guatemala Human Rights Commission

Region: Latin America
Description: The Guatemala Human Rights Commission is committed to funding and protecting human rights defenders working in Guatemala. Emergency funds and support can be directed to activists who are directly threatened.
Services offered: Advocacy, Awards, Emergency Funds, Immigration and Legal Services
Website: ghrc-usa.org
Email: ghrc-usa@ghrc-usa.org
Telephone: USA: +1 (202) 529 6599 // **Guatemala:** +502 4991 7780, 2254 5840

CREATIVE GRANTS

International

Aid A - Aid for Artists in Exile

Region: Global
Description: Aid A-Aid for Artists in Exile helps artists from anywhere in the world who are persecuted in their home countries for standing up for freedom of expression, human rights and democracy, and as a result are being prevented from carrying out their creative work in the areas of theatre, fine art, literature, film and music.
Services offered: Grants, Advocacy, Awards, Regional Assistance
Website: aid-a.com
Email: mail@aid-a.com
Telephone: +49 (0) 171 3611859

On the Move

Region: Global
Description: On the Move is a cultural mobility information network with more than 35 members in over 20 countries across Europe. On the Move aims to facilitate cross-border mobility in the arts and culture sector. The website provides guides and toolkits for mobility, as well as a database of places to find funding and artists' residencies listed by continent.
Services offered: Grants, Directories
Website: on-the-move.org
Email: mobility@on-the-move.org

Middle East and North Africa

Ettijahat Independent Culture

Region: Middle East and North Africa
Description: Ettijahat-Independent Culture seeks to promote independent culture and arts in the process of cultural, political, and social change by supporting artists and undertakers of cultural initiatives, enabling young researchers, building consensus and alliances between individuals and cultural institutions, promoting arts and artists through regional and international platforms, and helping Syrian communities gain access to culture and arts.
Services offered: Grants, Exhibition and Performance Opportunities, Professional Networks, Training, Workshops
Website: ettijahat.org
Email: info@ettijahat.org

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