

Special Report

When Musicians Become a Menace

Kjell Skyllstad⁺ (Norway)

Twenty years ago following the 1st World Conference on Music and Censorship in Copenhagen, Denmark a group of engaged musicians and musicologists came together to set up an organization with a main focus on making their work against censorship more effective, agreeing on giving the new organization the name of *Freemuse*.

After 12 years of activities observing increased silencing of artists regarded as a menace to the existing social order the organization decided to broaden its scope, addressing root causes rather than just symptoms. The broader focus included the promotion and protection of freedom of artistic expression and creativity across all art forms through the adoption of a common agenda of monitoring and documenting violations of artistic freedom globally and working with artists and activists for systemic structural changes.

Finally a comprehensive documentation based on extensive cooperative research carried out in nations across the globe has now been released: *The State of Artistic Freedom 2018*. see www.freemuse.org.

It is indeed a shocking documentation A statement accompanying the release of the research results says:

Freemuse warns of the emergence of a new global culture of silencing others, where artistic expression is being shut down in every corner of the globe, including in the traditionally democratic West.

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Freemuse researchers have closely examined more than 500 individual cases of artistic freedom violations in 78 countries in the 2017 calendar year, analyzing legal, social and political motivations for the violations. The report identifies 48 artists in prison, each serving around 4 years of punishment. Also during 2017 one musician per week were found to be prosecuted for expressing themselves. They include rappers, LGBT artists, and musicians from minority groups

Aiming at silencing artists from groups advocating social change or reform is seen as a priority especially in countries under authoritarian rule who keep constant watch on the popularity ratings and reactions on the social media as well. It seems however that any action aimed at silencing the voices for social justice in the media age is bound to backlash and fail.

For a report from the symposium *Listen to the Silenced: The State of Artistic Freedom in Europe* convened by Cultural Action Europe at the European Parliament on September 4, 2018. See www.cultureactioneurope.org.