

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION CHARTER

Charter

Books are invaluable sources of culture and knowledge, equally capable of shedding light on new perspectives and fostering the exchange of ideas, as simply bringing enjoyment to people, allowing them to escape reality and discover new places. Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, books contribute to raising literacy rates, helping people become critical thinkers and active members of society.

In parallel, bookshops play a key role in ensuring that people have access to books, thereby acting as vital placemakers and pillars of community life and society. Through their position as cultural hubs, bookshops can also provide spaces and opportunities for people to read, learn, debate and exchange opinions.

It is therefore no coincidence that throughout history, during times of political oppression, books have been banned, and even destroyed, while authors, publishers, and bookshops have been targeted, imprisoned and vandalised.

As a voice for European and international booksellers, the European and International Booksellers Federation (EIBF) is aware of its privilege and responsibility in promoting and protecting the fundamental right to freedom of expression.

EIBF recognises the right to freedom of expression and opinion as a universal human right, which is enshrined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights, and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. EIBF promotes the right to free expression as part of a coherent system of human rights which are mutually reinforcing.

Freedom of expression and open and free public debate are the building blocks of healthy democracies. The contribution that bookshops bring to the public space is, therefore, indispensable. EIBF does, however, acknowledge that freedom of expression is a vulnerable right that must always be safeguarded and advocated for.

This charter outlines EIBF's position on freedom of expression for its future work and engagement on the topic through seven guiding principles listed below.

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Guiding Principles

1

EIBF recognises the freedom of expression and opinion as a universal inalienable right, as enshrined in international law under Article 19 of the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Article 11 under the European Charter of Fundamental Rights.

2

Freedom of expression is a basic prerequisite for a free, diverse and democratic society. It is a key right that enables the exercise of other human rights, all of which are balanced in a coherent international legal system. Freedom of expression should, therefore, be distinguished from any incitement to hate speech, discrimination or violence.

3

Since its origins as both a European and an international association, EIBF has long advocated for the freedom to write, publish, and disseminate the written word and has remained firmly opposed to any form of censorship. This commitment has continued over the years, and remains as strong as ever, as reflected in our Book Charter.

4

EIBF also strongly condemns any other action that may hinder the freedom to write, publish and disseminate the written word, such as the banning of books, the persecution of authors, publishers and booksellers, as well as raids and searches of bookshops, among others.

5

As representatives of booksellers, EIBF highlights the role of bookshops as spaces where freedom of expression thrives. EIBF also values and recognises the tireless work of the bookselling community across the globe in ensuring these cultural hubs continue receiving the support and recognition they need in society.

6

EIBF stands by the European and international publishing community – the International Publishers Association (IPA) and the Federation of European Publishers (FEP) –, recognising their invaluable work in promoting freedom of expression and vouching to continue working together to defend this fundamental human right.

7

EIBF calls on the European Union, its institutions and judicial branch, to always uphold the freedoms to express, publish and disseminate ideas, books and cultural materials, as well as to act firmly against all forms of censorship within the Union.