



## **Publishers and Booksellers condemn recent attacks on bookshops and publishing houses**

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**The International Publishers Association (IPA) and the International Booksellers Federation (IBF) strongly condemn the recent series of attacks on publishing houses and publisher bookshops in Greece, resulting in the burning of thousands of books, and the UK with the attempted firebombing of publisher Gibson Square. Both IPA and IBF support freedom to publish without fear of attack or reprisal, and cannot accept attempts by any individual, group or government to censor through violence and intimidation those who write, publish or sell on any issue, be it on politics, culture or faith.**

In June and July this year, there has been a series of politically-motivated attacks on book publishers and their bookshops in Athens. All of these attacks have seemingly resulted in the destruction of these establishments and the burning of tens of thousands of books.

In the UK, since 27 September, four people have been arrested under the Terrorism Act 2000 on suspicion of carrying out an arson attack on the offices of the London-based publishing house, Gibson Square, which is also the home of its head, Martin Rynja. The arrests occurred after a fire broke out in the building, requiring the evacuation of everyone inside. The attack may be linked to the publisher's plans to release on 30 October the first English language edition a novel by US author, Sherry Jones, entitled *The Jewel of Medina*. The book fictionalises the Prophet Mohamed's relationship with his favourite wife, Aisha. Gibson Square took on the publication in the UK, after a planned publication in the US was withdrawn.

The President of IBF, Karl Pus, declared: *"Freedom of expression and freedom to publish are fundamental conditions for any democracy. These freedoms are prerequisites for an informed exchange of information, views and values among citizens. They constitute a right to inform, discuss, and criticize. Religious believers have a right not to be discriminated against on the basis of their beliefs [in that sense, freedom of religion is fundamental], but they cannot expect their religion to be set free from criticism. Similarly, the holders of a given political view cannot expect their political beliefs to be set free from criticism. Reciprocally, freedom of expression implies a right to contest and protest peacefully against any utterance that ones dislikes or feels insulted by. It goes without saying, violence, including fire bombings, should be banned in all circumstances"*.

Ana Maria Cabanellas, IPA President, added: "One must take these attacks very seriously, condemning them firmly and reminding all that at the very heart of freedom of expression and freedom to publish one has the right to debate openly and publicly different positions and views on political, religious or ethical matters, and to take opposing views. Governments should ensure that open debates, in particular about controversial issues, must take place in a non-violent form. To quote Heinrich Heine, «in a place where they burn books, they will end up burning human beings»".

#### **Notes for Editors:**

**Greece:** The publishers and bookshops concerned seem to hold right-wing political views. All of the attacks have reportedly lasted some 15 to 20 minutes without police interference.

**UK:** Gibson Square describes itself as publisher of books that are "able to contribute to a current debate". Among them *Blowing Up Russia* by former KGB officer Alexander Litvinenko, *House of Bush*, *House of Saud* by Craig Unger and *Londistan* by Melanie Phillips.

#### **More about IPA:**

The International Publishers Association (IPA) is the global non-governmental organisation representing all aspects of book and journal publishing worldwide. Established in 1896, IPA's mission is to promote and protect publishing and to raise awareness for publishing as a force for cultural and political advancement worldwide. IPA is an industry association with a human rights mandate. IPA currently has 65 member associations in 53 countries.

#### **More about IBF:**

The International Booksellers Federation (IBF), founded in 1956, is an international and independent non-profit making organization. National Booksellers Associations are Full Members and individual booksellers are Associate Members. IBF's political mission is to provide its Members with help and support when the need to lobby their governments on issues affecting the book trade. IBF also offers a variety of services to its Members, which range from worldwide networking, information and professional expertise to the promotion of the bookshop as the place to buy books.

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