

Press Release



FREEDOM
TO CREATE

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Freedom to Create Prize announces finalists

The shortlist for the 2009 Freedom to Create Prize has been announced. Winners for the Main, Youth and Imprisoned Artist Prize categories will be unveiled at an awards ceremony to be held at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, on 25 November 2009.

London – Mohsen Makhmalbaf, the celebrated filmmaker and official overseas spokesman for 2009 Iranian presidential candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi, is today revealed as one of the shortlisted finalists for the 2009 Freedom to Create Prize. He joins Western Saharan singer Aziza Brahim, imprisoned Burmese poet Saw Wei and Afghani installation artist Sheenkai Alam Stanikzai and other artists from around the globe competing for US\$125,000 in prize money.

Freedom to Create Prize founder Richard Chandler praised the bravery of this year's 1,015 artists from 110 countries who entered the prize.

"The Freedom to Create Prize is the only award of its kind in the world. It celebrates the power of art to fight oppression, break down stereotypes and build trust in societies where the social fabric has been ripped apart by conflict, violence and misunderstanding," said Mr Chandler. "Of most importance, the Prize also celebrates the bravery of artists who pursue their craft despite great danger to themselves."

The Prize is the celebratory component of a broader Freedom to Create initiative that uses art to drive change and help build the foundations of creativity in broken societies.

It will be judged by a panel of high profile artists, opinion formers, and human rights experts: Leading international human rights lawyer and jurist on the UN's Internal Justice Council Geoffrey Robertson QC; composer and founder of West-Eastern Divan Orchestra Daniel Barenboim; co-founder, along with Koffi Annan, of global diplomatic group, The Elders, and founder of Indian women and micro-finance movements Dr Ela Bhatt; BBC arts correspondent Razia Iqbal; *Time Out* founder and chair of Human Rights Watch Tony Elliot; award-winning Anglo-Indian artist Sacha Jafri; New York-based arts lawyer Peter Stern; artist and philanthropist Ana Tzarev; and Zimbabwean playwright Cont Mhlanga, winner of the inaugural Freedom to Create Prize in 2008.

The Main Prize finalists:

- Born in a refugee camp in Western Sahara, Aziza Brahim is a world musician whose songs have been outlawed in Morocco for championing the human rights of the Saharawi refugees in one of the world's most least-understood conflicts.
- Former war photographer Karim Ben Khelifa draws on his experience and skill to create images which redefine and humanize the current conflict between Palestine and Israel.

- Celebrated Iranian filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf has dedicated his craft to highlighting social justice issues both in his native Iran and in neighbouring countries such as Afghanistan. He also established a film school to foster a new generation of Iranian filmmakers and has established NGOs in Afghanistan.
- Afghan female artist Sheenkai Alam Stanikzai uses video performance, installation and photography to tackle the subjugation and violent persecution of women in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries.
- Burmese refugee women's group, The Kumjing Storytellers, use giant paper maché dolls in an installation piece designed to represent their stories of ethnic persecution in Burma and the plight of migrants and refugees from around the world.

Five moving submissions make up the shortlist for the Youth Prize:

- The AOS Angels Performance Troupe are a group of HIV-infected children and AIDS orphans living in China who have used painting to express the isolation they experience every day.
- Dance group Genesis: Sarajevo is comprised of nine girls from Bosniak and Croat backgrounds living in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Using the city of Sarajevo as their stage, the girls perform against the backdrop of culturally relevant sites, such as a Catholic church or Islamic fountain, to heal their fractured communities and express their hope for a peaceful future.
- Poimboi Veeyah Koindu (The Orphan Boys of Koindu), is a performance group made up of former child soldiers from Sierra Leone's civil war. They use the power of dance and music to not only heal themselves, but to seek forgiveness and acceptance from their communities.
- Super Buddies Club in Swaziland has nominated 15 of their group who during their school holidays, wrote and performed a play empowering child victims of sexual abuse to speak out and seek help. Sexual abuse is one of the drivers of the spread of HIV in a country where 43% of the population lives with the disease.
- The Zugdidi Shalva Dadiani State Drama Theatre in Georgia, has brought together the region's refugee children to perform on the Abkhazian-Georgian border in the neutral zone on Enguri Bridge in a powerful piece called *Peace Podium*.

The three shortlisted artists for the Imprisoned Artist Prize are currently being detained in some of the most oppressive countries in the world:

- In September, Cameroonian singer Lapiro de Mbanga was jailed for three years after his song *Constitution Constipeé* became a rallying anthem for nation-wide protests over recent constitutional amendments.
- On 21 June, Iranian filmmaker, playwright and journalist Maziar Bahari was arrested and charged with attempting to overthrow the government following the disputed presidential elections. He was released on bail on October 17 after pressure from international human rights and media groups.
- Nationally celebrated Burmese poet and installation artist Saw Wei was jailed for two years in November 2008 for publishing a love poem which contained a code criticizing the leader of the Junta.

Notes to Editors:

There are three prize winners in the Main Prize category, who will share a prize pool of US\$75,000. The first place prize of US\$50,000 will be split equally between the winner of the award, and an organisation nominated by them to further the cause that their work has highlighted. The second place prize of US\$15,000 will be similarly divided equally between the winner and their nominated organisation. The US\$10,000 third place prize will be shared the same way.

The Youth Prize is open to artists who are under the age of 18. The US\$25,000 prize will be divided into two. The winner(s) will receive US\$10,000. The remaining US\$15,000 will be given to an organisation nominated by them to further the cause their artwork has highlighted.

The final category, the Imprisoned Artist Prize, focuses on artists who are imprisoned as a result of their art and the role of their work in highlighting injustice. This prize differs slightly from the other categories, in that the panel will place less emphasis on the artist's work and more on the personal risks incurred by them, the message conveyed through their work and its impact. A single prize of US\$25,000 will be directed towards securing the artist's release, advocating on behalf of them and their cause and offering support to their family.

About Freedom to Create:

Freedom to Create (www.freedomtcreate.com) is an initiative that seeks to improve lives by addressing society's ability to support and sustain creativity. The initiative focuses on those societies in greatest need.

For creativity to flourish, it's critical to have certain foundations in place – things like education, trust, and freedom of expression. The Freedom to Create initiative concentrates on these foundations. Through our ArtAction arm (www.artaction.com), we support arts-driven projects that try to strengthen those foundations where they are weak. Through our annual Freedom to Create Prize (www.freedomtcreateprize.com), we celebrate artists who are beacons of inspiration for social change working in the most challenging conditions around the globe. Collectively our efforts seek to drive future prosperity by enabling creativity to flourish.

Freedom to Create is backed by R.F. Chandler (www.rfchandler.com), a Singapore-based private investment group with more than 20 years' experience investing in emerging markets.

THE SHORTLISTED ARTISTS IN FULL:

Freedom to Create Main Prize

Aziza Brahim (Western Sahara)

Western Sahara remains one of the world's last remaining major non-self governing territories. Morocco's control of the region is not internationally recognised and is disputed militarily by the Polisario Front, an Algerian-backed movement claiming independence for the territory as the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). The conflict has produced generations of refugees and approximately 150,000 Saharawis housed on Algerian territory in four Polisario controlled camps, with reports of restricted freedom of expression. Aziza Brahim embodies the new voice of the Saharawis, a people who resist and fight on to win their independence. Aziza was in exile before she was even born, when her heavily pregnant mother fled to a refugee camp in 1976. Her songs evoke exile, the right to freedom and the abuse of the human rights of her people living in the occupied zones of Western Sahara. She has been nominated for her album, *Mi Canto*. Mixing Saharawi music with rock, blues and African percussions, she tries to renovate the Saharawi rhythms and to make Saharawi music accessible to the whole world. Aziza's music is censored by the authorities in Morocco and the Western Sahara zones because authorities believe it champions the Saharawi people that have been tortured, killed or have disappeared during the conflict. Aziza, considered an enemy of the Moroccan government, can no longer visit the occupied zones.

Karim Ben Khelifa (Yemen)

Until two years ago, Karim had spent a decade of his life behind the lens as a war photographer. He left his home in Yemen to take photographs to 'change the world'. However, after assignments in countless war zones and brushes with death, Karim changed direction, deciding to focus entirely on dissecting conflicts through a different means. His first assignment is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the effects of which are felt around the world. Of his photography he writes: "It attempts to overturn the conventional assumptions surrounding the ongoing conflict by asking the fighters from the opposing sides three simple questions: who they are; who their enemy is, and why they are fighting." Karim believes that by allowing them to explain their motives, the combatants are humanised. "The glib dismissal of the humanity of the 'enemy' is not so much about the limits of empathy as it is the limits of imagination. The ultimate goal of this art project is to expand the moral imagination." Karim entered Gaza immediately after the last conflict and once in the territory had to build the trust of militia such as the Islamic Jihad and Al Qassam Brigade of Hamas, all reluctant to be photographed and interviewed in the open. He then repeated the process with the Israeli armed forces. He has plans to replicate his idea in Kashmir, Sudan and Columbia, to further investigate the concept of "The Enemy".

Mohsen Makhmalbaf (Iran)

Following this year's disputed elections, as images of the Green Revolution sweeping through Tehran's streets hit the world's newsfeeds, the Iranian government acted swiftly. While police and paramilitaries suppressed peaceful protestors with firearms, batons and pepper spray, authorities closed universities, banned rallies and blocked websites, phone transmissions and text messaging. When they closed the press office of defeated presidential candidate Mir-Houssein Moussavi, he turned to celebrated Iranian cinematographer, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, to be his voice. Mohsen's rise to become leader of the new wave of Iranian cinema came from unlikely beginnings. When he was 15, Mohsen formed an underground Islamic militia group and was shot and jailed by the time he was 17. While imprisoned, Mohsen educated himself and underwent an intellectual renaissance after which he distanced himself from violence, believing Iranian society suffers more from cultural poverty than

anything else. Mohsen has since written and directed 18 feature films and six short films that have been widely presented in international film festivals over the past ten years. Time magazine selected his 2001 film, *Kandahar*, as one of top 100 films of all time. In 2006, he was a juror at the Venice Film Festival. His nominating party, ZirZamin, an alternative Iranian media magazine said: "We are nominating all of his works because they promote freedom, understanding, open societies, secular humanism and respect to others. His analysis and depiction tasks people to questions real in everybody's life and social realism. He is not only a film director but an educationalist, author and analyst."

Sheenkai Alam Stanikzai (Afghanistan)

Despite a rich cultural history stretching back thousands of years, Afghanistan is described as having "a culture of nothingness." The Soviet invasion in 1979, and more recently the brutal suppression under the Taliban, meant art and culture were systematically destroyed, with all music being banned. Sheenkai Alam Stanikzai is one of a generation of Afghans who grew up during the conflict without the benefit of art or music. Her art explores the re-emergence of Afghan spirit after years of oppression. The fact she is a woman brings further poignancy to her work. Sheenkai has fashioned an installation piece which includes video performance, installation and modern photography tackling Chel Dokhtaraan, the historical event when 40 Afghan women committed suicide by jumping into wells during an invasion. But Sheenkai believes these 'honorable' deaths are "in the past." "What is happening today is that women, more than 40, are dying every day in different circumstances." Her work symbolizes the violent acts – public executions, floggings, stonings and hangings – that are being perpetrated today against females both in Afghan and neighbouring countries.

The Kumjing Storytellers (Burma)

Like all ethnic groups in Burma, the Shan are brutally suppressed and persecuted by the military junta. It is estimated that 6 million live in Burma. "Kumjing" - a Thai women's name meaning 'precious jewel' is used to represent the women who have migrated to live and work in the Thai-Burmese border areas. Since July this year, the military regime has renewed a scorched earth campaign in central Shan state that has driven more than 10,000 villagers from their homes. Troops have burned down over 500 houses, scores of granaries and forcibly relocated almost 40 villages. The women that make up The Kumjing Storytellers are among those who have fled the Burma-Thai border region, often leaving their families behind. Not simply an artwork, but a living art action, The Journey of Kumjing is a performance in which these persecuted women can tell their stories, challenge discrimination and assert their human rights. Some 250 paper maché-dolls travel across Thailand and the world to raise awareness of their plight. The Kumjing Storytellers interweave their personal history through the dolls. "The message of the piece is one of courage, hope and inspiration. We want to humanize migrants in the eyes of society," say the women. The Storytellers also want to inspire society to change the way it thinks and behaves towards 'outsiders'.

Freedom to Create Youth Prize

AOS Angels Performance Troupe (China)

The world's most populous country has at least 800,000 HIV-positive inhabitants. UNAIDS warns that by 2010 China could have the greatest number of HIV-positive people in the world. Located in the central western area of China, Fuyang Anhui is one of the country's poorest provinces. The region is famous for a blood scandal during the 1990s when peasant workers earned money by donating blood at official stations. Corrupt officials ignored hygiene procedures and re-used needles to cut costs. As a result the HIV virus spread rapidly throughout the population. Years of covering up the scandal allowed the virus to proliferate, with thousands of children born with HIV and many more struggling to survive as AIDS orphans. This submission, a painting entitled *We Are All the Same* is created by five 'Angels' – two boys and three girls aged eight to 16. These children are either AIDS Orphans or are

living with HIV and face hostility from their community and relatives who are uneducated about how the disease spreads. The AOS Angels are not allowed to attend school or play with 'healthy' children. Through the painting the children hope to use their own experiences to reduce the social discrimination that they – and children like them – experience every day. The work expresses the idea that children affected by HIV/AIDS share the same dreams as children whose lives are not blighted by the disease. They wrote: "We like to express our feelings through art, especially painting. We created this artwork and want to tell the people that all the children in the world are the angels, we should have friends, enjoy love, get education opportunities, and share fair social resources with others, because we are all the same."

Genesis: Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

During the Bosnian war, Sarajevo was the backdrop for one of the longest sieges in modern warfare. Although 15 years have passed, ethnic tensions linger and are escalating in some places. Even today, children from various ethnic groups attend segregated schools. The dance *Heart of Sarajevo* was created by the children of Genesis: Sarajevo in July 2009 as part of its awareness campaign to address issues affecting youth in post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina. Instead of focusing on the images of ethnic hatred such as the buildings destroyed during the Bosnian war fifteen years ago, the girls, who come from both Muslim (Bosniak) and Christian (Croat) backgrounds wanted to show the beauty of Sarajevo while remembering the past, commenting on the present, and setting the path for a peaceful and happier future where people of different ethnicities get along and work harmoniously together. The youths created site-specific choreography for places of significance to them, including the Mosque in the old town and a Catholic cathedral, representing both Muslim and Christian architecture. Lastly portrayed is the memorial to the children of Sarajevo who died during the war, which was unveiled in May 2009. The children are shown making contact while dancing and their movements represent their hope for a future where there is no war and where children and people of all ages can work together to promote peace.

Pimboi Veeyah Koindu (Sierra Leone)

During 11 years of civil war, tens of thousands of Sierra Leoneans died and more than two million were displaced. This brutal conflict gained further notoriety for the abduction and use of children as soldiers by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). Pimboi Veeyah Koindu is made up of a dozen youths who were all active members. Most were between five and ten when they were abducted and forced to watch the RUF kill their families. In 2006, the Center for Victims of Torture posted David Alan Harris, a dance artist and mental health clinician specializing in torture rehabilitation, to work with a group of boys from the war-ravaged district of Kailahun. From this experience, a dance group was formed – Pimboi Veeyah Koindu (The Orphan Boys of Koindu). When nearing the last of his dance sessions with the former boy soldiers, David asked them what they wanted to accomplish. Citing the need for forgiveness, the group created a performance for the community in which they would depict their roles in the war. Their resulting 25 minute play portrays the agony of the boy's forced recruitment and other coerced violence, eventually asking forgiveness of the local chief, neighbours and families. A youth who as a boy had been forced to kill his own parents introduces the performance, telling the audience *Healing and Forgiveness* was about, "How we were forced to do things; how we were punished; and how we punished others." Another spoke directly to the community: "We are your children. Please accept us back." At the end of the performance, the group were welcomed back with open arms.

Super Buddies Club (Swaziland)

With the highest death rate in the world and 43% of its 1.2 million population living with HIV/AIDS, hysteria has entered Swaziland's public consciousness. Earlier this year a politician floated the idea of compulsory HIV testing, forcing those infected to be tattooed on the buttocks. The epidemic has had a profound impact on this tiny landlocked country and has posed significant developmental challenges. Super Buddies Club is a nationwide youth network that uses the arts to educate its peers about the disease and addresses the issue of child sexual abuse that has caused many children to be infected

with HIV and AIDS in Swaziland. Over the school holidays, 15 members of the Super Buddies Club wrote and performed a theatre piece. At the end of the performance, the heroine is empowered to speak out against the taboo subject of sexual abuse and seek help from other youths who band together and deliver justice. The youths performed the play at a child protection rally held in June this year, with more than 1,500 people attending the event. After their performance, discussions followed on child rights and responsibilities.

Zugdidi Shalva Dadiani State Drama Theatre (Georgia)

Last year's Ossetia war brought to the world's attention a little understood conflict involving the secessionist movement of the Abkhaz minority - backed by the Russian Federation, Ossetia and Abkhazia - against Georgia. The Enguri Bridge between Georgia and Abkhazia is a neutral area which marks the ceasefire line. Abkhazia declared itself independent from Georgia in 1992 and after a bloody civil war a UNO mission observes the ceasefire line between Georgia and Abkhazia since 1994. Nevertheless nearly every day armed incidents take place in the Kodori Gorge between the both armies and guerrilla fighters. On last year's International Children's Day on June 1, Abkhazian and Georgian refugee children living in Georgia were brought together by Irakli Gorgia, artistic director of Zugdidi Shalva Dadiani State Drama Theatre, to perform on the Abkhazian-Georgian border near Enguri Bridge. The main goal of the project involved the children stepping in paint and leaving their vibrantly coloured footprints on a canvas called *Catwalk of Peace*. The canvas was then paraded towards Enguri Bridge in a bid to communicate with people on the other side of the river. The children also sent messages of peace to the children living in the neighbouring occupied territory by attaching them to pigeons and releasing them near the border. *Peace Podium* took place on the bridge controlled by Russian, Abkhazian and Georgian soldiers, just meters from the fully armed Russian troops where they control a symbolic border between Georgian and Abkhazian population. The purpose of the project was to promote the reconciliation and consolidation of the Georgian and Abkhazian people and stimulate peaceful co-existence.

Freedom to Create Imprisoned Artist Prize

Lapiro de Mbanga (Cameroon)

Early in 2008, angered by high living costs and a constitutional change that would allow the president to stay in power indefinitely, the people of Cameroon took to the streets. Amid nationwide strikes and mass demonstration, popular singer Lapiro de Mbanga, who had demanded that the president resign, was arrested and charged with inciting youth unrest. The government claims that his song, *Constitutional Constipeé* incited demonstrations. It uses seemingly innocuous language, which carried a satirical meaning and expresses Lapiro's - and many fellow Cameroonians' - strong objections to the constitutional amendment which will allow President Biya to stay in power after 2011. In September this year Lapiro was jailed for three years. He has become a symbol of peaceful resistance to the erosion of democracy in Cameroon, but has paid a significant price; imprisonment, deteriorating health and financial bankruptcy. Since his imprisonment at Douala Prison, Lapiro's family lives under extremely difficult financial constraints. His wife can only travel the six-hour bus journey once a week and she and his five children are in danger. Sharing a cell with 50 others, he is not allowed to exercise, endures appalling sanitary conditions and is given insufficient food. The artist will appeal against his sentence, but international observers believe he will fail. Campaigning forum Freemuse says of Lapiro: "The song gave voice to the frustrations of people in Cameroon. They believe that their constitution has been hijacked." Lapiro has been punished for his eloquence and influence, and unfortunately his popularity and respect among his fans has been his undoing.

Maziar Bahari (Iran)

On the morning of 21 June, the internationally acclaimed filmmaker, playwright and journalist was seized from his Tehran apartment by the Iranian authorities amid the crackdown following the disputed presidential elections. Only days earlier the Iranian-Canadian had been published in

Newsweek, dissecting the Green Revolution which saw thousands take to the streets in protest over the election results. In the preceding months he had also filmed mini-documentaries about life in Iran which were broadcast outside the country. Since his arrest the only outside communication has been brief phone calls to his mother and the release of an 11-page 'confession' by Maziar in which he said he 'helped promote revolution in Iran'. On 1 August Maziar was one of 100 people who were put in the dock by Iranian authorities on charges of attempting to overthrow the government. Petitions calling for Maziar's immediate release have been supported by prominent journalists, writers and filmmakers including Christiane Amanpour, Orhan Pamuk and Wim Wenders. Newsweek describes him as "a veteran journalist whose long career both in print and documentary filmmaking has been accurate, even-handed and widely respected." The Harvard Film Archive said his film and video work "reveal the human element behind the headlines and capture cultural truths through the lens of individual experience." Many believe he was targeted because of his internationally acclaimed career. His works include: *And Along Came a Spider*, *Isfhan Diary: The Terrorist Victim and Transit Tehran*: *Young Iran and its Inspirations*. In addition to filing for Newsweek, Maziar also makes news documentaries for Channel Four and the BBC in the UK. Maziar's partner, lawyer Paola Gourley fears he will still be in jail when their first child is born in November. Prior to his arrest, Paola begged Maziar to return to the safety of the UK, but Maziar was adamant that he remain in Iran. "I just hope that the people holding Maziar realize just how unfair this is, and that they release him soon."

*Please note: On October 17, Maziar was released on bail. Iranian authorities did not specify the reasons behind the release, but Maziar has experienced serious health complications. Humanitarian considerations were presumed to have played a role in the decision. At the time of publication, his eventual legal position is still undetermined.

Saw Wei (Burma)

In Burma, openly criticising the military junta can be fatal. Over the years, hundreds of people have been rounded up, tortured and locked away in notorious prisons throughout the country. Some have paid with their lives. In September 2007 a groundswell of public discontent led by monks saw thousands demonstrate on the streets on Yangon. Scores of people, including writers and journalists, were detained in what is now known as the Saffron Revolution. To escape the ever-watchful eye of the junta in the aftermath of the revolution, dissident writers in Burma have refined creative techniques to get their messages past the censors and into the community. One such writer in the leading poet and performance artist Saw Wei, who was jailed for two years in November 2008 for 'inducing crime against public tranquillity'. Saw Wei published a love poem in which he criticized the leader of the junta, General Than Shwe. The artwork, *February the Fourteenth* is an eight-line love poem. However, when the first letters of each line of the poem are read vertically, they read "General Than Shwe is crazy with power" in Burmese. Despite the official censors clearing the poem's publication, the audience soon found the hidden message and on January last year, Saw Wei was arrested. In November 2008, ten months after his arrest, he was sentenced to two years prison at Insein Prison, notorious for its inhumane and dirty conditions, abusive techniques and use of physical and mental torture. Saw Wei's wife has not been able to visit him since his arrest in January 2008 and is deeply concerned for his health. The poet is one of more than 2,100 political prisoners who include monks, students, elected members of parliament and lawyers, a number that has almost doubled since the Saffron Revolution.