

International Declaration of Independent Publishers 2014, to promote and strengthen bibliodiversity together

International Alliance of independent publishers

Background

The International Assembly of independent publishers 2012-2014 was held over two years, **through seven preparatory and thematic workshops** held in Guadalajara (Mexico), Paris (France), Bologna (Italy), Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), Frankfurt (Germany) and Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates) and **a closing meeting held under the patronage of UNESCO**, in Cape Town (South Africa) at the Centre for the Book, from 18 to 21 September 2014.

Preparatory workshops, completed through working groups, focused on themes selected and prioritised by publishers (**digital publishing, public book policies, independent publishing houses' economic models, youth literature, national and local languages publishing, solidarity publishing partnerships and "Fair Trade Book", book donations**). From these workshops and on-line exchanges some tools and recommendations were developed, aimed at public authorities, international organisations and book professionals, discussed, and validated by publishers who convened in Cape Town in September 2014. The objectives of these proposals (made available before the end of 2014 by the Alliance) are **to support and promote bibliodiversity at both national and international levels**.

This whole process led to the drafting of the 2014 International Declaration of independent publishers. On 20 September 2014, **60 independent publishers from 38 countries present in Cape Town collectively drafted, in three languages, their policy statement**. For more than four hours of interlinguistic and intercultural exchanges, joint reflection, mutual respect and questioning, publishers drafted this statement. The 2014 Declaration was also validated on-line by absent publishers and is currently being translated into several languages (French, English, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, Farsi, Italian, etc.). To date, **400 publishers from 45 countries signed the International Declaration of independent publishers**, that you can widely distribute to promote and strengthen bibliodiversity with us.

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Preamble

The book is essential for building and spreading knowledge, in the shaping of a human being and development of a critical mind. It is not simply a commodity. As a cultural asset, it forms part of a certain kind of economy which should not be subject to market forces exclusively. Its design, production and marketing, whether in print or digital format, should enable a book to last, since it is intended as much for future generations as for those in the present.

The independent publisher has total freedom in the design of editorial policy, which s/he carries out autonomously. Her/his approach is not solely commercial. Together with the other actors in the book chain, s/he is the guarantor of creativity, of ensuring that histories of oppression and suppression are kept alive, of the democratisation of books as well as of diverse and critical publishing. S/he is also the crafter of essential bibliodiversity. S/he prioritizes quality and longevity over mass production and speed.

Independent publishers find themselves increasingly weakened by the consequences of neo-liberal policies and the resulting corporatization of the publishing industry. Over the past few years, the rise of the large digital players has further intensified this situation: they consider cultural content to be simple instruments which serve their financial interests.

Political developments have an impact on the fate of cultural actors. In certain countries, democratic changes have opened up platforms for freedom and allowed a new generation of independent publishers to emerge. In other countries, on the other hand, conflicts severely affect publishing activity and the freedom to express a variety of opinions.

Within this context, independent publishing nevertheless manages to renew itself and to make diverse voices heard. Independent publishing is still thriving not only out of necessity but also because publishers have been able to mobilise themselves so as to be heard and to join forces. Today, more than ever, solidarity is vital.

Declaration

We, 400 publishers from 45 countries, meeting in the framework of the International Alliance of Independent Publishers at our Third Assembly, held in Cape Town (South Africa) in September 2014, reaffirm **our will to act together to defend and promote bibliodiversity.**

In 2005, the adoption by UNESCO of the *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, followed by its ratification by numerous States, represented an important step in recognising the specificity of cultural content and the role of the independent publisher. In order for it to be heeded, however, this Convention must be translated into pro-active public policies.

In countries where **national book policies** are weak or non-existent, we appeal to governments to establish without delay policies which foster cultural development and the democratisation of books and reading. All the actors in the book chain need to be very closely involved in drawing up and applying such policies. They must reinforce the book industry in each country and help support local production, distribution, and access by all to books; in particular by establishing adequate regulatory and fiscal measures, and by providing more space for reading, especially public libraries. Such policies should encompass printed books as much as digital and should promote their complementarity.

It is also crucial, in the context of globalisation, that national policies are carried over into **regional and international policies**. Such policies must allow books to circulate in an equitable manner and regulate the book market so that it is protected from the predatory acts of the large international e-tail and retail groups.

It is essential that fair laws regarding **copyright** be drawn up and applied, laws which allow for authors' rights be protected while guaranteeing access to knowledge.

We must be doubly vigilant and also doubly inventive if we are to thwart **any form of suppression of the word**. The struggle against all forms of **copyright** (State, administrative, religious, economic and even self-censorship) remains a priority.

Thought is not controlled by censorship alone. In an environment of excessive information, media concentration and the standardisation of content, it is essential to be careful that freedom of expression does not only serve the voice of the dominant groups or powers. **We, the independent publishers, defend Fair Speech** in order to make a multiplicity of voices heard, which in itself secures bibliodiversity.

The digital players in a hegemonic position, such as Amazon, Google or Apple, should not be above the laws and fiscal regulations in force in any country. We call on public authorities and on international bodies to pass laws which encourage bibliodiversity, so that publishers and bookshops may continue to play their indispensable role as cultural actors and intermediaries.

The distribution of books should not be uni-directional, reproducing situations of dominance and preventing the development of local markets and national industries. We call for equitable exchanges between large book-exporting countries and those countries that import books.

Regarding **textbooks**, the State and the large international publishing groups tend to dominate markets in the countries of the Global South, despite the advocacy of professional collectives and the existence of policy measures. It is urgent that local independent publishers be allowed to take over the production of textbooks, which is essential for strengthening the local book economy and developing other less lucrative and more risky publishing sectors. In particular, it is vital for young readers' development that they should be able to relate to the material given to them.

Donations of printed books, as well as digital devices (e-readers, tablets...) and digital content, even when motivated by philanthropic principles, contribute to a certain cultural hegemony. The warnings given by Southern professionals and their proposals for other types of book donation have contributed to a change in such practices. It is important that this system continues to be questioned across the world to provide a sustainable response to readers' needs and expectations.

Professional solidarity among independent publishers is a force that counters such predatory structures. We need to develop our own tools and encourage the transfer of skills as well as the sharing of know-how and resources.

Exchange of literature and ideas between countries **through translations** is an important promoter of mutual knowledge and is essential for the development of a critical, democratic approach. Funds to support translation must be established and strengthened. In order to encourage intercultural dialogue and preserve bibliodiversity, reciprocal translations should be supported.

Co-publishing and the principle of the "fair trade book" facilitate the exchange of content and ideas. They allow publishing costs and activities to be shared and books to be offered to the broadest public at a fair price. We are convinced that these practices need to be extended, especially through recourse to funds offering assistance for co-publishing.

Despite its essential role in sustainable education and social development, publishing in **local and national languages** continues to be marginalised. We need to promote the transmission of knowledge and emancipation, and ensure that each community has access to reading material in its own language.

We call on independent publishers everywhere in the world to come together, alongside the authors, independent bookstores, librarians and other actors in the book chain, and to form associations and collectives allowing bibliodiversity to thrive and become stronger.

Finally, **it is our responsibility, as independent publishers**, to practise the principles we have set out and to defend a publishing model which respects human rights and the environment. We also have a responsibility to readers and to people with little access to books, since a democratic approach depends on the acquisition of knowledge by each one of us. Together we must count on our ability to act and to redouble our creativity.

Saturday 20th September 2014, Cape Town (South Africa)

List of signatories

The list of signatories is not complete and is a work-in-progress.

Nouri ABID, Éditions Med Ali, **Tunisia**
Waël ABID, Al-Tanweer, **Tunisia**
Silvia AGUILERA, Lom Ediciones, **Chile**
Mesbahuddin AHMED, Ankur Prakashani, **Bangladesh**
Diego ÁLAMOS, Chancacazo publicaciones Ltda, **Chile**
Samer ALKADRI, Bright fingers, **Syria**
Ángeles ALONSO, Baile del Sol, **Canary Islands – Spain**
Bahman AMINI, éditions Kharavan, **France – Iran**
Marie-Agathe AMOIKON FAUQUEMBERGUE, Éburnie, **Ivory Coast**
Pascal ASSATHIANY, Éditions du Boréal, **Quebec – Canada**
Alejo AVILA, Del Naranjo, **Argentina**
Bichr BENNANI, Tarik éditions, **Morocco**
Karim BEN SMAIL, Cérès éditions, **Tunisia**
Pierre BERTRAND, Couleur Livres, **Belgium**
Isabelle BOURGUEIL, L'Or des fous éditeur, **France**
Constanza BRUNET, Marea Editora, **Argentina**
Haroldo CERAVOLO SEREZA, Alameda Casa Editorial and representative of the LIBRE collective, gathering 140 Brazilian independent publishers, **Brazil**
Indira CHANDRASEKHAR, Tulika Books and representative of the IPD Alternatives collective, gathering 8 Indian independent publishers, **India**
Gilles COLLEU, Vents d'ailleurs, **France**
Élodie COMTOIS, Écosociété, **Quebec – Canada**
Antoinette CORRÉA, BLD Éditions, **Senegal**
Élisabeth DALDOUL, elyzad, **Tunisia**
Anna DANIELI, Ediciones Trilce, **Uruguay**
Víctor Hugo DE LA FUENTE, Editorial Aún Creemos en los Sueños, **Chile**
Héctor DINSMANN, Libros de la Araucaria, **Argentina**
Serge DONTCHUENG KOUAM, Presses universitaires d'Afrique, **Cameroon**
Fatma EL BOUDY, Elain publishing, **Egypt**
Dina EL GHAMRY, Bardi, **Egypt**
Nadia ESSALMI, Yomad, **Morocco**
Jose Mari ESPARZA, Txalaparta, **Basque Country – Spain**
Francisco FANTINI, Fundación Gourmet Patagonia, **Chile**
Raúl FIGUEROA SARTI, F&G Editores, **Guatemala**
Sékou FOFANA, éditions Donniya, **Mali**
Gustavo Mauricio GARCIA ARENAS, Icono Editorial/ Códice Producciones, **Colombia**
Araken GOMES RIBEIRO, Contra Capa editora, **Brazil**
Silvia GONZALES, Madriguera and representative of the EIP collective, gathering 15 Peruvian independent publishers, **Peru**
Müge GURSOY SOKMEN, Metis, **Turkey**
Agnès GYR-UKUNDA, Bakame, **Rwanda**
Samar HADDAD, Atlas publishing, **Syria**
Sofiane HADJADJ, Barzakh, **Algeria**
Pablo HARARI – Ediciones Trilce, **Uruguay**
Susan HAWTHORNE, Spinifex Press, **Australia**
Jutta HEPKE, Vents d'ailleurs, **France**

Colleen HIGGS, Modjaji Books, **South Africa**
Déborah HOLTZ, Trilce and representative of the AEMI collective, gathering 12 Mexican independent publishers, **Mexico**
Jafar HOMAEI, Nashre-e Ney, **Iran**
Dorothée Gérard HOUSSOU, Les éditions du Flamboyant, **Benin**
Bridget IMPEY, Jacana Media, **South Africa**
Guido INDIJ, la marca editora and representative of the EDINAR collective, gathering Argentinian independent publishers, **Argentina**
Yasmin ISSAKA-COUBAGEAT, Graines de Pensées, **Togo**
Aline JABLONKA, Éditions Charles Léopold Mayer, **France**
Ivana JINKINGS, Boitempo, **Brazil**
Karine JOSEPH, Éditions du Sirocco, **Morocco**
Billy KAHORA, Kwani Trust, **Kenya**
Hassan KHALIL, Dar Al Farabi, **Lebanon**
Renate KLEIN, Spinifex Press, **Australia**
Hamidou KONATE, Jamana, **Mali**
Octavio KULESZ, Libros del Zorzal and Editorial Teseo, **Argentina**
Béatrice LALINON GBADO, Ruisseaux d'Afrique, **Benin**
Ester LEVINRAD, Jacana Media, **South Africa**
Mical LOROUGNON DREHI, éditions Livre Sud (EDILIS), **Ivory Coast**
Isabella MARCATTI, Boitempo, **Brazil**
Hamid MEDHIPOUR, Forough Verlag, **Germany – Iran**
Ritu MENON, Women Unlimited, **India**
Phehello MOFOKENG, Geko publishing, **South Africa**
Anita MOLINO, Il leone verde and representative of the FIDARE collective, gathering 104 Italian independent publishers, **Italy**
Pablo MOYA, Ediciones el Milagro, **Mexico**
Nabil MROUEH, Al Intishar, **Lebanon**
Jean-Claude NABA, Sankofa & Gurli, **Burkina Faso**
Tinouche NAZMJOU, Naakojaa, **France – Iran**
Seydou Nourou NDIAYE, Éditions Papyrus Afrique, **Senegal**
Abdoulaye Fodé NDIONE, Abis éditions, **Senegal**
François NKEME, Ifrikiya, **Cameroon**
Carla OLIVEIRA, Orfeu Negro, **Portugal**
Isabelle PIVERT, éditions du Sextant, **France**
José Antonio QUIROGA, Plural Editores, **Bolivia**
Mehdi RAHIMZADEH, Ferdosi, **Sweden – Iran**
Dan RAYMOND-BARKER, New Internationalist, **United Kingdom**
Marie Michèle RAZAFINTSALAMA, Jeunes malgaches and representative of the Afrilivres collective, gathering 33 sub-Saharan African independent publishers, **Madagascar**
Jean RICHARD, éditions d'en bas, **Switzerland**
Luis Daniel ROCCA, Taller de edición Rocca and representative of the REIC collective, gathering 13 Colombian independent publishers, **Colombia**
María José RUIZ VILAS, Txalaparta, **Basque Country – Spain**
Juan Carlos SÁEZ, JC Sáez Editor, **Chile**
Rodney SAINT-ELOI, Mémoire d'encrier, **Quebec – Canada / Haïti**
Abdulai SILA, Ku Si Mon Editora, **Guinea Bissau**
Paulo SLACHEVSKY, Lom Ediciones and representative of the EDIN collective, gathering 55 Chilean publishers, **Chile**

Aliou SOW, Ganndal, **Guinea Conakry**

Bernard STEPHAN, Les éditions de l'Atelier, **France**

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Abdón UBIDIA, Editorial El Conejo, **Equator**

Luis Augusto VACA MELO, Abra Palabra Editores SAS, **Colombia**

Mariana WARTH, Pallas Editora, **Brazil**

Alejandro ZENKER, Ediciones del Ermitaño, **Mexico**

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