

AN OPEN LETTER ON THE OPPRESSION OF INTERNATIONAL ARTISTS

In the wake of governmental repression of theater artists in Hungary and, more recently, in Belarus, the International Association of Theatre Critics (AICT-IATC) adds its voice to the global chorus calling for greater freedom on the pages of publications and on the stages of oppressed theatre companies.

As a non-profit, Non-Governmental Organization recognized under Statute B of UNESCO, the purpose of the IATC is to promote international cooperation through international engagement and advocacy for building bridges among cultures. In the recent repression and imprisonment of theatre artists, Aleksandr G. Lukashenko gives credence to critics who have called Belarus “the last true remaining dictatorship in the heart of Europe.” According to the *New York Times*, the deeply contentious election of December 19, 2010, after which Lukashenko claimed to have received 79 percent of the vote, led to the leader's announcement that more than 600 “bandits and saboteurs,” including several of his opponents, had been arrested.

The leadership of the IATC is deeply disturbed by the rising international tide of oppression of the arts and literature, especially of theatres and theatre artists. We deplore the conviction and brief imprisonment of Belarus Free Theatre's company manager Artiom Zhelezniak on charges of "illegal assembly." We celebrate the departure from Belarus of company members Nikolai Khalezin, Natalia Kolyada and others, who have been recognized internationally and were honored with a "Special Mention" by the Europe Theatre Prize.

Members of the IATC are theatre critics, but we are also theatre advocates and we will resist all governmental attempts to censor or otherwise marginalize the important work of our global theatre artists. When some artists and writers are not free to think, work, and create in an unrestricted manner, we all suffer a loss of freedom and of human possibility.

We call on all who love freedom—artists, audience members, governments—to rally against these specific oppressions, to agitate for greater creative freedom, and to join our voices in support of those who cannot, or may not, speak for themselves. We encourage our members to shine a bright light on these events and to keep these matters in the forefront of our global artistic discourse.

If we join together in this struggle, we shall prevail.

Sincerely,

Yun-Cheol Kim, President (Korea)

Michel Vaïs, Secretary General (Canada)

Association internationale des critiques de théâtre / International Association of Theatre Critics (AICT-IATC)