

# INTERNATIONAL PEN

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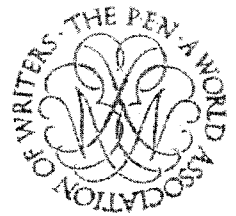
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## 12<sup>TH</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council Consideration of the UPR Report - Afghanistan (Thursday 24 September 2009)

### Statement by International PEN

(NGO in Consultative Status with ECOSOC)

17 September 2009

International PEN, the world association of writers representing members in 102 countries, welcome the comments made by the Afghan State in its National Report to the Human Rights Council, and are encouraged about its expressed support for the principles of freedom of expression. International PEN ~~and IPA~~ note with satisfaction the Afghan government's own recommendation that it should develop strategies to protect freedom of expression, via legislation, and the adoption of new policies for the protection, support and monitoring of human rights.

International PEN also welcome the positive statement by the Afghan State regarding the importance of diversity of publications without prior authorisation and censorship, as well as the expansion of access to internet and information technology.

However, we are seriously concerned about the decline in press freedom in recent months, in particular the growing violence against journalists who continue to be targeted with apparent impunity. We are encouraged by the recognition that the "intimidation of journalists by terrorists and unprofessional treatment of them by some government organs" is a challenge that the Afghan government will be addressing, and look forward to a resulting decrease in such attacks.

International PEN remain deeply concerned that the existence of 'blasphemy' laws, under which a number of writers and publishers have been charged and imprisoned, sometimes being given the death penalty, was not addressed in the Afghan State report, and therefore urge that removal of these laws be among the recommendations made by this UPR. International PEN will continue to press for the release of those writers and publishers imprisoned through blasphemy legislation (e.g.: Article 130 of the country's Constitution).

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