



Permanent Mission of Norway  
to the United Nations



## Concept Note

### Defending Creative Voices: Protection of Artists in Times of Emergencies

9 April 2024, 4.30pm- 6pm (EST)

UN HQ, Conference Room 2

This event, co-organized by UNESCO (under the [UNESCO-Aschberg Programme for Artists and Cultural Professionals](#)) and [PEN America's Artists at Risk Connection](#), aims to raise awareness among UN Member States and civil society of the deteriorating human rights situation of the creative sector during crises. Through reference to specific emergency situations around the world, renowned speakers will highlight their impact on the creative sector, including on writers and artists, and appeal to the international community for a comprehensive and coordinated response for their protection in emergency situations. In doing so, the event follows-up on the commitment included in the historic [MONDIACULT 2022 Declaration](#), which was adopted by over 150 States, to protecting and promoting artistic freedom and freedom of expression.

#### Background and objectives

In light of shrinking civic space, as well as conflict occurring around the world, writers and artists increasingly face targeted persecution. According to PEN America's Freedom to Write Index 2022, 84 writers and intellectuals were newly imprisoned in 2022, and over 800 faced human rights violations that impacted their freedom of expression, including artistic freedom.

As shown by the UNESCO report [Defending Creative Voices: Artists in emergencies, learning from the safety of journalists](#), as well as the publication of Artists at Risk Connection (ARC) [Art Is Power: 20 Artists on How They Fight for Justice and Inspire Change](#), despite the increasing threats, harassment and attacks that artists face – often linked the social or political content of their creative expression – they lack sufficient access to protection mechanisms, support opportunities and safety nets. They are currently not considered an especially vulnerable group prioritized for assistance during emergencies.

Considering the above, this event **will aim to:**

- Raise awareness among UN Member States and civil society actors about the impact of emergency situations on writers and artists; and call them to increase their assistance in this regard, for example by facilitating monitoring efforts, temporary residencies and schemes supporting the livelihoods of affected writers and artists, as well as evacuation and resettlement programmes benefiting them, allowing them safe passage to other countries and providing them with international protection.

- Appeal to the international community to recognize writers and artists as a vulnerable group to be prioritized when emergencies occur, and to enhance coordinated and comprehensive efforts to defend artistic freedom during crises; including through the development of a UN-spearheaded multistakeholder roadmap, strategy or similar framework for the protection of artists, inspired by the [UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity](#) led by UNESCO and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

### **About the UNESCO-Aschberg Programme for Artists and Cultural Professionals**

The [UNESCO-Aschberg programme](#), which is currently funded by Norway, supports the implementation of UNESCO's two normative instruments addressing artistic creativity: the [2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions](#) and the [1980 Recommendation concerning the Status of the Artist](#). Through the programme, UNESCO protects and promotes artistic freedom and the status of artists and cultural professionals. It also seeks to facilitate a balanced circulation of cultural goods and services and the mobility of artists from developing countries. The UNESCO-Aschberg programme has also developed a specific focus on assisting artists and cultural professionals in emergency situations, including through projects implemented in Afghanistan, Ukraine, Sudan and Yemen.

### **About PEN AMERICA's Artists at Risk Connection (ARC)**

[PEN America's Artists at Risk Connection](#) (ARC) safeguards the fundamental right to artistic freedom of expression worldwide. Its mission is to ensure that artists and cultural workers can live and create without fear, regardless of their country of origin or discipline. ARC plays the critical role of connecting at-risk artists to available resources across a global network of more than 800 organizations, providing urgent support, fellowships, and legal support. In addition, ARC provides emergency grants, resilience grants, and technical assistance, bolstering protection and resilience for artists at risk. ARC's impact is amplified by its regional protective networks in Africa and Latin America. In partnership with civil society organizations, ARC also builds cross-regional coalitions to raise awareness of artistic freedom issues, celebrate artists, and fight for increased recognition of the critical role that they play in society.