

Freemuse launches in Kraków its international report on the state of artistic freedom of the LGBTI community

2021-02-09

An international report on the freedom of artistic expression of the LGBTI community compiled by the Freemuse organisation was presented in Kraków on 10 December, International Human Rights Day.

Freemuse is an independent, international non-governmental organisation working as an advocate for human rights, freedom of speech, freedom of artistic expression and cultural diversity. The organisation enjoys United Nations Special Consultative Status to the Economic and Social Council (UN-ECOSOC) and Consultative Status with UNESCO.

Freemuse operates internationally, documenting violations of artistic freedom worldwide. The organisation cooperates with artists, artistic and cultural organisations, as well as activists. It supports artists persecuted in their countries because of their gender, race or sexual orientation. It defends artistic freedom by analysing, among other things, legal and political practices of censorship and other unlawful restrictions on artistic freedom in over 90 countries. It runs campaigns to promote diversity, and initiates, develops and supports local networks of artists and cultural workers, ensuring that their voice is heard and freedom of artistic expression is not restricted.

Freemuse is known for its annual report, *The State of Artistic Freedom*, which analyses cases of violations of artistic freedom faced by various groups of artists and people of culture. The report is widely referenced by governments, UN officials, as well as academic, cultural and artistic circles. This year's report focuses on violations of artistic freedom experienced by LGBTI artists (LGBTI - lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people). The report presents over 100 violations of artistic freedom that took place in 40 countries.

Some of the key issues to be revealed in the report include 45 per cent of violations documented in countries where there is no law criminalising homosexuality or its promotion, and 55 per cent of violations documented in countries where homosexuality and its promotion are considered a crime. The report reveals that, in most cases, individual national governments are responsible for 53 per cent of documented violations. Most affected by censorship and freedom violation is the free expression of film artists, accounting for 50 per cent of all cases, followed by transgressions suffered by visual artists and musicians.

It is worth recalling that International Human Rights Day was established in 1950 on the anniversary of the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Dedicated to human rights advocates and activists, it is an opportunity to honour the courage and achievements of those who strive to safeguard human rights and ensure that they are invariably respected.

Kraków - a city of cultural diversity

This year's report was presented in Kraków. Our city was invited to cooperate on the project due to its many activities promoting respect for various social groups that create the city's rich and heterogeneous character and contribute to its diversity and cosmopolitan openness. Formerly, the Freemuse reports were launched in Western European cities. The invitation to announce the report together in Kraków has an important symbolic dimension. Freemuse

sought a reliable partner to co-host a series of events announcing the report on the freedom of LGBTI artists and their right to artistic expression. Additionally, having envisaged a worldwide network of LGBTI artists and artistic and cultural organisations dealing with art and artistic expression, the organisation wished to formally communicate its launch and, likewise, chose Kraków to do so.

- "Having examined all aspects of holding the events in Berlin, Amsterdam and London, we decided to choose Kraków. It is widely recognised as a city of refuge, an active member of ICORN, a city with a rich tradition of freedom of artistic and cultural expression." - wrote Dr Srirak Plipat, Executive Director of the Freemuse network, in a letter to the Mayor of Kraków.

Additionally, Srirak Plipak pointed out that Kraków is consistent in respecting the principles and values with regard to human rights. The attitude is demonstrated in its open social and cultural policy, its status as an international shelter for artists, and its support for ethnic, cultural and sexual minorities, which has also recently been reflected in the illumination of important objects in rainbow colours to mark the International Day for Tolerance.

- "Announcing the global report on the freedom of LGBTI artists in Kraków, at the time when many Polish municipalities declare themselves to be 'LGBT Free Zones', is an important message of respect and diversity for the world. Despite the significant improvements achieved at international level in recent decades in promoting non-discrimination and equality for LGBTI people, in many countries artists continue to produce works of art, knowing that they will most likely never be exposed to the public in their countries. The report shows that there is still quite a long way to go towards the achievement of LGBTI people's rights to freedom of artistic expression," said Srirak Plipat.

International event

The report was announced on 10 December at the ICE Kraków Congress Centre and was broadcast online. Special guests of the event included Victor Madrigal-Borloz, UN Independent Expert on Protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, and Dr Srirak Plipat, Executive Director of the Freemuse Network.

- "For Kraków, this is a very important moment, which is part of an active policy to prevent exclusion and discrimination. We are a city of open gates. Citizens representing various religions, beliefs, nationalities and ethnic minorities have built a rich, centuries-old identity for Kraków. Non-heteronormative people have been and still are among those who have been creating the city in the past and also today. The task of local authorities is not to exclude anyone from the community, but to build and support strong local communities in solidarity, where everyone has the right to equal treatment. The strength of our cities comes from respect and appreciation of diversity," says Nina Gabryś, Chair of the Council for Equal Treatment of Kraków.

Culture without limitations

Report presentation was combined with a panel discussion attended by Freemuse representative Dr Srirak Plipat, Chair of the Council for Equal Treatment Nina Gabryś, Mayor of Kraków's Advisor for Culture Robert Piaskowski, as well as representatives of the creative



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community: Anna Maria Potocka - director of Museum of Contemporary Art in Kraków (MOCAK), Adelina Kiame, Angolan visual artist and writer, writer Jacek Dehnel and visual artist Daniel Rycharski. The discussion was accompanied by a cultural programme available through PlayKraków.

- "Erosion of cultural freedom poses a threat to rich cultural life. That is why Kraków's cultural policy puts so much emphasis on providing opportunities and space for the voices of creators of various nationalities, views or orientations. For years, we have also supported the non-heteronormative artists' right to freedom of expression at literary and music festivals, such as UNSOUND, Off Camera, Sacrum Profanum, Krakow Photomonth, FMF, Conrad Festival, Krakow Film Festival, as well as in cultural institutions such as MOCAK, Łaźnia Nowa, Bunkier Sztuki and independent theatres: Teatr Nowy PROXIMA and Barakah Theatre. The city has carried out and supported cultural initiatives by artists who represent the LGBTI art movement or address minority issues. Kraków has demonstrated its openness in these issues for many years and provided support for all forms of cultural expression and unconditional promotion of the values of an open society," emphasises Robert Piaskowski, Mayor of Kraków's Advisor for Culture.

The event, held on International Human Rights Day, is consistent with the Open Kraków programme and a series of activities focused on promoting respect for human rights and diversity, which have been taking place in Kraków in recent weeks. We have already seen the "D&I Changemakers 2020. Festival on Diversity, Inclusion and Values" organized by Diversity HUB and the "New Cracovians" Multiculturalism Festival. Additionally, the award ceremony of the Polish Prize named after Sérgio Vieira de Mello, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, established by the Villa Decius Association, was held on 10 December, when the International Human Rights Day is observed.