

Appeal for a worldwide reading »For Democracy and Freedom in Iran«

The international literature festival in Berlin is appealing to cultural institutions, theatre, radio stations, and interested parties to participate in a worldwide reading of the Ayatollah Montazeri's fatwa on the 16th of September. The aim of the coordinated events and campaigns will be to express unmistakable solidarity with the democratic opposition in Iran and to support the protests against the show trials and the imprisonment of democratic forces.

Thirty years ago the new leaders, who proclaimed themselves God's representatives on Earth, promised justice, love and fraternity and help for the weak and underprivileged. All people would live in peace and prosperity. Iran was to become a model for other formerly oppressed states, a Paradise on Earth.

But the men of God had hardly seized power when they began liquidating a large section of the opposition, executing thousands of dissenters and destroying the indigenous culture in favour of so-called Islamisation, downgrading women as second-class citizens and subjecting art and literature to strict censorship.

With the exception of brief uprisings by individuals or small groups, the population remained patient for a long time – for thirty years. But now the scandalous manipulation of the Presidential elections of June 12th has proved too much to bear. Millions took to the streets to demand the return of their stolen votes. The pious mask slipped from the face of those in power: overnight the régime was transformed into the worst kind of military dictatorship.

Demonstrators were shot down in the streets or tortured to death in prison. Formerly solid establishment figures that had ruled for decades and were now on the side of the opposition were – in show trials – charged with high treason and collaboration with foreign intelligence agencies. They delivered self-denunciating confessions which were, without any shadow of doubt, forced from them through torture.

How much legitimacy can be claimed by a régime which sees itself as divine, yet continues to beat down and shoot millions of believers, cheat them, and forbid them to grieve for their dead or conduct funerals? Anyone who nowadays calls »Allah o akbar« (God is great) is a suspect. Those who attend Friday prayers are strictly controlled and suspicious people denied access to mosques: clerics who have expressed criticism of recent events are sent to jail. How can a régime that creates such conditions still claim to be an Islamic state?

Two months have passed since the elections. Daily demonstrations and declarations show that even the widespread use of violence and the victimisation of members of the resistance could not break the will of the people. Iran is at the crossroads between a clerically-gilded military dictatorship and a democratic, open republic. The shape of the future is dependent on the level of solidarity the world is willing to show for the opposition in Iran.

On the occasion of the third anniversary of the beginning of the war in Iraq, the festival and the Peter-Weiss Foundation for Art and Politics e.V., based in Berlin, coordinated a worldwide reading on March 20th, 2006. On this »Anniversary of the Political Lie«, Eliot Weinberger's »What I Heard From Iraq« was read worldwide at forty-seven – in Australia, the USA, Germany, Greece, Lebanon, Great Britain, Holland, Italy, Luxemburg, India, and Switzerland. This event was followed by worldwide readings in commemoration of Anna Politkovskaja (20.3.2007); in protest against Robert Mugabe's dictatorship (9.9.2007); against repression in China in the lead-up to the Olympic Games (20.3.2008); and in memory of Mahmoud Darwish (5.10.2008). Each occasion found the support of many participants, including radio and television stations, on all continents.

Please write to us if you would like to participate in this campaign:
worldwidereading@literaturfestival.com

Very best wishes,

Ulrich Schreiber