



All CCS and Cross-sectoral

Artistic freedom in times of polycrises

SPECIAL COVERAGE: The 9th World Summit Report on Arts & Culture is Out highlighting issues of artistic freedom in times of poly-crises

The final report on discussions at the 9th World Summit on Arts and Culture has been released, shedding light on conversations around the crucial topic of safeguarding artistic freedom.

“Artistic freedom needs to be comprehended not as a single right, but as an ecosystem comprising various interconnected cultural, social, and economic rights. These include the rights to create freely, have one’s work supported and remunerated, move freely, associate freely as well as participate in cultural life”. This is the main outcome of the final report of the summit, held in May 2023 in Stockholm, Sweden.

Over 400 cultural policymakers, academics, artists, and representatives from 90 countries met in extensive panel discussions and workshops over four days, where participants delved into the multi-faceted nature of artistic freedom and how it can be better ensured in today’s complex global environment.

“Unless all rights are respected and fulfilled together, the fulfillment of artistic freedom remains elusive” the report underlines.

Participants stressed the importance of examining not just direct censorship or restrictions on content, but a wide range of barriers like lack of funding, inadequate infrastructure, and exclusionary norms that can discourage creativity. While artistic freedom is a universal principle, what constitutes freedoms and responsibilities varies greatly between contexts due to diverse historical, political, and socioeconomic factors.

The precarity of artistic freedom in times of poll crisis

from the pandemic to the climate crisis, during periods of instability like war, and disasters, the respect for human rights tends to decrease constituting major risk factors given simultaneous upheavals. Geopolitical conflicts especially endanger cultural infrastructure and workers, posing existential challenges to cultural heritage and songs/languages of occupied

or threatened populations, as seen recently in Ukraine, Afghanistan, and Ethiopia. At the same time, participants felt such times accentuate culture's potential to foster hope, unity, and social cohesion when freedoms are upheld.

Beyond active war zones, summit discussions featured stories of oppression from various developing nations as well. More subtle barriers like lack of protection for workers, limited funding options, or self-censorship from societal polarization or normalization of speech curbs were scrutinized.

Another concern summarised was how current global upheavals may be exacerbating fragilities. Issues overflowing borders like the climate emergency, pandemic-related economic fallout, refugee crises, and democratic backsliding incidents were identified as worsening conditions.

The conclusion drawn was that while artistic freedom is universally agreed as essential, assurance attempts generally mirror disconnected, under-resourced strategies. To strengthen safeguards, the report outlines several priority actions. It stresses the need for "alliance-building across borders and sectors" to tackle transnational issues like mobility barriers or regulatory gaps in new areas like AI and intellectual property.

What to do

Participants advocated "redistributing resources and narrative control" to rectify historic exclusions and underrepresentation. There were also calls to "embed artistic freedom in integrated policy frameworks" and "provide rapid and long-term support to at-risk creators." Moreover, the "potential of technologies must be responsibly shaped by citizens," not just private companies, according to summit discussions.

Overall, participants concurred that "freedoms can never be taken for granted and require constant vigilance." As Hilmar Farid, a senior Indonesian cultural policy leader stated, rights emerge from persistent advocacy, not authority benevolence. The report concludes cooperation is essential given viral threats that disregard borders, just as individual actions matter for a future where all may benefit from cultural contributions and self-expression without fear. The report outlined several specific priority actions that emerged from discussions on how to strengthen safeguards for artistic freedom globally

Alliance-Building Across Borders and Sectors

A major conclusion was the importance of collaboration across

geographical and industry lines. Issues like mobility barriers or gaps in regulating new technologies require international solutions. Summit participants stressed the value of partnerships between human rights, scientific, academic, and art circles to identify shared concerns and amplify discussion with policymakers. Cross-sectoral approaches were also deemed important to address intersectional challenges faced by marginalized communities.

Redistributing Resources and Narratives

Inequities stemming from colonial legacies and exclusion continue to curtail many groups' cultural rights. Discussions emphasized the urgency of redistributing resources, access to funding, and control over defining quality, art, and knowledge. Participants advocated empowering those long underrepresented to determine their agendas and shape new cultural centers instead of narrowly fitting dominant models. Changing hierarchical governance structures to include diverse voices was highlighted.

Embedding Artistic Freedom in Integrated Framework

It was noted that artistic freedom often lacks recognition in large-scale plans around development, rule of law, or technology policy. Summit participants pushed for recognizing its indicators within frameworks measuring national progress. They also stressed the need to incorporate cultural perspectives into policy dialogues concerning peace, environment, and other topics tied to conditions enabling creative expression.

Rapid and Sustained Support for At-Risk Individuals

While immediate action helps those facing acute threats, delegates recognized ongoing assistance is similarly crucial. Summit discussions underlined strengthening civil society networks, legal aid systems, and refuge programs providing long-term support to displaced creators. Employing both short-term evacuations and long-term strategies and sustainable infrastructure was deemed key.

- You can read the final report: [here](#)

