



## The Beacon for Freedom of Expression Conference 2004

### The Beacon for Freedom of Expression Database

#### A Gift from Norway to the Bibliotheca Alexandrina

The Beacon for Freedom of Expression Database, a gift to the Library of Alexandria from Norway, is a unique global reference catalogue containing bibliographical data on censored books and newspapers past and present, as well as data on literature on censorship and freedom of expression.

The Database was presented during a one-day Conference organized by the BA on 19 May 2003. Dr. Ismail Serageldin, Director of the BA and Ms. Valgerd Svarstad Haugland, the Norwegian Minister of Culture and Church Affairs delivered their speeches in the opening session of the Conference.

In presenting the gift, the Norwegian Minister summed up the idea of the database where the first part contains more than 55,000 bibliographical references and the second lists literature on censorship on freedom of expression. She also referred to article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states that, "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers".

In his speech, Dr. Serageldin welcomed the gift and the donors and thanked the Norwegian Minister for choosing the BA to be "the depositor of this great project" and said that "the BA is indeed the spot where we should meet to launch the Beacon of Freedom project, to reclaim for the New Library of Alexandria some of the luster and the role of its ancestors...". He reiterated the importance of the role that is played by libraries focusing on the role of the BA in making available the material that was banned in different societies and cultures throughout the different eras through the database of the Beacon of the Freedom of Expression. Bishop Desmond Tutu, South Africa Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi, Burmese Nobel Peace Prize Laureate joined the opening session of the Conference via videoconference.

The famous Egyptian Poet Mr. Ahmed Abd El-Mooti Hegazy gave a quick glimpse of his own personal experience with poetry and the impact of censorship on artists. The last part of the opening session was a brief presentation by Mr. Gere Andarssen, Deputy Director, Worldview Rights, on the exhibition "Art for Freedom" which is consisting of 17 unique graphic works by Norway's leading contemporary Artists.

The opening session was followed by a Press Conference where many of the Egyptian and international media representatives directed their questions to the Norwegian Minister, Dr. Serageldin and Mr. Hegazy about the content of the database, the idea behind this unique project and their future expectations of this initiative. The Conference sessions tackled many issues related to freedom of expression, censorship, fundamentalism and art oppression, censorship of libraries, films, broadcasting and Internet as well as the institutional, political and social constraints on the freedom of expression. The Conference sessions also discussed the





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role of libraries in promoting freedom of expression and the importance of dialogue serving intercultural and inter-religious communication on freedom of expression.