

Now, more than ever, the world needs *authors' rights*



The International Federation of Journalists represents 600,000 journalists in 142 countries, North and South. It has a keen interest in promoting conditions in which independent authorship can thrive.

I have a confession. I am a journalist – an author. And now – more clearly than at any recent time – the world needs ethical journalism. Despite the failings of newspapers in some countries recently, the work of individual, independent journalists remains the best bulwark against arbitrary power and the gaining of that power through a mixture of falsehood and rumour amplified by the echo-chambers of electronic gossip.

I write and edit reports on science and technology in London. My ability to make a living – like that of every independent, professional author – depends on the strength of authors' rights laws, the future of which we are once more here to discuss.

I want to stress the need for *professional* authorship. The promise held out by some that the internet era would usher in a golden era of democracy has proved hollow. A vast exchange of prejudices and lies through anti-social media is not, I suggest, true or useful “free expression”. Citizens of all our countries need to have the chance to be informed through the work of people who commit themselves to building the skills and experience to evaluate claims and unmask falsehood. Those people – those journalists in particular – need to have the economic security that enables them to stand up to power (including that of newspaper and broadcasting owners when necessary).

That publishing has been hurt badly by the internet revolution is well-known – not least because publishers have some influence and capability to tell us so. It has been hurt in particular by internet corporations that eke out a fortune selling advertising alongside other people's creative work. How to get those corporations to pay for their use of this, their prime raw material, is a challenge that is causing head-scratching in the European Union, as it must here, soon.

I therefore appeal to this Committee not to be swayed by the promise held out by some that opening up creative works to use without remuneration offers some kind of golden era of free information. The risk is that free information ends up being worth every penny.

Yes, let us have international norms that give libraries, archives and educational institutions the legal certainty they need to play their utterly essential part in ensuring an informed citizenry.

And let us insist that, throughout the world, those vital institutions are adequately funded and that the use they make of authors' work is compensated. Because as libraries move online, and as libraries form partnerships with those internet corporations, some of their activities increasingly resemble publishing and these parts of their activities affect the incomes of authors like me.

Let us insist that that remuneration be delivered to authors through collecting societies. Let this Committee commit to encouraging the formation of transparent, democratic collecting societies everywhere.

Useful information depends on authors having adequate *primary* income. The proposed new EU directive securing more transparency in the way authors' work are exploited by their publishers, producers and broadcasters is a step in the right direction. WIPO should be inspired by it.

Let this Committee re-dedicate itself to enabling “innovation and creativity for the benefit of all” through defending the rights and incomes of individual authors. After all, without the work of skilled authors and performers libraries have nothing to share; schools nothing to teach; and this Committee nothing to discuss. This Committee needs to re-focus on supporting creativity.