

***Association of American Publishers***  
**INTERNATIONAL FREEDOM TO PUBLISH COMMITTEE**

***The Fund for Free Expression***  
**A DIVISION OF HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH**

February 14, 1992

**THE THREAT AGAINST SALMAN RUSHDIE**

**As the novelist begins a fourth year in hiding,  
the U.N and the U.S. must act**

"Every morning this writer sits down to write, he does not know if he will live through the day."

-- Nobel Literature laureate Nadine Gordimer, in  
her December 7 acceptance speech

"*The Satanic Verses* must be freely available and easily affordable, if only because if it is not read and studied, then these years will have no meaning."

-- Salman Rushdie, in his December 11 talk at  
Columbia University

**SUMMARY**

Even though Salman Rushdie and others connected with *The Satanic Verses* are every bit as much in danger today as they were on February 14, 1989, when the late Ayatollah Khomeini pronounced a "fatwa," or death sentence, against them, virtually all governments -- including the United States -- seem to have contracted amnesia about this continuing human rights outrage.

The state terrorism represented by the fatwa against Rushdie has all but disappeared as a point of concern between Iran and the rest of the world. This must change. When the United Nations Human Rights Commission meets in Geneva later this month, it must renew the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Iran with specific instructions to press for an end to the fatwa. The new United Nations Secretary General, Boutros Boutros Ghali, must make the Salman Rushdie case a matter of the highest priority for his personal involvement and attention. Finally, the United States -- many of whose citizens, including Rushdie's publishers, booksellers and the reading public, are at risk; and Britain -- whose subject, Salman Rushdie, enters a fourth year in hiding -- must speak up, clearly and forcefully, for an immediate end to the fatwa.

**BACKGROUND**

On February 14, 1989, the Ayatollah Khomeini issued the fatwa against Rushdie and all those connected with the publication of his novel, *The Satanic Verses*, on the grounds that it blasphemed the Islamic religion. Salman Rushdie went into hiding in England, and remains a virtual prisoner, shuttling from one "safe house" to another. The Ayatollah's pronouncement was met with worldwide condemnation. The International Committee for the Defense of Salman Rushdie called upon governments to "repudiate the threats made against Salman Rushdie and his publishers, and to take firm action to ensure that these threats are withdrawn." A number of Western governments broke off diplomatic relations with Iran to protest the death sentence.

The fatwa is hardly an academic or purely symbolic gesture. Iran's leaders reaffirmed the death sentence, and a private Islamic foundation doubled the one million dollar bounty originally offered to anyone who would carry it out.

On July 3, 1991, Rushdie's Italian translator, Ettore Capriolo, was stabbed. On July 11, his Japanese translator, Hitoshi Igarashi, was murdered. No arrests have been made in those cases.

Earlier, several booksellers in Britain and the United States were the targets of bombs, and many others received threatening calls and letters. For a time, this resulted in the unavailability of the book at major outlets, and anyone who sells it is still at risk.

## RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

November 11, 1991 was the 1,000th day of Salman Rushdie's enforced hiding. Rushdie's supporters reluctantly postponed a planned vigil, at the suggestion of the British Foreign Office, which was afraid the vigil might have a negative impact on the negotiations for the release of the British hostages in Lebanon, which were then at a crucial point. Instead, the occasion was marked by a gathering of friends and colleagues at a Waterstone's bookshop in London. A small protest was also held in Dag Hammerskjold Plaza in New York, across from the United Nations, at which Norman Mailer read a letter to the Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar calling for UN intervention in the matter.

In a November 22, 1991 speech on tolerance the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. George Carey, appealed to the British to understand the "pain" of Muslims over the "outrageous slur on the Prophet" caused by *The Satanic Verses*, which he compared with the pain that the showing of the Last Temptation of Christ caused many Christians. He said nothing about the sentence of death imposed on Rushdie. Rushdie expressed his disappointment that the archbishop did not ask Iranian leaders to lift the fatwa.

Britain's final hostages in Lebanon were released in the final months of 1991. In a November 27 interview, Rushdie said that now that Britain and Iran had re-established relations and British hostages have been freed, "I think it's my turn." In a BBC radio interview, he commented that "It seems to me I am entitled to say our government should not become best friends with a government that is trying to murder its subjects."

Nadine Gordimer, 1991 Nobel Literature Prize laureate, said in her Nobel lecture in Stockholm on December 7, 1991 that the death sentence on Rushdie was an "unparalleled absurdity" as well as a "crime against humanity." She also urged the United Nations to act on Rushdie's behalf.

On December 11, 1991, Rushdie made a surprise appearance in New York at a Columbia University dinner in honor of the 200th Anniversary of the First Amendment. "Free speech," he said, "is life itself," and he called for paperback publication of the book, on the grounds that "*The Satanic Verses* must be freely available and easily affordable, if only because if it is not read and studied, then these years will have no meaning." He described himself as a secular Muslim.

In an interview with Time magazine Rushdie referred to his plight by saying, "At least it's about what I believe

most deeply in. And therefore it's possible to fight for it. At least the fight is about the right thing."

Dr. Hesham El-Essawy, chairman of the Islamic Society for the Promotion of Religious Tolerance said that Rushdie's claims to be a secular Muslim, which many regarded as essentially renegeing on his conversion, combined with the call for a paperback, put him in greater danger than ever. Liaquat Hussain of the Bradford (England)-based Council of Mosques said: "This step will incite the sensibilities of Muslims and therefore undermine his chances to resume a normal life."

It was reported on January 14, 1992 that the British Council of Mosques was launching a new campaign for the banning of *The Satanic Verses* and for more respect for the Moslem people and religion.

Kalim Siddiqui, leader of the pro-Iranian Muslim Institute, stated publicly that Rushdie had been rightly condemned to death, but that British Moslems would not try to kill him. He said he was sick and tired of the controversy over the book, but he demanded that it be withdrawn from sale.

Iran's United Nations envoy, Kamal Kharrazi, said in November that the edict on Rushdie is unalterable, although this issue would not hinder expansion of Teheran-London ties. This was also confirmed by Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati.

Although there has been no formal upgrading of ties between Britain and Iran, and ambassadors have not been exchanged, it appears the two countries are moving towards closer ties. The British Foreign Office states that "Our position on the fatwa is unchanged. It is an unacceptable infringement on the rights of a British citizen." And in a January 25, 1992 report a British diplomat said that no upgrading to ambassadorial status was imminent -- in large part because of the fatwa.

A spokeswoman for departing UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar said "We don't have a policy about [Rushdie] at all." Meanwhile, Iran has moved to have the mandate of its Special Rapporteur on Human Rights discontinued this month, in February 1992.

A consortium of publishers, writers and human rights groups, under the auspices of the Authors' Guild, has agreed to produce an American paperback edition of *The Satanic Verses*. Rushdie's hardcover publisher, Viking Penguin, has released the English language rights. The publication will be officially announced on February 14, to mark the third anniversary of the fatwa. However, there are no current plans for a paperback in Britain.

## **THE DIPLOMATIC AFTERMATH**

While the passage of three years have not altered the threat to Salman Rushdie and others connected with *The Satanic Verses*, there has been a significant change in the attitude of other governments toward Iran, as the following chronology of diplomatic responses indicates.

On February 16, 1989, because Rushdie is a British subject, Britain issued a protest to Iran and froze plans to increase the size of its embassy staff in Teheran. Britain did not remove its personnel from Iran until February 20, following a second announcement by the Ayatollah Khomeini of the fatwa. The European Community then elevated the controversy to a diplomatic incident when ministers from the 12 EC nations recalled their heads of mission in Teheran and halted high-level contacts. The removal was proposed by French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas, who appeared to rule out the possibility of economic sanctions or an across-the-board break in diplomatic relations from the very beginning. In retaliation, Iran recalled its envoys from European Community nations.

In addition to pulling its diplomats out of Iran, Britain asked the Iranian government to withdraw its charge

d'affaires and the one other Iran-based member of his staff from London. Foreign office officials said that this did not amount to a formal expulsion. Britain did not sever diplomatic relations, but insisted on what it called "reciprocity at zero."

On February 28, Iran passed a law that mandated a complete break of diplomatic relations with Britain on March 7 unless the British Government denounced Salman Rushdie and his novel. Shortly afterward, Foreign Secretary Sir Geoffrey Howe and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher asserted that the novel was offensive to many British people as well as to Moslems. However, because the British government refused to prosecute Rushdie and continued to permit the sale of his novel, Teheran went ahead and broke relations on March 7.

The West German government was the first to recall its head of mission from Iran, on February 17. The other EC nations followed West Germany's example after its February announcement. The Canadian external affairs minister announced the removal of the Canadian charge d'affaires on February 21. Austria, which is not a member of the EC, announced on February 22 that its ambassador to Teheran would be returning to Vienna for a "long stay," though he was not formally recalled in protest.

Japan, alone among the non-communist industrial states, made no change in its diplomatic relations with Iran. The Japanese government declined even to make an official protest and refrained from recalling its ambassador from Teheran.

At no time during the days and weeks following the death threat -- aimed at American citizens at Viking/Penguin, his publishers, as well as British subject Rushdie -- did President Bush or any other American official issue a forthright denunciation of this call for terrorism. Nor was there a clear public declaration that the United States government would act to protect the rights of Americans to write, publish, sell and buy books. Every comment on the matter was made in response to a reporter's question. An example was Vice President Quayle's March 16 remark at the National Press Club that while he had not read the book, it was "obviously not only offensive, but I think most of us would say in bad taste." President Bush, when pressed, said he would act if "American interests" were threatened.

Although the Bush Administration expressed support for the actions of the European nations, the only formal statement issued by the United States was uttered to disassociate the U.S. government from any activity offensive to Islam. The United States had economic sanctions against Iran and no diplomatic relations with the Iranian government at the time the fatwa was issued.

Both West Germany and France called for restrictive measures, in addition to the removal of heads of mission, to limit Iranian diplomats to a sixty kilometer radius around capital cities. The British rejected this proposal.

France quietly signaled its oil companies to slow down the purchase of Iranian oil. Japan also made import cuts, but the Japanese government asserted that the cuts were due to a seasonal decline in the use of oil in Japan.

On March 20 European Community leaders decided to allow its ambassadors to return to Iran in spite of the fact that the fatwa had not been revoked. They insisted that there was no change in the Community's rejection of the death order. Diplomats said that the decision to allow ambassadors to return was precipitated by Italy, Greece, Spain and Ireland, all of whom have small embassies in Teheran and found it difficult to operate without their top diplomats there. Only the British government objected. The ban on high-level contacts remained in place.

Italy's ambassador to Iran returned at the end of March. By April 10, those of Spain, Greece and Sweden had also returned. On May 24 a majority of the European Parliament signed a resolution calling on the 12 EC nations to break off all relations with Teheran and to make every effort to exclude the Iranian regime from the U.N. The resolution had little effect. All but the British, French, and West German heads of mission had returned to Teheran by the end of April. The latter two returned in June, just after Khomeini's death.

The death of the Ayatollah Khomeini produced a willingness on the part of the White House to hold talks with Iran's new leaders. Washington continues to condition the resumption of diplomatic relations to Teheran's help in freeing Western hostages still held in Lebanon. There is no evidence that the United States considers the fatwa an obstacle to the resumption of relations. The United States decided in June of this year to permit U.S. firms to buy Iranian oil for the first time since 1987.

A European Community statement released at the end of July 1990 expressed respect for Islam. The conciliatory declaration was drafted to meet a condition set by the Iranian government before diplomatic ties with Britain would be restored. In return the European Community expected Teheran to "modify" the threat against Rushdie, after which it would then agree to lift the ban on high-level diplomatic contacts.

On August 4, President Rafsanjani of Iran instructed its foreign ministry to restore diplomatic relations with Britain, after receiving further conciliatory remarks from British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd. Britain and Iran resumed diplomatic relations on September 27. British officials said that they understood from statements by Iranian officials that the Iranian government respected international law, and would not interfere in the internal affairs of another country. However, the Iranian government continued to insist that it was not authorized to lift the death order. The alleged irrevocability of the fatwa was made clear before diplomatic ties were resumed.

Britain reopened its embassy in Teheran on October 28, 1990. In April of this year the European Information Service reported that Britain has conditioned the exchange of ambassadors on the release of hostages still held in Lebanon. Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd has stated that "relations between Britain and Iran have great potential but will remain stunted for as long as Britons are wrongly held in Lebanon." He has not insisted on the revocation of the fatwa.

Iran and the European Community may begin exploratory talks with a view to setting up a new trade and economic cooperation agreement. Italian Foreign Minister Gianni De Michelis said that he would recommend the EC exchange ambassadors with Iran.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Fund for Free Expression and the International Freedom-to-Publish Committee of the Association of American Publishers reiterate their strong support for Salman Rushdie, his publishers and others connected with the *The Satanic Verses*. In addition, we:

- urge that the matter of the continuing threat against Salman Rushdie and others connected with *The Satanic Verses* be restored to the top of the agenda of concerns between the community of nations and Iran;
- urge the United Nations Human Rights Commission to extend the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Iran, with specific instructions to press for the removal of the fatwa;
- call upon the leaders of Iran to disavow the fatwa and condemn any actions, such as the violence that occurred this summer in Japan and Italy, or the bombing of bookstores in Britain, that are taken to carry it out;
- call upon the appropriate authorities in Japan and Italy to take all steps to insure that those who attacked Salman Rushdie's translators are brought to justice;
- call upon the United States government to speak out clearly and forcefully against the death threat, the violence that has resulted, and the continuing danger to U.S. publishers, booksellers and readers.

**For more information, contact:**  
Gara LaMarche, (212) 972-8400 (o)  
(718) 789-5808 (h)

*The Fund for Free Expression was created in 1975 to monitor and combat censorship around the world and in the United States. The Chair is Roland Algrant; Vice Chairs, Aryeh Neier and Robert Wedgeworth; Executive Director, Gara LaMarche; Associate, Lydia Lobenthal. The members are Alice Arlen, Robert L. Bernstein, Tom A. Bernstein, Hortense Calisher, Geoffrey Cowan, Dorothy Cullman, Patricia Derian, Adrian DeWind, Irene Diamond, E.L. Doctorow, Norman Dorsen, Alan Finberg, Frances FitzGerald, Jack Greenberg, Vartan Gregorian, S. Miller Harris, Alice H. Henkin, Pam Hill, Joseph Hofheimer, Lawrence Hughes, Ellen Hume, Anne M. Johnson, Mark Kaplan, Stephen Kass, William Koshland, Judith F. Krug, Jeri Laber, Anthony Lewis, William Loverd, Wendy Luers, John Macrae, III, Michael Massing, Nancy Meiselas, Arthur Miller, The Rt. Rev. Paul Moore, Jr., Toni Morrison, Peter Osnos, Bruce Rabb, Geoffrey Cobb Ryan, John G. Ryden, Steven R. Shapiro, Jerome Shestack, Nadine Strossen, Rose Styron, Hector Timerman, John Updike, Luisa Valenzuela, Nicholas A. Veliotos, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., and Roger Wilkins.*

*The Fund for Free Expression is a component of Human Rights Watch, which also includes Africa Watch, Americas Watch, Asia Watch, Helsinki Watch, Middle East Watch, and special projects on Prisoners' Rights and Women's Rights. The Chair is Robert L. Bernstein and the Vice Chair is Adrian W. DeWind. Aryeh Neier is Executive Director; Kenneth Roth, Deputy Director; Holly J. Burkhalter, Washington Director; Susan Osnos, Press Director.*

*The International Freedom-to-Publish Committee of the Association of American Publishers was created in 1974 to promote the freedom to publish around the world. The Chair is Lisa Drew and the Executive Director is Jeri Laber. The members are Roland Algrant, Roy Benjamin, Cornelia Bessie, Simon Michael Bessie, Kathryn Court, Harriette K. Dorsen, Thomas W. Froncek, Ashbel Green, Charles Hayward, Lawrence Hughes, Barry Lippman, Kenneth D. McCormick, John Macrae, III, James Mercer, Susan Moldow, Betty Prashker, Faith Sale, Will Schwalbe, Richard S. Seaver, Steve Wasserman, Deborah E. Wiley, and Alan D. Williams.*

*This report was prepared with the assistance of Catherine Siemann and Stephanie Shaw.*

---

**Association of American Publishers**  
**220 East 23rd Street**  
**New York, NY 10010**  
**(tel) 212 689-8920**  
**(fax) 212 696-0131**

**Fund for Free Expression**  
**485 Fifth Avenue**  
**New York, NY 10017**  
**(tel) 212 972-0905**  
**(fax) 212 972-0905**