

Oslo 22 June 2026

To whom it may concern

It is with great concern and frustration that I have been informed by our partner Beyond Skin about the British Government refusal to let Afghan woman musician, Soraya Hossaini, perform at Belfast Fleadh.

Travel bans present a major crisis for the global performing arts sector. A travel ban for artists is a violation of artistic freedom because it inherently restricts mobility, which is an essential condition for creative expression, distribution, and cultural exchange.

Freemuse views the free movement of creators as a fundamental right that underpins free expression and dialogue. Restricting this mobility violates artistic freedom in several distinct ways:

- **Stifle's Collaboration and Creation:** Art relies on cross-cultural understanding, collaboration, and live performance. Restricting movement disrupts tours, exhibits, and face-to-face exchanges of ideas.
- **Denies the Right to an Audience:** Free speech includes the public's right to receive information and diverse cultural perspectives. Travel bans prevent citizens from engaging directly with an artist's work.
- **Silences Dissident Voices:** Artists are often the most powerful critics of authoritarian regimes and oppressive systems. Travel bans cut off critical platforms for persecuted artists and prevent them from seeking safe haven abroad.
- **Drives Self-Censorship:** The threat of travel bans, border interrogation, and unpredictable visa restrictions creates a chilling effect. It forces artists and arts institutions to self-censor and avoid controversial or political themes out of fear of repercussions.

Freemuse had documented travel bans as one of the most prominent, growing tools of censorship used to punish creators and silence independent cultural expression.

When artists are subjected to travel bans, these restrictions primarily conflict with international frameworks protecting human rights and cultural diversity.

The 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions: This treaty explicitly outlines the right of artists to travel and share their work internationally. It establishes that cultural diversity can only thrive if artistic freedom—including the mobility of artists—is respected and protected.

The 1980 Recommendation concerning the Status of the Artist: This foundational UNESCO text requires member states to recognize the essential role of artists in society

and calls on governments to take measures to ensure artists can freely practice their profession and travel across borders.

Conclusion

Freemuse believes that the British Government's refusal to let Soraya Hossaini perform at the Belfast Fleadh is a clear breach of the UK's obligations under the UK's ratification of the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions in December 2007.

Against this background, Freemuse is requesting the British Government to immediately approve Soraya Hossaini's application for entry to the UK so that she can perform at the Belfast Fleadh and participate in the activities Beyond Skin has planned for her.

Freemuse is an independent international non-governmental organization advocating for freedom of artistic expression and cultural diversity. Freemuse has United Nations Special Consultative Status to the Economic and Social Council (UN-ECOSOC) and Consultative Status with UNESCO.

Sincerely yours,

Sverre Pedersen
Executive Director
Freemuse