

International Authors Forum

Position Statement – Tax on Books

Introduction

Whether for pleasure, study or self-improvement it is important that we, as a society, make the practice of reading accessible to all. The retail cost of books is a determinant in this accessibility. Any significant disruption of a publisher's careful pricing of books could have a severely negative impact on sales. For these reasons the IAF opposes the taxation of books.

Literature contributes greatly to the richness and diversity of our cultural environment and is a highly beneficial leisure and educational pursuit. Reading for pleasure has a very positive effect on a child's development through life, therefore it's important to ensure that children have access to a wide range of books that meet their needs. A tax on books is a tax on knowledge.

Background

Books are rarely singled out for taxation, and are usually exempted from general and harmonized sales taxes, and value-added taxes around the world. The reason for this is clear – to tax reading is to tax knowledge. The society that taxes knowledge does so to its own detriment.

Issues

While it is widely accepted that books should not be taxed, there are still cases where:

- Electronic copies of books are taxed, even where their print equivalent is not, due to different legal treatment.
- Governments fail to exempt books from new taxes introduced as revenue tools.
- Book piracy levels are in the increase as a result of new book taxation.

The introduction of book taxes threatens to limit access to books for readers.

Position

The International Authors Forum opposes taxation on books, newspapers, journals and many important sources of information, be they cultural or educational. We will lend our support to territorial campaigns against this wherever we can.

Where a tax on books is introduced, we will warn that government that such taxes could potentially lead to a long term negative effect far greater than the short term budgetary gains that might be achieved.

Where taxation on books has long existed or is the result of legal technicalities, we will campaign for reform. We believe most societies reject the idea of taxing knowledge, and the IAF will act where creeping infringements occur against this principle.