



Interviews with

Bodour Al Qasimi, president, International Publishers Association
Karine Pansa, vice president, International Publishers Association

For podcast release
Monday, January 11, 2021

KENNEALLY: The global community of publishers works in dozens of languages and on every inhabited continent. The International Publishers Association, based in Geneva, represents their interests, encouraging respect for copyright, protecting freedom of expression and promoting literacy.

Welcome to Copyright Clearance Center's podcast series. I'm Christopher Kenneally for *Velocity of Content*.

In November, as part of its first-ever virtual general assembly, IPA elected two distinguished women publishers to its top leadership posts. Bodour Al Qasimi, founder and CEO of Kalimat Group in Sharjah, the United Arab Emirates, will serve a two-year term as president. And Karine Pansa, owner and publishing director of Girassol Brasil in Sao Paulo, Brazil, takes office as vice president. They both join me now.

Salaam alaikum, Bodour Al Qasimi.

AL QASIMI: Alaikum salaam, Chris.

KENNEALLY: And bem-vinda, Karine Pansa.

PANSA: Muito obrigado, Chris.

KENNEALLY: Well, I would like to open the discussion with Bodour. First, congratulations on your election, Bodour. You are the first woman from the Arab-speaking countries to serve as IPA president and only the second to lead the organization in its 124-year history. You are also founder and president of the Emirates Publishers Association and so I'd like to ask about the reaction you've had from Arab publishers since this news broke.

AL QASIMI: Thank you, Chris. And thank you for hosting us and for your continuous support to the publishing world through your podcast series. I have to say that publishers have been supportive all along my journey into IPA, which is interesting given that when I



started in publishing some 12 years ago, I had to deal with some mindset blockages that were rampant at the time. I mean, I was a young woman, new publisher, full of passion and holding some grand visions. So in a way it was probably a shock to the established status quo.

But it didn't take long for them to welcome and support me and I'm really grateful for that. I've been working now alongside some brilliant Arab publishers to improve the state of publishing in the Arab world and, you know, things are happening. Things are shifting.

So all this is really to tell you that since the news broke and I became the IPA president, the reactions have been overwhelmingly positive, not just from the Arab world, but from all over the world. And I'm really humbled and energized by the reactions. We have a lot to do and I can't wait to start.

KENNEALLY: Well, indeed, and we look forward to your work at IPA. So tell us what it means to you personally, as a publisher, as a woman, just personally. How are you looking forward to the next two years?

AL QASIMI: You know, this nomination means a lot to me. It's been quite a story of blood and sweat, truly. There have been a lot of ups and downs during this journey and keeping it together despite it all was not easy, I have to say. But I believed in myself and I believed that women should get a fair chance to become leaders in our industry.

I also believe that we live in a completely new world, a world that requires fresh ideas and fresh ideas will only come from a truly diverse community. I'm proud of the work we've been doing along this journey and I'm really looking forward to working with Karine for the next couple of years.

KENNEALLY: And the next couple of years will be years fraught for everyone, not just publishers. I have to ask you about the state of international publishing right now in the midst of the global pandemic.

AL QASIMI: As you know, Chris, the global publishing sector has suffered enormously from the ramifications of this pandemic. And this should not come as a surprise to anyone. Despite that, many publishers have adapted themselves to the digital world before the pandemic. The majority are still dependent, though, on physical set-ups like bookstores and libraries to sell their books. And book fairs were such a major opportunity for all publishers to sell their books and make business deals.



All of that stopped and it stopped suddenly without much warning. So you can imagine the state of shock and confusion during the initial stages of this pandemic. But you know this sudden disruption forced the publishing community worldwide to do some serious soul-searching, to find out the reasons why we were vulnerable to such a sudden event. I mean, many of the B-to-C sectors thrived during the pandemic, so the question that we have to ask ourselves initially, why is the publishing sector suffering while some sectors are thriving? Clearly we lacked digital infrastructure to weather the storm.

But, you know, after denial and the confusion stage, we set out to find solutions. Some of them were temporary and some of them permanent. And so we took advantage of the virtual tools and we brainstormed. I mean, we really brainstormed a lot and there were many events taking place virtually that helped us to stay united and to feel supported within our global community.

Are we away from the eye of the storm now? Not quite yet. We still have a lot of work to do and we will only know the impact of the lockdowns and restrictions in January, after the December festive season sales are in. Because, as you know, this month is the highest sales period for books in most markets.

But whatever the results are, publishers worldwide are going into 2021 determined to revisit their business models, to seek serious government support, to diversify their offerings and to revisit their marketing and distribution channels and build strong digital infrastructure.

KENNEALLY: So it sounds to me as if the priority, then, for this first part of your tenure, is to really support IPA members in these difficult days. Are there any particular ways you expect to be doing that?

AL QASIMI: Yes. I mean, IPA acts as an umbrella for all its members and a unifying platform for their voices and their concerns. During the pandemic, IPA leveraged its network to link publishers with each other and encourage them to diversify their partnerships. We supported members in their communication with their respective governments and offered support in policy reforms that aim to ease financial and legislative burdens of publishers.

IPA also offered resources and hosted and encouraged members to attend many virtual events to foster dialogue between publishers themselves and between publishers and other stakeholders.



My priorities in IPA are going to be a continuation of these great efforts, and I have to thank the former president, Hugo Setzer, for all of his amazing work during the last two years.

So priority number one for me now is to help our members transition from this crisis into new growth and this is why we published our COVID-19 report, *From Response to Recovery*, which is available on the IPA website.

And we're also working on a global publishing industry recovery plan that is informed by the voices and the needs of the publishing sector and its stakeholders. This is a plan to stabilize and grow the publishing industry and will support all our members to implement it. And I'll also focus on making the sector more inclusive and more diverse.

And if we learned any lessons from this pandemic, Chris, it's that we need to be extremely innovative to remain on top of our game. Innovation requires fresh thinking and fresh ideas and no one can generate new ideas if the same kinds of people are at the brainstorming and decision-making tables.

KENNEALLY: You mention recovery and a focus on new growth, Bodour, and one area of the world that certainly has great expectations for growth but will need some support as it recovers from the pandemic, is Africa. Now, that's an area that you have put a special focus on.

AL QASIMI: Yes. As you know, we organized two regional conferences in Lagos and in Nairobi, which were a huge success. And these regional seminars were part of our plan to diversify IPA's focus and bring attention to emerging markets. As you know, Africa is an incredible continent with amazing diversity and cultural richness. Its wisdom is ancient and has guided human evolution for centuries.

So, for me, the question was how come this culturally rich and diverse continent is not part of the global literary mainstream? Clearly there was a gap and we wanted to find out more about the reasons and also support African publishers to bridge that gap. And the enthusiasm by which we were received in both markets reflected a yearning of African publishers for global connections with their international colleagues and a desire to learn from best-case studies to develop the sector in the continent.

I mean, the quality of the conversations brought to light the limitations and the challenges that African publishers are facing, which was a great first step. And we'll continue supporting Africa and all emerging markets, especially in light of global readers' thirst for diverse and original voices from outside their markets.



KENNEALLY: And IPA as an organization, and all of its members individually, work hard to provide access to quality-assured content for education, for research, for culture, for citizenship, and that is a particularly difficult task at this moment because we are all confronted with fake news, misinformation and bogus science. And what do you think readers, consumers, listeners to this program, should be doing to protect themselves from those kinds of scourges?

AL QASIMI: This is a million-dollar question, Chris. Really. And parallel with COVID-19, another pandemic has been growing and getting more serious and that's fake news. It's the other side of democratization of information which was made possible by the Internet. For readers, the dangers of not being vigilant are serious and so it's important for them to be aware of that. Most important thing to do is to increase the level of our media literacy, to be able to scrutinize a news source for credibility and reliability.

It's also important for readers to become critical of the news they consume and share the responsibility by not sharing news stories until they determine that they are genuine and also by not sharing fake news with anyone. The less people share fake news, the less oxygen this news will have.

Also, nowadays, there are so many available tools for free that allow readers to fact-check news sites and evaluate resources. And above all, readers need to exercise common sense and good citizenship and understand clearly that their actions can be part of the solution or part of the problem.

KENNEALLY: And when we speak about readers, we have to think, I think almost first and foremost, about young readers and the world they will come into eventually. You founded the Kalimat Group in 2007 and have made it a leader of Arabic children's publishing, and I wonder, as IPA president, Bodour, will you place any special emphasis on this sector and on young readers?

AL QASIMI: Absolutely. Children's books have a special place in my heart, especially that I started Kalimat Group thanks to my own children's feedback about the quality of Arabic books that existed at the time.

But children's books is an important category for the publishing business and also for cultural development. As parents and educators seek new and innovative content to attract kids' attention away from their gadgets, more demand will be placed on quality and innovative ideas for children's books which makes it a good segment from a business point of view.



We need to maintain and increase literacy levels and arm the younger generation with intellectual tools to know right from wrong. And we just spoke about fake news, right? So unless children develop a discerning mind through books and reading, they won't be able to analyze and form independent opinions and we know that that's not healthy for society.

So it's no surprise, then, that more publishers are starting to value the segment. And as IPA president, I'll do whatever I can to support the development of children's book market.

KENNEALLY: Bodour Al Qasimi, president of the International Publishers Association, thank you for speaking with me. Shukran.

AL QASINI: Thank you. Shukran.

KENNEALLY: And joining me now is Karine Pansa, owner and publishing director of Girassol Brasil in Sao Paolo, Brazil. She is the newly-elected vice president of the International Publishers Association. Welcome, again, Karine.

PANSA: Thank you, Chris, and thank you CCC for inviting us for this lovely meeting.

KENNEALLY: Well, we're very happy you could join us, Karine, and Ana María Cabanellas of Argentina previously served as the IPA vice president and she was president, too, from 2006 to 2008. And as a South American publisher, Karine, what special perspective do you think you bring to the IPA?

PANSA: You know, Ana María Cabanellas from Argentina was the first woman to be IPA president and she has broken an important barrier at IPA. After her, now Bodour, only two women during a long time makes me also feels responsible for a change.

I think all of us at IPA are united by one love, that are books. But the value of IPA comes from the opportunity to see how our colleagues around the world tackle certain challenges or seize particular opportunities.

South America has two major languages and a rich range of cultures. I'm well aware that the different challenges faced by the different markets in South America, whether that is distribution, adoption of digital, pressure on copyright or freedom to publish, these are really difficult questions. I think I can bring that knowledge as well as my own experience of Brazil to my work for IPA.



KENNEALLY: In a recent interview, Karine, you noted that while many women work in publishing in Brazil as you do, only a few have risen to the kind of leadership position that you have. And as IPA vice president, what will you do, what will you try to do, to encourage greater diversity in publishing in your own country and around the world?

PANSA: I'm not sure if Brazil is that different to many other countries in terms of number of women in publishing workforce versus number of women in leadership positions. I have this doubt, but I think the work of Bodour to create publisher and formal mentorship scheme is wonderful. And the great women involved in that mentorship program that are able to serve as inspiration to other women, this is fantastic. I'm part of this program, mentorship program, and really excited about the possibility of contributing to that.

I have already spoken with three mentees and it was really exciting to hear their needs, their expectations with the market and also their fears. I was there to encourage them to believe in their work and to help them to find a way to go forward.

IPA is also really lucky to have a past president, Michiel Kolman, as its special envoy for diversity and inclusion and I will fully support his work as well as continue to push for progress at home in Brazil.

KENNEALLY: And, Karine, you and Bodour both work in children's publishing and I wonder how difficult it is to encourage children to read books today when there are so many distractions and demands on their attention. What special role, too, do you think libraries can play in helping to cultivate a new generation of readers?

PANSA: Yes, both of us started in children's book publishing. I think we all feel this growing competition to our time, attention – not just children, right, Chris? I think that it has been interesting to see how sales for children's books have grown in many markets during the pandemic. IPA also included this very issue in its *Reading Matters* report that it was launched as part of the state of publishing reports.

There were many initiatives out there to encourage reading, but it is also our job as publishers to make our books as attractive as possible to give children that desire to pick up a book and read. This is also so important that we create this habit of reading or a culture of reading.

Also is another IPA report, *Paper and Digital*. It has showed that quality of reading will rise depending on whether you're reading on a screen or a paper. It's really important that children don't lose that skill to deep-read a text.



You also mentioned libraries, but I also think about bookshops. All of these places are where children can see the magic and wonder of books and have the opportunity to lose themselves in different adventures, meet new people, or learn about new things. We are all part of the book ecosystem and it's why we come together on projects like the sustainable development goals book club that we are creating together with ONU.

KENNEALLY: Now, you mentioned libraries, you mentioned bookshops and sadly, in the global pandemic, those kinds of spaces are, in many, many countries around the world, closed off to us. And so I have to ask you, finally, Karine Pansa, about your own assessment of the state of international publishing today and what kind of emphasis you would like to see IPA place on helping publishers recover in the years to come.

PANSA: Well, I think that Bodour has already mentioned and she led a remarkable report that it was released during the general assembly. I think it was called *From Response to Recovery – COVID-19* – which really represents a clear view of the different challenges faced by different types of markets.

The markets that are struggling the most to recover so far are those with limited digital publishing access or distribution as well as more limited reading cultures. These are areas where IPA can play a supportive role and use this crisis to prepare publishers in those markets for the digital future on both practical level, but also in terms of tackling digital piracy.

From our own national perspective, this year has been really difficult for Brazil and seeing government considering imposing VAT on books when we were already struggling, it was difficult to understand when the international trends are towards reducing VAT on books. The IPA must call for action – summarize lots of initiatives that governments can take to support its industries and we will continue to support members with their governments.

KENNEALLY: Karine Pansa, vice president of the International Publishers Association, thank you for speaking with me today. Obrigado.

PANSA: Obrigado.

KENNEALLY: Our co-producer and recording engineer of Copyright Clearance Center's *Velocity of Content* podcast is Jeremy Brieske of Burst Marketing. You can subscribe to the program wherever you go for podcasts and follow us on Twitter and Facebook.

I'm Christopher Kenneally. Thanks for listening and join us again soon on another program from Copyright Clearance Center.



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