

Contribution by the President of the **Cyprus Film Classification Board**

**Mr Ioannis Solomou** to the European Conference of Film Classification

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It gives me great pleasure to take part for the first time in this important conference on European Film Classification. As a novice in the job, I do not dare to make suggestions to people who have much more experience than I do on the really interesting subjects that we shall discuss. I can only say that although many people in this room may have doubts about our work, that is if it makes a real impact on our society, given that only a tiny percentage of people imitate dangerous or socially unacceptable acts they see in films, the fact remains that malleable youths have to be protected in one way or another from harmful content. So if we manage to prevent this small percentage from committing some unpalatable act, then we should feel that we have done our job. For this reason I believe that it is especially fitting that our conference gives such a great emphasis to the protection of youth.

In my country, there is no system of classifying videos or DVDs, or exercising any sort of control on the Internet and we are trying to find a solution to the problem. To let Customs officers seize videos or digital video disks they may suspect to be offending, is surely not the proper way to deal with the problem.

The reason for my short intervention is to inform you that, at long last the Cyprus House of Representatives, approved this July the new law and regulations concerning the classification of films. So the Cyprus Film Censorship Board, which operated for more than 60 years, has now become a Film Classification Board. Although in its long life the Cyprus Censorship Board banned less than 10 films or demanded that some scenes of films are cut, nevertheless it had the power to do it and this was something we didn't want.

Under the new law films are classified into five categories

- “U” i.e. Suitable for all ages
- “12” i.e. Not suitable for children under 12
- “15” i.e. Not suitable for young people under 15

“18” i.e. Not suitable for persons under 18

“N C” i.e. Not classifiable films, i.e. films that cannot be screened in a public cinema.

This category includes films that contain scenes extremely offending to the national or religious feelings of the various communities of Cyprus, or socially unacceptable acts, such as incitement to racial hatred, or to abolishing democracy, or contain scenes of pederasty, bestiality, necrophilia, extreme sexual cruelty or degrading behavior, or are purely pornographic films. Also films containing scenes encouraging directly or indirectly the use of drugs, or containing violent sexual acts or unjustified sexually cruelty may fall in this category. The Cyprus Film Classification Board cannot suggest the removal of particular scenes from a film so that it can be classified in a lower category.

The Cyprus Film Classification Board does not have permanent staff and does not employ professional classifiers. It is made up of 30 persons who offer their services voluntarily. They are people nominated by organisations, such as the associations of parents, psychologists, child psychologists, sociologists, film directors, actors, consumers, the prevention of violence in the family association and representatives of the Press and Information Office, the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Radio-television Authority, the Social Welfare Department and the Film Advisory Board.

As the number of films shown in my country each year is no more than 150 and there is no classification of video films, if professional classifiers were employed they would not have much work to do. So we rely on people who represent a wide range of organisations and associations and are willing, when asked, to devote a few hours every month to see some films and decide on the classification, on the basis of the criteria prescribed by law.

The only person who is full time employee is the Secretary of the Board, who does all the administrative work. I, as President of the Board, carry out my other duties as Director of the Press and Information Office, participate only in one or two classification sessions a month. But whenever there is an appeal against the particular rating of a film I always take part in the classification committee.

The rating is mandatory and no film can be shown in theatres without a classification certificate. Even films shown in cinema clubs are classified, but the clubs do not pay any

fee. There is no provision in the new law for consumer advice, but I am going to request our Board to introduce this advice, which I find quite useful, on a voluntary basis.

Each film is classified by a 5-member committee. Of course, theatre owners have the right to appeal against a particular decision if they disagree with the rating given. In such a case the film is reviewed by a committee with entirely new composition.

The members of the Board do not receive a salary just an honorarium for each film they classify.