



INTERNATIONAL PEN
WRITERS IN PRISON COMMITTEE
DAY OF THE IMPRISONED WRITER

15 NOVEMBER 2008

Summary of PEN Centre Activities Day of the Imprisoned Writer 15 November
2008

In the past year, the Writers in Prison Committee (WiPC) of International PEN has monitored over 1,000 attacks on writers and journalists in 90 countries, 200 of whom are serving long prison, others have been threatened, harassed and attacked. Tragically, in the 12 months since 15 November 2007, 39 were killed, many clearly in the pursuit of their professions, others in unclear circumstances.

On 15 November every year, PEN's membership of writers world wide celebrates the courage of others in standing up against repression and for the principle of freedom of expression and the right to information. This Day of the Imprisoned Writer sees writers world wide sending appeals, staging events, and commemorating their fellow colleagues. Each year PEN focuses on five cases – one from each world region and each illustrating the type of repression that is faced daily by those who question, challenge and illustrate daily lives through their writings.

- **Azerbaijan: Eynullah Fatullayev** – a journalist serving an eight year prison term for his political commentary and investigations into the murder of another journalist in 2005;
- **China: Tsering Woeser** – a Tibetan writer and poet who writes in Chinese and who has been banned and suffers harassment for her writings on Tibet;
- **Iran: Mohammad Sadiq Kabudvand** – a journalist and Kurdish rights activist serving an 11-year prison sentence;
- **Peru: Melissa Rocío Patiño Hinostroza** – a student and poet currently on trial for alleged links to a terrorist organisation, although there is no evidence of her having carried out or advocated violence;
- **Zimbabwe: Writers, Cast and Crew - *The Crocodile of Zambezi*** – a play that has been banned and led to actors and crew being beaten, and the playwrights threatened.

Writers around the world took part in International PEN activities on 15 November and the days around to honour their colleagues who are under attack. Here is a summary of some of the activities

- **Austrian PEN:** held an event in Vienna where Tunisian journalist Sihem Bensedrine, and Malawian poet, Jack Mapanje were guests. Both spoke about their experiences of threats and living under difficult situations. Sihem Bensedrine stressed out the differences between the official view of Tunisia and the real circumstances of the living of a writer who dares to criticize. Jack Mapanje spoke about the poor level of human rights in Africa and expressed his hope of a brighter future. The event coincided with the publication of Mapanje's poetry collection, "Of Chameleons and Gods / Und Gott ward zum Chamäleon" in a bilingual German/English edition. Works of both authors were read by a popular stage and movie actor Wolfgang Böck, accompanied by jazz compositions performed by Michael Starch on the theme of freedom. The event was reviewed in different nationwide papers, interviews were broadcasted in radio (Ö1, FM4) in German and English, a long report was in TV on ORF 1.
- **Belgian (Flanders):** held an evening of poetry readings from imprisoned writers on 15 November, and the Centre's work was reported in the leading daily *De Standaard* with a special focus on China <http://home.scarlet.be/bartvanloo.info/PEN/Gevangen08.pdf>
- **Catalan PEN:** held an awards ceremony on 12 November for the 20th Catalonia International Prize, given this year to Aung San Suu Kyi, a case sponsored by Catalan PEN. There were a series of readings entitled *Freedom from Fear* that focussed on Burmese writings. On 13 November, there were two panel events. One on Writing and Territory with speakers from Algeria, Cuba and Kosovo. The other on Writing and Identity, featuring Carmen Boullosa from Mexico. The Centre also revived a Catalan PEN special event, the "writers cage" where writers read from the PEN anthology *This Prison Where I Live* from a cage outside the Centre's offices. The Centre added to its impressive series of posters on free expression with a new work by Jaume Plensa and Jordi Embodas. (Copy available on request.)
- **Cuban Writers in Exile:** On 15 November the Centre held its monthly activity "Talking to the Author" which was attended by the Spanish writer Fernando Arrabal who joined Angel Cuadra, Armando Alvarez Bravo, and Carlos Alberto Montaner, a Cuban writer living in Spain. where discussion centred on the plight of Cuban writers. The Centre then gave Fernando Arrabal a commemoration plaque for "his literary work and support for the freedom of Cuba". Arrabal then went on to speak about his past experiences with Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and Pablo Picasso and a on the work of Milan Kundera. Participants were also invited to take part in the WiPC Greetings Card campaign.
- **Danish PEN:** held a very successful 3-day event at the Copenhagen Book Fair 14-16 November. Throughout the festival, well known Danish writers give short presentations on freedom of expression, imprisoned writers and what can be done to help, each in a different personal style, often moving and sometimes humorous. There was also a postcard campaign where the public had the

opportunity to send a greeting to the five writers featured in the Day of the Imprisoned, writer, as well as Malaysian web editor Raja Petra Karuddin, who is an honorary member of Danish PEN. The postcards were issued in English, Spanish and French, and on the front the text of Article 19 in English, Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Arabic, French and Danish. The signed postcards with stamps and pre-printed address labels were put into a tall 'glass' so everybody could see how the pile was growing. The signers of the postcards had to pay for the privilege – 20 Danish kroner (€ 2.75). Over 500 postcards were sent. Posters were also displayed. The Centre was able to collect greetings and gifts from Danish and foreign writers and celebrities written or drawn and signed specially for this occasion for sale to the public. They included Vaclav Havel who sent three beautifully autographed greetings. Others were Fadia Faqir (Jordan), Emily Wu (China-USA), Aasne Seierstad (Norway) and Danes including Suzanne Brøgger, Pia Tafdrup (who wrote her last collection of haiku poems by hand in a small, handmade book), Herbert Pundik, Roald Als, Per Marquard Otzen and Pia Schutzmann. Finally, Danish PEN was the host of one of the key events at the fair, where two exiled writers living in Denmark – Yun Feng (China) and Dina Yafasova (Belarus) – were interviewed on their experiences of being a writer in exile in Denmark and about the plans for cities of asylum in Denmark. (Photos available)

- **English PEN:** English PEN's annual service to mark the Day of the Imprisoned Writer was held at St Bride's Church was once again a great success. The Chair of the Writers in Prison Committee, Carole Seymour-Jones, who had just stepped off a plane back from her mission in the Maldives, gave an extremely moving address about her recent experiences. The choir was as enchanting as ever, whilst extracts from the work of persecuted writers were read beautifully by actors Caroline Carver and Kenny Doughty.
- **Foundation PEN Emergency Fund/Oxfam Novib Award:** this year the award was granted to five people: Pierre Roger Lambo Sandjo, a singer from Cameroon, Zimbabwean playwrights, Raisedon Baya and Christopher Mlalazi, Zargana and Saw Wei from Burma, and Dejan Anastasijevic from Serbia. Anastasijevic accepted the award on behalf of all six at a ceremony hosted by the Crossing Borders music and literature festival in The Hague on 19 November. (Photo available)
- **German Speaking Writers Abroad:** held an event titled "Against censorship and for freedom of speech in China" where Günter Nooke, a representative of the German Foreign Ministry, reported on the human rights situation in China. This was followed by a reading of five of Shi Tao's poems in Chinese and German. There were also contributions from Professor Hans Kühner from Humboldt University, Xiao Qiao who described her situation in China and subsequent flight, and Dirk Pleiter of Amnesty International gave a short introduction on the film "Prisoners in Freedom City" by Hu Jia. half an hour. The evening ended with a panel discussion between Dirk Pleiter, Hans Kühner, Freya Klier, Günter Nooke and Xiao Qiao, moderated by Margit Miosga.
- **Ghanian PEN:** staged an event that where members of Ghanaian PEN and youth groups listened to speakers on the topic of freedom of expression

- and the importance of literature. They included the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), National Media Commission (NMC), Ghana Journalists Association (GJA), Ghana Writers Association (GWA) and the English Department, University of Ghana. Among the points raised was the importance of free expression and democracy around the time of elections, such as was to be held in Ghana in early December, and that young people in a country with relatively few free expression problems should not be complacent.
- **Guinean PEN:** held events on 7 November in collaboration with the Musée du Fout, centred the books of three Guinean authors who had been imprisoned for their work. There was a debate where the authors spoke about their work, and a successful book sale where over 200 copies of the books were sold. One of the books. Later that day, the theatre troupe *les Sardines de Guinée* staged their adaptation of one of the novels, *Plus jamais ça* by Boubacar Diallo.. (Photos available)
 - **Malawi PEN:** held a literary event honouring writers world wide and promoting the Centre's work. At the centre was a presentation by writer Kingsley Jika on the autobiography of Vira Chirwa, a human rights activist imprisoned in the 1990s. (Photos available)
 - **Nepal PEN:** has staggered their activities over the year making use of the opportunity of a column in a popular weekly where they have featured cases including Nepali journalist Birendra Sah and other writers under threat in Nepal, the situation in Myanmar, Vietnam and China.
 - **Norwegian PEN:** marked the Day of the Imprisoned Writer at the House of Literature in Oslo on Nov. 13. WiPC chair Elisabet Middelthon gave an overview of the writers in focus and there was a special page featuring these on the Norwegian PEN web. As for each year, Norwegian PEN awarded its Ossietzky prize for outstanding achievements in the field of free expression. This year, the prize was awarded to two people - Chungdak KOREN, leader of the Norwegian Tibet committee and professor Francis SEJERSTED, chair of the Fritt Ord board, former chair of the Norwegian Nobel Peace Prize Committee and chair of the publicly appointed Free Speech Commission (1996-99)
 - **Sierra Leone PEN:** observed the Day with a Seminar, a poetry recitation session and a drama performance (on human rights and freedom of expression) along with statements from some key players in the fight for freedom of expression and human rights in general. The celebration took place on 14 November at the British Council Hall with the theme: "Human Rights and Freedom of Expression". PEN members and school club members and representatives from other institutions presented poems and speeches on the theme. Over hundred people attended.
 - **Somali PEN:** held a day long workshop at Hotel Sahafi, in the Somali capital, Mogadishu on 16 November 2008 that brought together over 80 writers, journalists, artists, lawyers, human rights activists, representatives from civil society organisations and others. The focus of the event was the Impact of the Civil War in Somalia on the Freedom and Careers of Somali writers and

journalists. This successful event ended with a refreshing artistic performance of poetry and music that included Somali performing artists, including such national stars as Said Mohamed Harawo, Dahabo Shiikh Maxamuud and Abwaan Farey. (Photos available)

- **Swedish PEN:** held a very successful Day of the Imprisoned Writer where the Centre held an award Ceremony for Lydia Cacho the winner of the 2008 Tucholsky Prize, given annually by Swedish PEN to writers who fight against oppression of freedom of expression, to the Mexican author, **Lydia Cacho** came to Stockholm to accept the award on the Day of the Imprisoned Writer. Lydia Cacho had been briefly imprisoned, put on trial, and now lives under threat for disclosing international pedophile rings. The award led author **Roberto Saviano** to write a message praising her courage published in the Swedish press. Saviano is himself living in hiding from threats from the Italian mafia about whom he wrote in his book *Gomorra*. The event was well covered in the Swedish press. The Centre also published a booklet *Imprisoned Words; focus Latin America* given to the award audience free of charge that day. www.dn.se/content/1/c6/85/13/05/FangsladeForfattare.pdf

An event marking the Day of the Imprisoned Writer was held in Uppsala in cooperation with Uppsala Municipality, Uppsala Publishing House and the daily *Uppsala Nya Tidning* on the theme of truth, humanity and free world. Cecilia Wikstrom, a member of Swedish Parliament and the Deputy Chairman on the Standing Committee for Cultural Affairs spoke of Uppsala becoming a City of Refuge for persecuted writers, and the Mayor of Knivsta municipality also spoke at the event. There were also readings of prose and poetry by Elsie Johansson, Ak Welspar, and Ulrika Knutson and musical performances by Jacke Sjodin, Lasse Aberg, the Stig Helmers Experience band, and traditional Indian music instrumental presentations by Coste Apetrea and Suranjana Ghosh.

- **Swiss Italian and Romansh Centre, Suisse Romande and Swiss German PEN Centres:** Once more the Swiss Italian and Romansh, the Swiss Romand and the Swiss German PEN Centres combined forces in order to stage events in three different language regions of Switzerland. The focus of the public meetings highlighting the Day of the Imprisoned Writer in 2008 was the situation of writers and the society at large in Iraq. Ali Al Shalah, Iraqi poet in exile in Zurich and president of the Iraqi PEN Centre took part in all three events: **Swiss Italian and Romansh Centre:** "Literature and Freedom of Expression: The story continues in Iraq and the world". Guests: Ali Al Shalah and Younis Tawfik, Iraqi novelist exiled in Italy talk with Luisa Orelli, translator and Arabist at the High School in Locarno and at a public soirée in Lugano. **Swiss German PEN Centre:** "Iraq - the tragedy of the cultures": Ali Al Shalah presented and discussed the actual situation in Iraq as well as a short poetical movie, portraying life in the city of Babylon immediately after the war started in 2003. Poems of Iraqi writers were read in German and Arabic. **Swiss Romand Centre:** Ali Al Shalah and Khazal al-Maijdi, Iraqi poet exiled in the Netherlands discuss their situation. The Swiss Romand as well as the Swiss Italian Centre also took the opportunity to present further cases of imprisoned writers, respectively highlighting the cases suggested by the International PEN Writers in Prison Committee and the situation in China, Burma, Vietnam and Tibet. The work of the three Swiss PEN Centres was supported respectively by Reporters sans Frontières, Swiss Italian Section, the

Anne Frank Foundation, the Dr. Jenö Stähelin Foundation and jointly by the Swiss Writers' Union AdS.

- **Swiss Romand Centre:** issued a press release on the work of the WiPC and specifically on Vietnamese cases that was covered in two dailies - *Tribune de Genève* and *Le Courier*, and the weekly magazine *Genève Home Informations*.
- **Sydney PEN:** held an event on 15 November featuring Anna Funder, author of *Stasiland* who spoke about courage to a large and appreciative audience. She was introduced by Tom Keneally, who explained to the audience that the Empty Chair on the stage represented the imprisoned Burmese poet and activist, Zargana. During the course of 2008 Sydney PEN hosted a number of public events, each one featuring an Empty Chair representing an imprisoned writer. He spoke of Sydney PEN's WiPC activities, and its focus on South East Asia. In particular, on the case of Australian writer, Harry Nicolaides, who was arrested in Thailand in August 2008 and has subsequently been given a six year prison sentence. During the final weeks of 2008, Sydney PEN's WiPC participated in the greetings card campaign.
- **PEN USA:** to commemorate the Day of the Imprisoned Writer, PEN USA partnered with a local chapter of Amnesty and hosted a candlelight vigil for writers in prison on the Loyola Marymount Campus. PEN Staff members researched writer's individual cases and prepared short, biographical statements to be read at the vigil.

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