

WRITERS FOR PEACE COMMITTEE

NEWSLETTER



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THE EROSION OF DEMOCRACY

BY GERMÁN ROJAS (WFPC CHAIR, PEN CHILE)

In early February 2024, presidential elections were held in El Salvador, an event that went almost unnoticed in the world press. The result tells us that the current President, Nayib Bukele, was re-elected with almost 83% of the votes, an overwhelming majority that reminds us of the elections held in the totalitarian one-party regimes of the Cold War era.

At 38 years of age, Bukele was elected President for the first time in 2019, obtaining an absolute majority of 53.1% of the vote with his Nuevas Ideas party. On that occasion he broke the alternation between governing parties that had been taking place since 1989 between the two main Salvadoran parties: the right-wing Alianza Republicana Nacionalista and the left-wing Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front).

His electoral commitment at the time was to pursue a policy of national pacification in the face of the proliferation of criminal groups known as maras or gangs. This proposal was successful, which, among other things, is expressed in a high decrease in the homicide rate. But this has happened while implementing policies that have violated important democratic principles:

- There have been serious restrictions on press freedom. The president now controls most of the media.
- Bukele has interfered with the independence of the judiciary by having it prosecute political opponents.
- He has threatened civil society organisations, intellectuals, journalists and international aid workers with criminal prosecution for any criticism of him or his administration.
- He dismissed the magistrates of the Constitutional Chamber and the Attorney General of the Republic, which then led to the Chamber declaring in September 2021 that the immediate re-election of the president was possible, asserting without legal basis that the will of the people to re-elect Bukele is above the Constitution.
- He has dismissed one third of the judges, which has allowed him to control the judiciary at will.
- On 22 March 2022, Congress - controlled by a two third majority of Bukele's "Nuevas Ideas" party - declared a "state of exception" which has been used as an instrument to control opposition groups, civil society and the media. Today the state does not need judicial authorisation to tap telephone conversations or electronic devices.

- Procedural guarantees of adequate defence have disappeared; the police function as both judiciary and executive and carry out mass trials (between 100 and 600 cases are heard at the same time); there is no individualisation of crimes; there are indefinite provisional detentions; etc.

The institutions, including the police and the army, accepted this situation, and the opposition, which is legislatively very weak, lost popular support due to corruption and the inability to renew its proposals and leadership.

Bukele represents the response to a progressive process of deterioration of the Salvadoran democratic system. The citizenship has overwhelmingly backed this populist politician with the tools of democracy. For the population, the control of the maras or gangs has been a relief. The fact is that he has imposed measures that undermine human rights and the exercise of democracy does not seem to matter to many, judging by the recent election results.

So now comes the big question: is this situation unique to El Salvador? Certainly not in Latin America. We have in view the cases of Nicaragua, Cuba and Venezuela and others, where freedom of expression is under threat. In the case of the United States, too, Trump's shadow continues to loom as a major threat to democracy. Suffice to recall all the efforts he made to manipulate the election results of November 2020 in his favour, for which no mea culpa has ever been heard.

A new spectre is also haunting European territory: that of the various far-right groupings, which, while heterogeneous and responding to different political contexts, are rooted in national fears in which anything different represents a threat and becomes a breeding ground for the development of unacceptable hate speech. Some are already in government or are part of broader governmental coalitions (Giorgia Meloni in Italy, Viktor Orban in Hungary, Democrats in Sweden, etc.). Other countries we can mention, where they are not in government but have a strong electoral presence, are Spain (Vox), the Netherlands, Austria and Finland. And most worrying of all is the

resurgence in Germany of xenophobic, Eurosceptic and nationalist positions close to neo-Nazism represented by the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, which led to recent mass protests in large German cities calling for AfD to be banned for its anti-democratic vocation.

Obviously, the democratic system is not applicable in many countries globally, nor does it have to be a system that applies everywhere. However, we have also witnessed that in many African, Asian and Middle Eastern countries that have adhered to democratic principles, democracy has been progressively eroded.

My concern on this issue is that political polarisation in those parts of the world that have been governed by democratic systems means that democracy is now under threat in many countries. With it comes the proliferation of hate speech, exclusion, narrow nationalism and authoritarianism that have done so much damage to humanity in the past. Political polarisation is an immense threat to peace. And we - writers - cannot remain mere spectators on the sidelines.

BLLED MEETING 2024 – INVITATION

PEN Slovenia and Writers for Peace Committee will organise the 56th International meeting of writers in Bled that will take place between the **16th and the 18th** of April 2024.

Like every year, the focus will be on the PEN International Writers for Peace Committee Meeting, which will hold the General Assembly on the first day of the meeting, i.e. 16th April between 9am and 5pm CET. This meeting will be hybrid, so you're welcome to register for the online participation should you not be able to attend in person. The second day, 17th April, will be dedicated to public round tables and discussions. The 11th festival Faces of Peace will take place on the 18th April.

The round table topics that were chosen this year are:

1. The Consequences of Catastrophe for Peace: Writers' Response (topic chosen by WfPC)

Many of the catastrophes facing humanity are natural disasters. Other catastrophes -like war and violation of human rights are directly caused by mankind. Often natural disasters are made worse by human actions - whether in the causes (climate change, deforestation etc.) or in the response. Often catastrophe strikes in parts of the world already destabilized by strife. Writers can draw attention to the dangers, use poetry and fiction to face disaster, and urge action. In the face of these challenges, writers play a vital role. Their literary prowess can spotlight the perils, employ poetry and fiction to memorialize the impact of disasters, and passionately advocate for decisive action. Through the lens of writers, the consequences of catastrophes become not just tales of despair but narratives that inspire awareness and impel positive change.

2. Multiculturality and Dialogue in Balkan Literature (topic chosen by Slovenian PEN)

The richness of Balkan literature lies in its diversity. Its languages belong to various linguistic groups with Slavic, Romance, and even Germanic roots. Over centuries of linguistic interweaving, multiple cultural and national communities have emerged. After the breakup of Yugoslavia and the devastating wars in the 1990s, a larger number of countries were created. However, despite the process of European Union integration, hatred has not been eradicated. Hate speech, glorification of war criminals, restrictions on freedom of speech, and attacks on writers fill the news too often and raise fears that war could break out again. Yet in the former Yugoslavia, intercultural authors (including Nobel laureate Ivo Andrić) were the ones who belonged to multiple cultural traditions. Their sensitivity and understanding of interethnic and interfaith issues served as a guide for the entire Yugoslav society. Is it then possible to create a space for dialogue from this diversity? Can literature, which in the Balkans often gave space for collaboration, transcend hatred?

The last day will be dedicated to literary and poetry festival Faces of Peace, which this year, will present the creativity of young poets and writers. Therefore, we kindly invite all PEN centres, which joined the Tomorrow's club initiative during the Uppsala Congress in 2022 to send their young delegates. Some of them will be included in the round tables and many will present their creativity during the 11th Faces of Peace Festival around Slovenia.

Short agenda:

- **15th April 2024** - Bled before Bled, literary evening with Chilean poet and Chair of the WfPC Germán Rojas, Ljubljana.
- **16th April 2024** - General Assembly of WfPC (closed to public, only PEN members), where we also dedicate time to address the war in Ukraine and the Palestine/Israeli conflict, as well as various other crisis.
- **17th April 2024** - Round tables "The Consequences of Catastrophe for Peace: Writers' Response", moderated by Germán Rojas and "Multiculturality and Dialogue in Balkan Literature", moderated by Vesna Mikolič.
- **18th April 2024** - Faces of Peace - Tomorrow's club of PEN International, organized by Ege Dündar and Selma Skenderović and Bled after Bled, literary evening with Pakistani writer and activist Tahira Abdullah, Ljubljana.

Like every year, we will publish Bled meeting 2024 anthology and your written contributions will be included in this anthology if sent by the March 10, 2024 in one of the official languages of the meeting: French, English, Spanish or Slovenian. The text should not exceed 4.000 characters with spaces. To encourage as many people as possible to participate, we are accepting all literary forms.

The registration fee without accommodation is 250€. This fee covers the travel from Ljubljana airport to Bled and back to the Ljubljana airport, coffee breaks and catering during conferences as well as printed materials. Travel to Ljubljana airport and hotel expenses are to be settled by delegates, participants and accompanying guests themselves.

The online participation will be free of charge. The online participants will receive the conference materials in electronic form.

We managed to get a special deal in Hotel Park**** for the participants of our meeting.

Price list:

- Double room for single use € 146 per day
- Double room for single use with a view on the lake € 174 per day
- Double room € 162 per day
- Double room with a view on the lake € 194 per day

To make the reservation in Hotel Park please click

If you have any questions or doubts about the reservation, please call +386 4 579 16 00 or send them an email on booking.eventsbled@sava.si. PEN discount code is 37507.

Please note that the special rates are available only until March 11, 2024! After that date you will need to pay the full price, so don't wait with your reservations.

If you don't wish to stay in Hotel Park, there are other types of accommodation available in Bled. More information on this link.

Individual cancellations are possible by March 30, 2024. We reserve the right to postpone/cancel the meeting either in the case of sanitary restrictions or too few registered participants. All paid fees will be returned.

If you are interested in attending the 56th International Writers' Meeting at Bled, please complete the registration form found on link by March 10, 2024 at the latest. The participation fee needs to be settled by the March 17th, 2024.

PAYMENT FOR THE REGISTRACION FEE ONLY

Slovenski center PEN, Tomšičeva 12, Ljubljana
NLB d.d., Trg Republike 2, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia,
SWIFT/BIC: LJBAS12X,
IBAN: SI56 0201 0001 2599 684.

We have invited many eminent writers and publicists to the meeting. We promise to keep you informed of all future developments and confirmations. At the moment we can confirm the presence of a prominent Pakistani human rights activist Mrs. Tahira Abdullah. A detailed programme and all other details concerning the Bled meeting will be sent to you in the coming weeks.

We are looking forward to seeing you in Bled or on the big screen of the conference room. If you have any questions at this stage, contact us.

Looking forward to your registration.

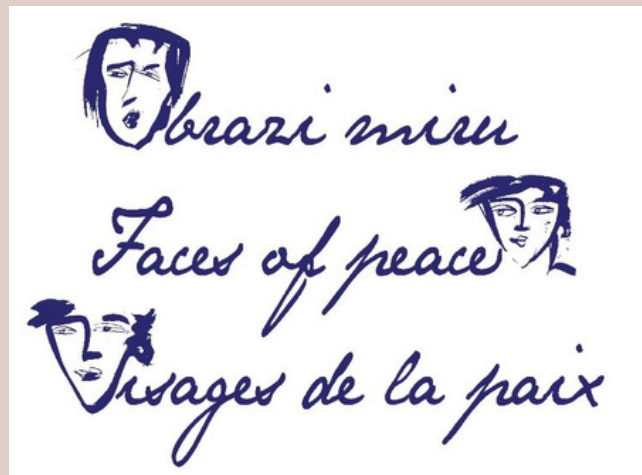
BLED FESTIVAL FACES OF PEACE AND TOMORROW CLUB – CONTRIBUTION OF YOUNG AUTHORS

BY SELMA SKENDEROVIĆ (PEN SLOVENIA) AND EGE DÜNDAR (PEN INTERNATIONAL)

On the initiative of the Slovenian PEN center president Tanja Tuma, we invited young authors from different parts of the world – Mirza Pinjić (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Tijana Rakočević (Montenegro) and Hanna Komar (Republic of Belarus) – who will join the round tables **The Consequences Of Catastrophe for Peace: Writers' Response and Multiculturality and Dialogue in Balkan Literature** which will take place from 16th to 18th April 2024 as a part of Bled Festival Faces of Peace. In addition to the mentioned round tables, the authors will also take part in a round table dedicated exclusively to young authors with the title **At the Intersection of Literature and Social Engagement** where they will talk about common points between literature and social engagement and about the role young writers play in writing socially engaged literature. The emphasis will be on the positive changes that such literature can bring to new generations.

We believe that young people, with their modern, contemporary views and writing that does not represent only one side, can contribute to a more tolerant, inclusive society in which we will build relationships on intercultural dialogue, instead of deepening the tension between individual nations, religions and cultures with our differences. To amplify the voices of youths overlooked by industries and institutions, voices from communities that have been marginalized and silenced by political oppression, by publishers that refuse to print their books and schools that refuse to keep them in their libraries we want to establish Tomorrow Club. Our goal would be to connect as many writers as possible under 35 – not just by diversity in age but also in their forms of expression, background, language, geography, gender and more – with experienced colleagues at centers and beyond in our movement, so this tradition built on creating solidarity strategies, community and opportunities can be passed down and be innovative.

Where increasingly uprooted youths feel unheard and unseen, we need more storytellers to envision a sense of collective belonging. Opportunities are needed to connect over a shared passion for a world they feel needs to change but are not always sure how.



Our differences matter though not as urgently as common crises from wars to pandemics, climate change to wealth inequality. Tomorrow Club will establish solidarity between our communities that transcends borders, inequalities, and politics, encouraging constructive action. It can demonstrate that solidarity does not need to get tangled in the trappings of politics. It's just human and we need much more of it for the future that's already here.



YANG HENGJUN, ANOTHER VICTIM OF WORDS IN CHINA

BY TIENCHI MARTIN-LIAO (INDEPENDANT CHINESSE PEN)

According to Amnesty International, China is the country that carries out the most executions in the world. The yearly number of executions reaches several thousand. Yet the exact number is unknown because it is the »state secret«.

The list of capital crimes is 46. The judicial authority in China pronounced proudly that a „death sentence with two years probation“ has been practiced very frequently instead of actual death sentences. Executions under the pretense of political crimes have been extremely rare in the last decades. In most cases, political prisoners receive life sentences, such as the dissident Wang Binzhang or Uyghur scholar Ilham Tohti.

The recent case of the Australian writer Dr. Yang Hengjun has shocked the world, and the harsh punishment for a non-Chinese citizen is offending international law. Yang, a pro-democracy publisher, and ICPC member, was arrested in 2019 in Guangzhou during his trip with his family in China. In the five years of detention, the outside world and his family knew very little about his condition. He was repeatedly interrogated in more than 300 closed-door trials and his health deteriorated rapidly. On February 5, the Beijing Court declared that Yang Hengjun was receiving a death sentence with two years of probation on espionage charges. Should the possible appeal fail, after the probation time, it will turn into a life sentence.

Who is Yang Hengjun, and why the prosecution of espionage?

The 58-year-old Yang worked for China's Ministry of State Security from 1989 to 1999 after he graduated from Shanghai's Fudan University. In 1999 he moved to Australia, studied, and received his PhD. In 2002 he became an Australian citizen. For the past 20 years, Yang has worked as an editor, writer, and blogger in Hong Kong, the USA, and Australia. His writings uphold democratic values and are critical to the authoritarian system in China. However, sometimes they also have a compromising and friendly tone toward Beijing, which brought in turn suspicion and criticism from the democratic front overseas. It is

well known that his blog posts have received a lot of attention on Chinese social media.

Yang joined ICPC in 2005, ten years later, he wrote to the ICPC board, that he wanted to quit his membership because there were critics of his person and writing, he did not want to influence the good reputation of ICPC, and it would be better for both sides that he leave PEN.

In 2011 he was arrested or disappeared in China for a couple of days, and it prompted a political dispute between the Chinese and Australian governments. Later on, he explained that it was a „misunderstanding“ and he felt sorry that he had stirred up so much trouble. In 2014 he was invited to the state banquet for the 55th anniversary of the founding of the PRC. His first novel, using himself as a rough model, is a story about a legendary double agent.

The ambiguous character, the multi-functional position as well as his complex political stance indicate that it is not easy to define the person Yang Hengjun. Is he a freelance writer, and journalist with free thoughts and ambition, a mediator among the Beijing authority, the US administration, and the overseas opposition or is he an opportunist playing the double roles as an intellectual and servant to an authoritarian regime?

It took the Chinese authorities five years to investigate Yang's case, his future has been decided: death sentence with 2 years probation, which means after the probation, life long imprisonment. Yet the verdict is not known to the public, we do not know what kind of espionage he had performed. It is said that he had sold „state secrets“ to Taiwan. As we know, „state secret“ has a very vague definition in official Chinese. A private picture of a high politician, and a phone call from the superior could be a „state secret“. No matter what kind of „crimes“, Yang has committed, one thing is clear, he was convicted mainly for his words. Since he is an Australian citizen, he became a trading card between the Chinese and Australian governments.

PEN International and many PEN centers have co-signed a statement, Ma Thida, chairwoman of the Writers in Prison Committee wrote: „This is a shocking and unacceptable outcome of a flawed and opaque judicial process. In this process, writers are denied representation and their basic human rights to a fair trial. We stand in solidarity with Yang Hengjun and call on the government of the People's Republic of China to stop infringing on freedom of speech.“

Not every victim of a totalitarian regime is a hero. Dr. Yang Hengjun is not a hero, but as a writer, he deserves our support. His case is another example of how the PRC government strangles freedom of speech. It has tried to silence its 1.4 billion people without success, now it is stretching its hand to other countries and their citizens, we need to stop this outrageous attempt and stand up against the notorious „state terrorism“ in China.



pen
INTERNATIONAL

Yang Hengjun
Australian novelist,
blogger and political
commentator

#YangHengjun
#LiuXiaoboanniversary

After welcoming the Vakxikon collection of Writers for Peace, one piece from each of the 27 EU countries, I was asked to give the annual Stinging Fly lecture in Dublin. This continuously innovative literary magazine bi-annually proclaims Plato God has specially appointed me to this city, so as though it were a large thoroughbred horse which because of its great size is inclined to be lazy and needs the stimulation of some stinging fly reminding us of the importance of the written word, the needling jolt of the sting that wakens us from our lethargy. The task required me to plagiarize my own life, an experience that turned into more of a riotous event than I'd expected. Although it's not the case for all writing lives, mine has been continuously crisscrossed by politics. We know when we're caught by a subject that has to be committed to the page, so if that is political then so be it. I've imagined the first woman to become pregnant after Hiroshima, men on Death Row in the USA, the Irish woman who attempted to assassinate Mussolini, but also lovers matching up the colours of their wine as the sun slanted through a pub window, offering possible hope. Considering the news headlines of the last year, I was conscious of Theodor Adorno's 1949 essay - "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbarism." My own belief is that although it might seem ruthlessly self-indulgent, or, more to the point, truly delusional, to be an artist of any hue at the moment, NOT continuing to be just that, or NOT recognizing our need for artistic engagement, would in fact feed the parcels of barbarism that we're seeing erupting.

I've written, in *Reading Rites*, about our place in the cave of history.

There we are, everyone is more or less fed and has a place to sleep. The cooks have begun to add tastes to the food, the nurses have figured how to make bandages and put them on. Sadly, over in the far corner someone has started making a weapon. But in the other one, the artists have begun... they have steadied themselves on the precipice between the desire to create the metaphor for themselves, and the apprehensive wish to make it public. They will continue sketching the world in order to strengthen their corner. They will have their work cut out for them

when the hordes from the gun side gain strength. And when those hordes finally destroy that cave, and move to another one, the metaphor will stay hiding, waiting to be found some day, all alive as if it had never been neglected.



We are the stinging fly, our literary duty is to create place in the cave for all of us, including the painter who only wants to follow the meandering of a river or the poet who wants, with closed eyes, to write only about love and the gullies it digs out on our hearts.

SNOW BLACK – AND SNOW WHITE, TODAY AND IN THE PAST

BY ULI ROTHFUSS (PEN GERMANY)

Thoughts on "The snow is black in my city" - a quote from Sarah Kirsch

The snow lies black in my city - the quote, the motif of the honoured German poet Sarah Kirsch is an image that I can imagine in a very real way; real and frightening. The time is cold like the weather, but the snow is not white, but black like the night, in broad daylight, and no, not just the black blanket, it is already falling black, this snow, no white, no green, not even grey, just a monotonous, a vast black.

In my childhood, in the Black Forest, a mountain region in South Germany, we loved the arrival of the first snow, we chased through the metre-high piles of snow, jubilant, full of joy, we took the snow, which for weeks and months bathed the landscape in its white as if washed clean, as a friend.

When I look out at the black snow in the city today, I fear every step into it, as if I could sink into it, I am afraid of what is hidden behind, under the black layer, be it blood, the blood of the innocent, with which we also stain our hands, in the face of this blind rage with which the warmongering is supported, driven forward; and we do not know what to do, how to oppose the madness.

There is talk of human rights, of the weak also having their rights. Yes. A noble claim. In Israel, in Palestine, children are expelled, driven into nights of bombing, left behind, mutilated, murdered. There is no one left who has right on their side. The question I keep asking myself is: has anyone who acts according to the Old Testament's "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," ever forfeited his own claim to a minimum of justice? And how dirty must politics be to still fuel this, to exploit resentment for its own selfish purposes?

When I open my mobile phone, when I look at the pictures of this world, the black layers of snow in the cities of the world, I am surrounded by a silence in the face of what has seemed good to me since childhood. The good turns black, it is no longer the white snow of childhood that surrounds me, that gives me hope that the pure still exists; it has turned black, the belief in it is lost in the echo that I shout out into the forests of childhood. What remains is writing - as a way to somehow hold on to the last things.

Uli Rothfuss, professor of cultural studies and publicist, born in 1961, lives in Stein/Franconia and Ebershardt/Black Forest in Germany.

Member of the Executive Committee of the PEN Centre Germany and member of the Advisory Board of the Writers-for-Peace Committee of International PEN.

www.uli-rothfuss.de.

JOURNALISM IN NICARAGUA, A CENSORED AND PERSECUTED PROFESSION

BY ARQUÍMEDES GONZÁLEZ (PEN NICARAGUA)

Ten months have passed since the illegal detention of Nicaraguan journalist Víctor Ticay, Canal 10's correspondent in Nicaragua, who was also sentenced to eight years in prison by Daniel Ortega's regime on charges of spreading false information and conspiring to destabilise national integrity.

The journalist was arrested by Ortega's police officers on 6 April 2023, in the municipality of Nandaime, one day after broadcasting on Facebook Live an activity of the Catholic Church on his news page "La Portada". Since then, Ticay has been detained in the National Penitentiary System, known as La Modelo, a prison located on the outskirts of Managua, the capital of Nicaragua.

Ticay is the most recent case of harassment, criminalisation and persecution of journalists in this Central American country. He was convicted under the Special Law on Cybercrimes passed by the National Assembly at the end of November 2020, which criminalises the work of independent journalism.

On repeated occasions, the Vice President and spokesperson for the regime, Rosario Murillo, has called independent journalists "terrorists" and "forces of darkness" for reporting on serious human rights violations in Nicaragua since April 2018.

Since then, when civic protests began, the Ortega regime has unleashed a manhunt against journalists and media outlets. Currently all newspapers, dozens of radio and television stations have been closed or confiscated.

More than 200 journalists in exile

The trade union organisation Periodistas y Comunicadores Independientes (PCIN) denounced that at least 22 journalists have been deprived of their nationality and that 241 have gone into exile between 2018 and December 2023.

In 2020, the PCIN Observatory recorded 1,678 attacks against journalists and independent media. In 2021, the escalation of repression continued. Up to September last year, PCIN counted 1,980 attacks.

In 2018, the government unleashed a maelstrom of very serious human rights violations such as the unsolved murder of Bluefields journalist Ángel Gahona, while covering protests in the Southern Caribbean, followed by the arbitrary imprisonment of journalists Miguel Mora, Lucía Pineda Ubau and Miguel Mendoza, who spent more than two years in prison. Mora was arrested a second time. In February 2023 he was expelled from the country and together with Pineda, they were stripped of their nationality. Mendoza was also convicted for allegedly "conspiring to undermine national integrity" after expressing his opinion on social media about human rights abuses committed by Ortega. The sports journalist was also expelled from Nicaragua and denationalised. In retaliation, the houses of Pineau Ubau and Mendoza were confiscated.



In addition, Ortega has been responsible for the expulsion of international media correspondents, physical and verbal attacks on Nicaraguan and foreign reporters covering protests, censorship and closure of media outlets such as "La Prensa", "Confidencial" and "100 noticias", confiscation of buildings, theft of equipment, threats, harassment, persecution, police and para-police siege against journalists, which led to the forced displacement and exile of dozens of journalists.

Another of the most extreme cases is that of journalist Kalúa Salazar, who in 2020 was prosecuted after publishing an investigation into

corruption in a Sandinista mayor's office in the southern Caribbean region of the country.

This information was classified as false, and the journalist was prosecuted for slander.

On 29 September 2020, Judge Deyanira Traña found journalist Salazar guilty of slander, sentencing her to 120 days in prison and a fine of C\$7,684.58 córdobas, equivalent to approximately US\$230.

RETHINKING THE BLED MANIFESTO, TEN YEARS AFTER

BY TERESA SALEMA CADETE (PEN PORTUGAL)

In his latest essay (*Le Labyrinthe des égarés. L'Occident et ses adversaires*, Paris, Grasset 2023), Amin Maalouf asks himself, and us by the same token, where a certain incapacity to cooperate, or at least to negotiate, among states and peoples, comes from. He writes this in the epilogue, after having reflected about the history of the mutual relationship between several nations, throughout the 20th century until our days – Japan, The Soviet Union/Russia, China, and The United States of America.

In spite of several omissions, the essay shows how the humanity and the peoples over the globe have often been able to improve their lives and to keep living in peace when they have had leaders with a political vision, who had been able to negotiate and, if necessary, to make compromises with so-called adversary powers. The main example remains the de-escalation between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cuba crisis of 1962.

Surprisingly – or not – he sustains that the memory of the Hiroshima nuclear bombing 1945 has sharpened a certain degree of vigilance against the danger of new wars, which has lasted long in the world, at least until the fall of the Berlin Wall 1989. In this sense, he calls this last occurrence a possible sign of de-escalation, a sort of “Hiroshima in reverse” (p. 425).

Some months after the approval of the Bled manifesto at the PEN General Assembly in Reykjavik 2013, it was launched in January 2014 in The Hague during a meeting organized by Oxfam. There I met Amin Maalouf, and we had the opportunity to exchange ideas about another of his essays, “*Le dérèglement du monde. Quand nos civilisations s'épuisent*,” Paris, Grasset 2009, which I had read with my students. As a matter of fact, it is not difficult to establish evident connections between the destruction of some main

universal principles that help establishing communication among different peoples with different political visions and systems, and the present lack, on a scary globally level, of guidelines that help initiating dialogue and negotiation among groups and nations in conflict – a road opened by the Bled Manifesto.

In this sense, let us reexamine its point 4, that “PEN considers one of the world's greatest challenges to be the transition from violence to debate, discussion and dialogue”, and furthermore, PEN members are exhorted to “be active participants in this process.” But how?

Surely, as the text says, by “promoting where necessary the principles of international law.” But along with reflecting about the conditions of possibility for conflict parts to negotiate, it seems crucial to establish main goals for any pacification process, since “social and political justice is inaccessible without peace and freedom” (point 6). The role of the PEN members could therefore consist in trying to make the gap between any present difficult and complex situation and an established consensual goal, into a path that only can be accomplished when being pursued.

HATE SPEECH IN SOUTH ASIA

BY MD MOHEUDDIN (PEN BANGLADESH)

In most of the South Asian countries, hate speech is increasingly used by majority groups against minorities on the basis of religion, ethnicity or linguistic difference and it has long been used as a weapon to continue the oppression and subordination of groups who have been discriminated against politically, socially and economically. It's interesting and also alarming that the practice of hate speech is increasing within the same race, religion, national origin because of the different ideology, believe and thinking.

Hate speech not only targets a group or individual's psychological and emotional state, but also their personal freedom, dignity, and personhood. In South Asia minorities are easy targets of hate speech—both online and offline—spreading of misinformation against them and inciting violence against them have become even more commonplace, simpler and anonymous with the advent of social media.

Muslims as well as Hindus in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and some other countries of South Asia are divided into many groups with their different ideas, believes and superstitions inherited and inherent to them. Though they belong to the same religion, each group hate another, spread propaganda, agitate and mayhem among them. Almost same cases we see among the Hindu groups and the indigenous people have their own believes and traditions, and they usually do not go for extreme hatred.

In Pakistan, online hate speech has also been flourishing. Here Hindus, who form just 1.9 percent of the country's population, and Muslim sects like the Shias and Ahmadis, have borne the brunt of the extremist and inflammatory content on social media. In India, hate speech has become more and more communal in nature- directed at Pakistan, Indian Muslims and their Kashmiri counterparts. Meanwhile, in Pakistan, hate speech is largely a sectarian phenomenon that has targeted Muslim sects like the Shias and Ahmadis.

Hate videos often go quickly viral across South Asia, garnering thousands of views before they are identified and removed by social media giants like Google and Meta. Social media has supercharged the proliferation of hate speech across South Asia, with

hundreds of videos seeking to promote hate for minorities uploaded to YouTube and Facebook in various languages every day.

Hate speech is also being used within political parties in South Asian countries, by different political parties using very strong and anti-Semitic language against their rivals. Parties in government act as though they have absolute power use hate speech to defy the oppositions.



Image by Gerd Altmann from Pixabay

The common denominator driving hate speeches in the region currently is the ubiquitous online platforms, primarily social media. We introduce laws framed to restrict press freedom and freedom of speech in the guise of protecting citizens against hate speech and violence. But governments and political parties use press as a weapon to attack the opposition in various ways.

This world is a global village where we, every religion, cast, nation, will have to be even more to learn to establish a democratic society that accommodates different ideologies peacefully.

GUATEMALA CONTINUES TO YEARN FOR A FIRM AND LASTING PEACE

BY DENNIS ESCOBAR GALICIA (PEN GUATEMALA)

On January 14 of this year – at last! – Bernardo Arévalo assumed the presidency of Guatemala. It was a tortuous six months in which the anti-democratic forces appropriating the Guatemalan State, used intimidation and legal resources to perpetuate themselves in power and prevent the most voted candidate from being sworn in as Constitutional President of the Republic.

The so-called Pact of the Corrupt, made up of ultra-conservative parties financed by the rancid economic oligarchy and criminal groups supported by drug trafficking, never imagined that a recently formed political party – called Semilla (Seed) –, founded by young intellectuals -men and women- and presided by the son of the president (Juan José Arévalo) who in 1944 led the first period of what is known as the Democratic Spring, would triumph in the elections. In the plans of the corrupt despots, other parties should have won to continue consolidating the status quo.



Image by David Peterson from Pixabay

The Guatemalan people, fed up with so much corruption and demagoguery, led by the native peoples and the progressive mestizo population, closed ranks, and resolutely opposed the actions of the government in power and its allies, to prevent the constitutional order from being broken – even with the sound of boots and shrapnel – thus avoiding the return to the past of the peace of the cemetery. To this the solidarity of most of the democratic countries of the world was added. They demanded that organizations such as the Organization of American States (OAS) and the UN pronounce themselves in favor of democracy in Guatemala.

The Guatemalan population still has open wounds from the 35-year civil war, which left approximately 200,000 dead and disappeared, and which ended on 29 January 1996 with the signing of the Acuerdo de Paz Firme y Duradera (Firm and Lasting Peace Agreement) between Guatemala's government and the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG), the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union. However, none of the following governments complied with the agreement and instead turned politics into a means of illicit enrichment.

The arrival of Bernardo Arévalo to the presidency and Karen Herrera to the vice presidency, thanks to the defense of democracy by the native peoples, will allow the Guatemalan population to return to the path of building a firm and lasting peace, bearing in mind that "development is the new name for peace", according to the words of Paul VI, the Pope of peace. The road will be winding, because those who did not want to let go of power will be lying in wait and doing anything to hinder the good intentions of the current government. The Guatemalan people and all its civil society organizations, presided over by the native peoples, will have to be very mature and intelligent and not let themselves be carried away by emotions.

The seed is planted in fertile soil, but it must be watered, fertilized and not trampled, so that brambles do not emerge. From that well germinated seed, a Guatemala with PEACE must sprout.

INGREDIENTS FOR LIVING IN PEACE

BY BIYÚ SUÁREZ CÉSPEDES (PEN BOLIVIA)

Today I need to write about PEACE, in capital letters because I need to express from the depths of my being the obligation that I have as a person to spread, to proclaim this concept. I do this by addressing parents and teachers first. Without the latter as channelers and catalysts of peace, a good result cannot be achieved. Home and school united in a crusade for peace.

The family has a great influence on the development and growth of children, and this is reflected in the behavior of the students. A child who receives training in an environment of respect and peace is more likely to have better behavior at school.

And teachers must have the indispensable materials for their students to respond positively. Working with social justice, dialogue, inclusion, acceptance, but above all, and to avoid "bullying", a good teacher must promote critical thinking as the tool to resolve conflicts and achieve peace in the classroom and therefore in their personal and general environment.

But I cannot talk about peace if I do not have it personally, if I do not distinguish what it is. If I have personal peace, it will be easier to bring this value to others. By freeing myself from fear, from stress, from suffering that is not worth it, it allows me to be aware of how wonderful life is, to be myself, to feel connected with the universe and with my own. Only in this way can we build a family, a secure society that appreciates itself and develops to its full potential.

The principles and values that foster a culture of peace in the different areas where we live together are freedom, justice, tolerance, equality, solidarity, equity, democracy, and respect for human rights.

Peace is not the absence of conflict; living and coexisting in peace means having the ability to accept differences, to tolerate and respect others to achieve unity in the family and in society as a result.

That is why I propose to cook this recipe in which the following ingredients cannot be missing:

In a large mold put two kilos of caresses combined with a lot of sweetness, love, and kisses. Mix them with an equal amount of understanding, smiles and three spoons of forgiveness, sift them with a good amount of patience and solidarity, put them in a hot oven and watch them bake.

Unmold carefully and sprinkle with hope for a better world. Decorate with cherries of good humor. Add empathy to the decoration and share in big plates with friendship and illusion.



Image by Sarita Tamayo Martínez from Pixabay

Pablo Neruda - Peace for the twilights to come

Peace for the twilights to come,
peace for the bridge, peace for the wine,
peace for the stanzas which pursue me
and in my blood uprise entangling
my earlier songs with earth and loves,

peace for the city in the morning
when bread wakes up, peace for the Mississippi,
source of rivers,
peace for my brother's shirt,
peace for books like a seal of air,
peace for the great kolkhoz of Kiev,
peace for the ashes of those dead
and of these other dead, peace for the grimy
iron of Brooklyn, peace for the letter-carrier
who from house to house goes like the day,

peace for the choreographer who shouts
through a funnel to the honeysuckle vine,
peace for my own right hand
that wants to write only Rosario,
peace for the Bolivian, secretive
as a lump of tin, peace
so that you may marry, peace for all
the saw-mills of Bio-Bio,
peace for the torn heart
of guerilla Spain,
peace for the little museum in Wyoming
where the most lovely thing
is a pillow embroidered with a heart,
peace for the baker and his loaves,
and peace for the flour, peace
for all the wheat to be born,
for all the love which will seek its tasseled shelter,
peace for all those alive: peace
for all lands and all waters.

Here I say farewell, I return
to my house, in my dreams
I return to Patagonia where

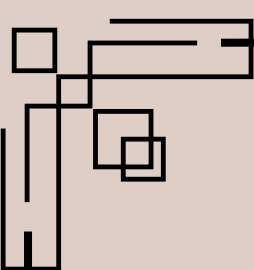
the wind rattles the barns
and the ocean spatters ice.

I am nothing more than a poet: I love all of you,
I wander about the world I love;
in my country they gaol miners
and soldiers give orders to judges.
But I love even the roots
in my small cold country,
if I had to die a thousand times over
it is there I would die,
if I had to be born a thousand times over
it is there I would be born
near the tall wild pines
the tempestuous south wind
the newly purchased bells.

Let none think of me.
Let us think of the entire earth
and pound the table with love.
I don't want blood again
to saturate bread, beans, music:
I wish they would come with me:
the miner, the little girl,
the lawyer, the seaman,
the doll-maker,
to go into a movie and come out
to drink the reddest wine.
I did not come to solve anything.

I came here to sing
and for you to sing with me.

IX. Let the railsplitter awake (VI). Canto General. 1950.



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