

WRITERS FOR PEACE COMMITTEE

WRITING FOR PEACE



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PEN International Writers for Peace Committee
 Comité des écrivains et écrivaines pour la paix de PEN International
 Comité de Escritores y Escritoras por la Paz de PEN internacional
 Odbor pisateljev in pisateljic za mir

WRITING IN A WORLD AT WAR

BY GERMÁN ROJAS (WFPC CHAIR, PEN CHILE)

We arrived in Oxford on a rainy day. Autumn had already begun in Europe, just as spring was blooming in the south of the world. The beauty of the day was that we met with so many friends from all over the world, whom we had been lucky enough to meet at previous Congresses of PEN International. And, through them, we were also gradually weaving networks with delegates who were coming for the first time to these annual meetings convened by the Secretariat of PEN International with headquarters in London.

This 90th Congress of PEN International, whose theme was 'Writers in a World at War', took place from 24-27 September, and was attended by 232 people, both in person and online. 181 were delegates from 94 Centres and the others were staff members and managers of PEN International, invited guests and representatives of friendly NGOs. The four days of in-depth and far-sighted discussions covered the history of PEN, the role of literature in the context of the current global crises, and the importance of our mission of solidarity and unrestricted defence of human rights.

Palestinian writer Adania Shibli, the same writer who had been cancelled from the 2023 Frankfurt Book Fair, opened the Congress with a moving speech in which she intertwined personal accounts with broader reflections on silence, language and the effects of colonialism on the identity of the Palestinian people. Welcoming remarks were made by Burhan Sönmez, President of PEN International, Margaret Busby President of English PEN and Anthony Brewerton of the beautiful Bodleian Libraries, where the opening ceremony took place.

At the Pre-Congress meeting of the Writers for Peace Committee, the main topic of discussion was the text of a resolution -prepared by PEN International- on "Freedom of Expression in Palestine and Israel", which was then submitted to the Congress and approved by a large majority. At the Peace Committee prevailed dialogue, the open exchange of ideas, however conflicting they might be, and the search for understanding between the participating delegates.

A second resolution entitled 'Protection Mechanisms for Writers at Risk', which had been prepared in the framework of the work of the Steering Committee of the

Writers in Prison Committee, was also adopted almost unanimously by the Congress. In relation to this Committee, it is very important to underline that its Chairperson -Ma Thida of PEN Myanmar- was re-elected for a second 3-year term. She will continue to lead the preparation of the updated version of the Writers at Risk Protection Manual and the Case List 2024 to be published in March 2025.

In these resolutions, PEN International called on governments, and on international and civil society organisations to take appropriate action to protect imprisoned or at risk writers to realise freedom of expression in Palestine and Israel, to bring about an immediate and permanent ceasefire and an end to indiscriminate attacks on civilians. The Assembly of Delegates called for swift and coordinated action by all sectors - governments, civil society and cultural institutions - to safeguard and defend justice, equity and the human rights of writers in Palestine, Israel and other territories where peace is brutally threatened.

Meanwhile in Oxford the rain continued to fall.

One of the most important outcomes of the Congress was the establishment of a 5th permanent committee of PEN International: the Young Writers' Committee. No votes were recorded against this initiative. Ege Dündar, a member of the Board of PEN International, has long been the driving force behind this initiative and will initially be in charge of giving structure and content to this Committee. As Chair of the Writers for Peace Committee, I expressed our full support and interest in developing joint activities in the future. It is important to encourage all Centres of PEN International to form Young Writers' Committees at a local level.

And on the subject of working together with other Committees of PEN International, it was wonderful to see that we elected Judyth Hill -from PEN San Miguel- as the new Chair of the Women Writers Committee of PEN International. We will undoubtedly be doing a lot of joint work over the next three years between the two Committees (Peace and Women) because we know that in times of war it is women who suffer most during armed conflict or repression by autocratic governments.

In the comfort of the hotel where the meeting was held, we continued to protect ourselves from the rain that was falling from the sky with the persistence of the sea.

One of the most beautiful things that happened at the Peace Committee meeting was the appointment of our Slovenian friend, Boris A. Novak, as President Emeritus of our Committee, which he chaired between 1991 and 1999. And the other very important news for us is that the Congress elected Kim Echlin - from PEN Canada and a member of our Advisory Committee - as member of the Board of PEN International with the highest individual vote.

The final key moments included the re-election for another 3 years of Burhan Sönmez as President of PEN International, which will continue the reforms promoted in his first term; the election of Arne Svingen -from PEN Norway- as the new International Secretary, to replace our highly esteemed Tanja Tuma; and Carles Torner - from PEN Català- as Vice-President. For its part, PEN

Dominican Republic was officially recognised as a new PEN Centre. Throughout the Congress there were many highly interesting round tables with excellent panellists. Unfortunately for reasons of space I will not be able to refer to them.

And just when we thought that it had been raining in Oxford since the 16th century, as García Márquez would have said, at the end of the Congress we were able to walk through its beautiful streets invaded by sunshine, flowers and objects that reminded us that Harry Potter and all his legends lived there. Looking at all this beauty, we thanked the Secretariat of PEN International and our friends from English PEN for organising such a magnificent Congress.



BOOKS ARE THE ESSENCE OF HUMANITY

BY TANJA TUMA (PEN SLOVENIA)

(Speech by Tanja Tuma, International Secretary ad interim, delivered at the Inaugural Ceremony of the 90th Congress of PEN International).

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Adania Shibli, thank you for your powerful keynote speech. It is a great honour to conclude the opening ceremony of the 90th Congress of PEN International, one of the noblest movements ever to exist. The greatness of PEN does not derive from personal glory or material gain; we fight for ideas and for our fellow writers at risk across the globe.

Before I embark on the pleasant task of thanking the important individuals and organisations who made this event and the Congress possible, allow me to share a few thoughts with you.

All of our work is only possible because of the kind support of individuals and foundations. Tonight, we were delighted to be able to offer you this evening for free, but please, please, we need your support. There are many ways to do so. You can join the network Friends of PEN, please, note the postcard on your seats. Tonight, you can also buy our book PEN International Illustrated History depicting 100 years of PEN, available in the lobby.

Books are the essence of humanity. In 1602, the Bodleian Library housed 2,000 volumes. By 1914, the number had grown to one million. A decade ago, there were 12 million. Today, the online cloud storage of human art and science is as vast as the universe. In 1605, Sir Francis Bacon recognized the importance of preserving books in places accessible to researchers and readers. He donated his famous book *The Advancement of Learning* to the newly founded Bodleian Library. At the dawn of the scientific age, no one contested his maxim: "Knowledge is power." Bacon's belief in humanity's capacity for systematic observation and reason, leading to scientific discovery, paved the way for progress throughout history.

Yet today, we worry that algorithms, often generously termed "artificial intelligence," may take control of our jobs, lives, emotions, and even our words.

How can writers survive in a world without words?

Whenever we doubt our lives, loves, fears, and hopes, we turn to words. But in times of war, words are crippled, free expression stifled, and lives taken from people. The atrocities that devastate humanity in over fifty conflicts and wars around the globe seem impossible to convey in writing.

Yet, writers always find a way – through poetry, essays, or novels – we pick up the pen and describe life, defy propaganda and distorted realities. Bacon's essay on truth begins with the sentence: "What is truth?" said jesting Pilate; and would not stay for an answer."

Well, Ladies and Gentlemen, delegates of PEN centres around the world, let me tell you what you already know:

WE WILL STAY FOR THE ANSWER!

On behalf of PEN International, we thank you for supporting the 90th Congress under the theme: *Writers in a World at War*.

Special thanks to the Bodleian Library for hosting us this evening, to English PEN and to our sponsors the Hawthornden Foundation and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency for their unwavering support.

Thank you!

40 YEARS OF THE WRITERS FOR PEACE COMMITTEE – A TRIBUTE TO BORIS A. NOVAK

BY GERMÁN ROJAS (WFPC CHAIR, PEN CHILE)

At the recent meeting of the Writers' Committee of PEN International there was a very moving moment at which the 40th anniversary of the Committee was remembered, and a well-deserved tribute was paid to Boris A. Novak, who led our Committee from 1991 to 1999.

On that occasion, I recalled that the Committee has been concerned since its inception in establishing bridges between writers and cultures. It was founded at the PEN Congress in Tokyo in 1984, when the world was separated into two irreconcilable political blocks, separated by that imaginary line we called 'the iron curtain', dividing the socialist countries led by the Soviet Union, from the countries that recognised themselves in the capitalist system and had the United States as their point of reference.

In 1965, The Slovenian town of Bled hosted the 33rd Congress of PEN International. That Congress not only elected Arthur Miller as new President, but it also made possible to start the wonderful practice of meetings in Bled from 1968 to the present day.



Foto: Tihomir Pinter

And the bridges that were opened since that moment continued until 1989 when the Berlin Wall fell. This was a political event of unparalleled importance that opened up so much hope for lasting peace throughout the world. The aim was no longer just to unite East and West, but to achieve universal unity among writers.

Life showed us that not everything was rosy. Soon after, the Yugoslavian war broke out when Slobodan Milosevic's Yugoslav army attacked Slovenia, Croatia, Kosovo and Bosnia & Herzegovina. This terrible and unjustifiable war gave new impetus to the Writers for Peace Committee. It organized humanitarian help for refugees from the former Yugoslavia and writers from the besieged city of Sarajevo, in Bosnia.

We cannot forget that in 1993, PEN held its International Congress in Dubrovnik, Croatia, and many PEN Centres were present there, despite the great risks involved, expressing their solidarity with writers and communities affected by the war, while at the same time condemning Slobodan Milosevic's regime.

The year 2000 saw another important milestone in the life of the Committee: The Congress of PEN International was held in Moscow with the aim of celebrating Russia's return to democracy, but everything changed because of the Russian army's attack on Chechnya which had taken place 6 months before the Congress. All resolutions approved were attributed to PEN Moscow so that PEN International would not be accused by Russian authorities of foreign interference. This conflict changed the nature of the Congress as PEN unambiguously rejected the attack and bravely defended peace and the right to freedom of expression.

The Committee has always stood firmly in the struggle for the defence of the values of Peace and Freedom of Expression, which has manifested itself in many ways: support for the struggle of Kurdish PEN; defence of Ukraine in the last 10 years; support for Sierra Leone in 2005; backing for Afghanistan, always denouncing discriminatory policies against Afghan women; support for the peace process in Mali; the fight against the extraditions of Edward Snowden and Julian Assange;

condemnation of the attack on Salman Rushdie; support for the struggle of the Iranian people against the ruling theocracy; the denunciation of the atrocities suffered by the inhabitants of the Nagorno-Karabakh region; the denunciation of the repression in Kazakhstan; the demands for peace in the northern region of Ethiopia; the unwavering support for the heroic struggle of the Palestinian people for their survival; the constant support for the defence of freedom of expression in Myanmar and other Asian countries; the tireless efforts to always seek peace and dialogue between the Balkan countries; the total support given to the fight of the people of Cuba and Nicaragua and, obviously, the crucial role played by the Committee in drafting the Bled Manifesto, which was approved in the Congress held in Reykjavik, Iceland, in 2013. This is a long list, but it falls far short of all what our Committee has done.

Coming back to the Yugoslav wars, we cannot forget that under the able and efficient leadership of Boris A. Novak, PEN International played a major role in building a heroic support network, first helping writers in refugee camps, and then extending the help of the international community to writers and journalists under siege in Sarajevo.

It is for this reason that on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of our committee, we honoured Boris A. Novak by awarding him the title of “President Emeritus” of the Writers for Peace Committee. He has an impressive CV: Slovenian poet, playwright, essayist, and translator, a Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Ljubljana, and Vice-President of PEN International since 2002. He has published 100 books and has been translated in 30 foreign languages. Boris has received several national and international awards. He is an associate member of the Slovene, Croatian, and Bosnia & Herzegovina Academies of Science and Arts, and of the French poetry academy Mallarmé. But most important of all he is a deeply humanitarian person who has dedicated his life not only to literature, but also to saving human lives.

This recognition is not only a tribute to Boris for all that he has done, but also a thank you to him as PEN International is truly honoured to count him among its members.

RESOLUTION ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN PALESTINE AND ISRAEL

At its 90th Congress held in Oxford from 24th to 27th September 2024, the Assembly of Delegates of PEN International adopted a resolution condemning the grave violations of freedom of expression in Palestine and Israel following the events of 7th October 2023. The Assembly of Delegates calls for urgent and coordinated action from all sectors—governments, civil society, and cultural institutions—to uphold the values of justice, equity, and human rights for writers in Palestine and Israel, and everywhere.

Resolution on freedom of expression in Palestine and Israel

Resolution on freedom of expression in Palestine and Israel addresses the catastrophic violations of freedom of expression in Palestine and Israel since 7th October 2023 attacks and throughout the ongoing Israeli war on

Gaza, in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and in Israel. PEN International condemns the alarming increase in targeted killings, arbitrary detentions, and restrictions on access to information, with Israeli authorities largely responsible for these violations.

The toll on writers, journalists, and cultural workers is unprecedented, with reports indicating at least 45 artists and cultural activists killed between October 2023 and February 2024. PEN International has documented the cases of at least 14 writers and poets killed in Gaza between October and December 2023 as a result of Israeli bombardment, marking this the deadliest period for writers in recent history. Furthermore, the ongoing violence has created a perilous environment where journalists are increasingly targeted, leading to a record number of casualties among media professionals.

The ongoing Israeli bombardment and destruction of infrastructure in Gaza have resulted in severe limitations on access to information, leaving many unable to communicate or share their experiences with the outside world. Social media platforms have curtailed content advocating for Palestine and Palestinian human rights, sharply reducing the visibility of individuals sharing such messages. Access to Gaza for international journalists is prohibited unless they are embedded with Israeli military forces, and even in these cases, their ability to report is heavily restricted. Within Israel, the government has also ramped up its suppression of media organisations. These measures foster a hostile climate for journalists, making independent and objective reporting increasingly difficult.

Additionally, the systematic destruction of cultural heritage poses an existential threat to the identity and future of Palestinian culture. The bombardment has led to significant damage to cultural institutions, libraries, and historical sites, undermining the ability of future generations to access and engage with their cultural heritage.



In response to these urgent concerns, the Assembly of Delegates calls for all parties to the conflict to uphold an immediate and permanent ceasefire, cease indiscriminate attacks against civilians, and ensure the safety of writers and journalists. Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups must release all Israeli hostages and protect their rights. The Israeli government must halt its bombardment of Gaza, withdraw forces, and release all arbitrarily detained Palestinians while safeguarding their rights and access to necessary resources.

PEN International considers these violations to be a grave breach of international law and calls for a thorough investigation by the International Criminal Court. The international community must play a pivotal role in advocating for independent investigations into the killings of writers and journalists and work towards ending the Israeli occupation of Palestine in accordance with international law.

Statement on the situation in Lebanon

At the closure of the 90th Congress of PEN International the following statement was approved as a complement to the resolution on “Freedom of expression in Palestine and Israel”.

“PEN International is horrified by the escalation of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah and the growing numbers of casualties, the vast majority of whom have been killed and injured in Lebanon as a result of Israeli authorities’ bombardment and indiscriminate attacks. PEN calls for an immediate end of all hostilities, and call on the Israeli military, Hezbollah and all parties to the conflict to engage in an immediate ceasefire, to protect writers, civilians, and all those at risk.”

HOW CAN THE MIDDLE EAST BREAK THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE?

BY DANIEL GALAY

We, Palestinians and Israelis, Arabs and Jews, must talk more and more about all the advantages of peace over all the death and destruction that war means for both of our peoples.

We must talk peace within our own communities and, of course, for the people in the region too.

To be passive, not to work towards peace and avoid war at all costs, is itself the crime of the silent bystander.

To talk about peace means, among other things, to talk about our identities. After all, one of the main things that Israelis and Palestinians are fighting over is a story of the self and the collective—who we are, what languages we speak and where we belong. Within Israel, political choices are often made, not based on the real Palestinians, but about internal questions in Israeli society, that affect Palestinians too. The subject of identity is, apparently, not "sexy", not attractive and powerful enough.

Identity is also a dynamic concept intrinsically connected to history and memory. And some people find it hard to talk about history with so much going on in the present...

But we must engage in a humane and creative discussion of identity in order to reduce fear and demonization on both sides. To create Peace, we must know ourselves and we must know our neighbors. The subject of Identity sounds too abstract and evasive. But this is not the case. Identity is language, community, history and hope for the future.

If we do not understand who our neighbors want to be, how they want to see themselves, how can we envision what peace can be?

We have to know what we are working for, not just what we are working against.

Politicians talk all the time about power and more power. This attitude shows how much they ignore the soul of their own people. There is so much positive power in human feelings, compassion and solidarity—which politicians ignore and exclude from the public

stage. Therefore, we have no other choice but to apply great pressure until politicians change their minds, or we will replace them for other, better politicians.

I condemn Hamas for provoking the 7th of October war with their barbaric pogrom against Israeli civilians.

I condemn Hamas for taking innocent hostages.

I criticize sharply the Israeli government for not struggling on behalf of a two-states solution, for allowing its own people to remain in hostage with Hamas for months, and allowing innocent Palestinian to go hungry, to die, instead of seeking resolution.

I criticize sharply the Israeli government, including the opposition, for ignoring the subjects of identity and culture, which are vital for achieving peace in the Middle East.

Daniel Galay was born in Buenos Aires, in 1945. At an early age he started writing poetry and short stories in Yiddish and Spanish. He lives in Israel and writes poetry, playwrights, and texts for music-theater in Hebrew and Yiddish, and libretti for operas.

VIOLATIONS OF CULTURAL AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN BELARUS: A 2024 UPDATE

BY TACIANA NIADBAJ (PEN BELARUS)

In Belarus, the cultural and human rights situation continues to deteriorate as the government intensifies its crackdown on artistic expression and political dissent. According to a recent report from PEN Belarus, between January and September 2024, there were 960 documented violations affecting cultural workers in the country. These violations are part of a broader pattern of repression that targets writers, artists, musicians, and other cultural figures, especially those who publicly oppose the regime or express dissent through their work.

Since the mass protests of 2020, Belarus has witnessed a harsh clampdown on freedom of expression. As of September 2024, there are 1,317 political prisoners in the country, at least 101 of whom are cultural figures. Among those imprisoned are well-known activists and cultural workers like writer and musician Maryja Kalesnikava, lawyer Maksim Znak, and former presidential candidate Viktor Babaryka, who remain detained under harsh conditions. These individuals are not only symbols of the political opposition but also represent the broader struggle for cultural freedom in a state where artistic expression is increasingly seen as a threat.

The repressive measures extend beyond imprisonment. Cultural workers are often subjected to arbitrary detention, criminal prosecution, and ongoing surveillance. In many cases, these charges are framed as "extremist activities" or attempts to undermine the state's authority. This legal ambiguity has led to the persecution of artists both inside Belarus and abroad, where many have sought refuge after fleeing the country. The growing trend of "in absentia" convictions highlights the regime's determination to silence voices of dissent, even outside its borders.

Censorship remains a significant tool of control, with at least 67 instances of cultural censorship recorded in the first nine months of 2024. This includes the cancellation of cultural events, the forced alteration of artistic works, and restrictions on exhibitions and performances. Artists and performers are pressured to comply with state-approved narratives or risk losing their jobs or facing legal action. For example, theatre directors like Tacciana

Čajeŭskaja, Siarhieĭ Pukita, Dzmitry Harelik, and Sviatlana Karukina have been dismissed from their positions due to their political views, demonstrating how far the government is willing to go to enforce ideological conformity.

However, one of the most pressing cultural issues in Belarus today is the ongoing process of russification – a concerted effort to impose the ideology of the "Russian world" within Belarusian borders. This phenomenon is not merely the replacement of Belarusian language and culture with Russian, but the active destruction of Belarusian cultural identity. In recent years, the government has been promoting the integration of Belarus into the Russian cultural and political sphere, erasing the significance of the Belarusian language, traditions, and history.



This process of russification is driven by the Belarusian authorities' support for the Russian government's aggressive geopolitical objectives. As part of this broader agenda, there is a systematic attempt to undermine Belarus's cultural sovereignty. Rather than celebrating Belarus's unique historical and cultural heritage, the state prioritizes the propagation of Russian cultural narratives. These efforts are justified through a propaganda campaign that intertwines culture with political power, using the Russian language and its associated narratives as a means to legitimize the ongoing war in Ukraine, disseminate disinformation, and promote the idea that Belarus has no cultural subjectivity of its own.

This campaign goes beyond the superficial promotion of the Russian language. The Belarusian government has taken steps to actively suppress expressions of Belarusian identity and to marginalize Belarusian

language and culture. Educational institutions, cultural centers, and even the arts are being restructured to remove any trace of Belarusian identity in favor of Russian influences. This leads to a generation of young Belarusians who are less familiar with their own history, culture, and language, and who are increasingly taught to view themselves as part of a greater Russian identity rather than as members of a unique Belarusian cultural tradition.

If this process of russification is not stopped, Belarus risks losing its cultural identity altogether. More importantly, Europe could soon find itself no longer bordered by Belarus—a country historically aligned with European culture and values—but by a province of Russia. The efforts to erase Belarus's cultural subjectivity and replace it with Russian narratives threaten to turn the country into a satellite of Russian influence, severing ties with its European heritage.

The ongoing russification is not merely a cultural threat, but a direct assault on Belarusian sovereignty. The regime's endorsement of this process presents a fundamental challenge to the preservation of the nation's cultural independence. Belarusian artists, writers, and intellectuals who resist this cultural erasure are often persecuted, censored, or forced into exile. Those who dare to preserve and promote Belarusian cultural traditions face severe consequences, including imprisonment, loss of professional opportunities, or threats to their families.

In addition to the repression of Belarusian culture, the government's policies also involve the widespread use of Russian cultural and media outlets to influence the public's perception of both Belarusian and Russian identity. Belarusian media is often forced to align with Russian narratives, and independent voices are silenced under the guise of national security. The country's cultural institutions, which should be centers of artistic expression and intellectual freedom, are instead co-opted into promoting state propaganda.

The persecution of cultural figures in Belarus is a clear violation of both cultural and human rights. These actions not only affect the individuals directly targeted but also have a chilling effect on the broader cultural landscape of the country. With artists silenced or forced into exile, Belarus risks losing its rich tradition of creative expression and intellectual discourse, the state-imposed cultural monopoly diminishes the potential

for future artistic and intellectual growth, leaving the nation vulnerable to further cultural homogenization under external influences.

International solidarity is essential in these difficult times. The global community must continue to raise awareness of the situation in Belarus and support the cultural workers who are being persecuted for their work. Advocacy for the release of political prisoners and the protection of cultural freedoms remains a critical part of the fight for human rights in Belarus. In the face of this ongoing repression, the courage and resilience of Belarusian artists continue to inspire those who stand for freedom of expression and human dignity.

For more detailed information on the situation of human rights and cultural rights in Belarus, you can read the full report here: [PEN Belarus Monitoring Report \(Jan-Sept 2024\)](#).



PEN Belarus continues its work outside Belarus, while many members of the organization and other writers remain within the country. We provide assistance to repressed writers and their families. If you believe in the importance of our work, please consider supporting PEN Belarus with a subscription on Patreon: [Support PEN Belarus on Patreon](#).



NICARAGUA: GIOCONDA BELLI ADDRESSES HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL ON BEHALF OF PEN INTERNATIONAL

BY GIOCONDA BELLI (PEN NICARAGUA)

During the 57th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (9 September to 11 October 2024), Gioconda Belli, prominent Nicaraguan writer and President of PEN Nicaragua, voiced concerns about the escalating repression of civil liberties, including freedom of expression, by the Nicaraguan authorities.

Speaking on behalf of PEN International during the Interactive Dialogue session on 10 September, Gioconda Belli, now living in forced exile, highlighted the persecution of cultural organisations, the forced displacement of journalists, and the closure of media outlets and civil society groups, including PEN Nicaragua, which was shut down by the authorities on February 2021.

A full transcript of her oral statement is available below:

Thank you, Mr. President.

On behalf of PEN International and sister organisations, I welcome the High Commissioner's report on human rights in Nicaragua. I am Gioconda Belli, a Nicaraguan writer stripped of my nationality for exercising my freedom of expression.

Among the 5,600 organisations that have been cancelled by the government of my country since 2018 is PEN Nicaragua, of which I was President. For fourteen years we fought for freedom of expression and the promotion of culture. What happens to a people denied speech and information? Fifty-six media outlets closed, 277 journalists in exile, church pulpits emptied of critical priests, cultural institutions such as the Granada Poetry Festival, the Nicaraguan Language Academy, and Books for Children, have been cancelled, as well as private universities, and more than 9,000 religious processions.

The actions and speeches of the regime reveal a systematic work to impose a distorted narrative of history and a culture of cancellation of our values and traditions.

They impose silence on the citizens in an attempt to distort reality and elaborate a creed that is harmful to the new generations. The soul of the Nicaraguan people is at stake.

We urge the Member States of the United Nations to continue to denounce and demand an end to the harassment of critical voices in Nicaragua.

Thank you.



THE PLANET AND THE PEN

BY MIQUEL ÀNGEL LLAUGER (PEN CATALÀ)

A few weeks ago, the WWF (World Wildlife Fund) released a report with shocking figures on the global state of biodiversity. A count of more than 5,000 species of mammals, birds, fish, reptiles, and amphibians showed that wild animal populations have been reduced by 73% in the last fifty years. Climate data released around the same time by organizations such as Copernicus (the European Union's meteorological service) indicated that global temperatures were now above the "safety limit" of a 1.5°C increase over pre-industrial times. Jean Skea, chairman of the IPCC (the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), warned that we have already missed the opportunity to keep the global temperature below the 1.5°C increase, that titanic efforts will be needed to keep it below 2°C and that we are heading towards 3°C and beyond.

The collapse of biodiversity and climate are not unrelated phenomena. They are part of a systemic crisis in which other safety frontiers are being crossed: atmospheric pollution, the water cycle, the loss of fertile soil, and so on. Our chances of preserving a safe and habitable planet for all are diminishing as each day passes, without a radical change of course. We sometimes speak of an existential threat. This is an accurate expression, since what we are facing is a threat to life as we have known it up to now.

None of this happens, of course, without profound social implications. One of the most distinctive aspects of the climate crisis is undoubtedly inequality: inequality in consequences and inequality in responsibility. The most vulnerable populations suffer, and will suffer more in the future. This is the suffering of a planet in disarray. The greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming, distributed in an obscenely unequal manner, have much to do with the economic dynamics of the profits of large companies, at the forefront of which are those engaged in the fossil fuels business.

It is urgent to ask ourselves what the role of writers (authors, translators, journalists, editors) should be in this scenario. For more than a century, PEN has represented writers who have wanted to give voice to the desire for freedom and justice. PEN was born under the banner of freedom of expression and understanding between peoples. Throughout this century of existence,

it has embraced causes that embody aspirations for a better world: anti-colonialism, anti-racism, feminism, linguistic rights, sexual diversity, indigenous communities. The imperative of the moment is to incorporate the environmental threat into the core of our concerns. It is not just another issue: it is an issue that is linked to all the others and that we must place at the heart of our action.

Many aspects of the climate issue intersect with our work as writers and with PEN's historical mission. For example, threats to freedom of expression are linked to environmental activism. The fight against disinformation and lies is hindered by economic interests and authoritarian movements, and by minimizing the impact of environmental activism. All this deserves an effort of reflection and information dissemination.

But there is something else, perhaps more essential. We writers must recognize that we are indebted to the natural world. For centuries, nature has been a source of inspiration for poets and storytellers. It has provided us with balance and given us hundreds of elements with which our literary texts interrogate the world and populate themselves with metaphors. It is painful to imagine the task of a writer on a fatally impoverished planet. We do not want the literature of the future to deal only with artificialized worlds, or to be an endless elegy to a vanished universe. Let us preserve life. Let us preserve the conditions in which literature is possible, and everything that nourishes so many pages that we love.

THE RIGHT TO WRITE: PEN SIERRA LEONE'S PURSUIT OF PEACE AND EXPRESSION IN AFRICA

BY OUMAR FAROUK SESAY (PEN SIERRA LEONE)

Inspired by a recent Zoom meeting of PEN International's Writers for Peace Committee (WFPC) with African PEN Centres, where members pledged to deepen commitments to freedom of expression and lasting peace, PEN Sierra Leone is leading efforts to champion these essential pillars of Africa's young democracies. Across the continent, political structures remain fragile, and open dialogue is often constrained, highlighting the need for unwavering advocacy. With a longstanding commitment to defending the rights of writers, journalists, and citizens to share ideas without fear, PEN International continues to be a powerful force for change.

The March 16 meeting amplified WFPC initiatives, highlighting African issues on the world stage. Participants recognized that Africa's democratic aspirations are inseparable from its people's right to speak, write, and advocate for peace. A vital part of the initiatives discussed was establishing focal points within each PEN centre to lead efforts in peace-building and the advancement of free expression. To sustain this momentum, centres were encouraged to hold regular meetings, facilitate ongoing information-sharing, and cultivate a unified regional voice for freedom of expression.

Collective action was another central focus, with PEN centres urged to respond promptly to conflicts and critical events across Africa. Coordinated by the Head of the Africa Region, these initiatives would ensure that the voices of peace advocates resonate across the continent. Members were also invited to contribute to the WFPC's quarterly newsletter and anthologies, including the thematic collection, *The Right to Write*, addressing pressing African issues. Accountability emerged as a guiding principle, with local Writers for Peace Committees encouraged to regularly report their activities to foster collaboration and strengthen regional support.

PEN Sierra Leone has long been a proactive advocate for freedom of expression. In 2016, it joined a continent-wide campaign against criminal defamation laws, working with PEN International and other African PEN

centres to produce the influential report, "Stifling Dissent, Impeding Accountability: Criminal Defamation Laws in Africa". This report was critical in the 2020 repeal of Part V of Sierra Leone's 1965 Public Order Act, a landmark victory for free speech. However, new restrictive cyber laws have emerged, threatening these gains; recent arrests over alleged cyberbullying highlight the persistence of repressive tactics and underscore the need for continued advocacy.

PEN Sierra Leone now seeks to deepen its engagement with the WFPC, understanding that defending freedom of expression is indispensable to democratic progress. To advance this mission, PEN Sierra Leone plans to strengthen alliances with local media and other stakeholders, nurturing a culture of peace and fostering informed public discourse. The organization is developing strategic plans that address the unique needs of fledgling democracies and emphasizes the vital role of media partnerships in amplifying messages of peace and freedom.



To achieve these ambitious goals, PEN Sierra Leone is forming key committees, including a Mano River Union Writers for Peace Committee and a Women Writers' Committee, to address specific challenges facing Sierra Leone and neighboring countries. Plans are underway to host annual writers' conferences and literary festivals, offering platforms for dialogue and collaboration among

writers, journalists, and activists and underscoring the importance of journalism in sustaining democracy. A Mano River Union Arts and Culture Festival will celebrate the region's rich heritage, using cultural expression as a bridge to peace and unity. PEN Sierra Leone also aims to advocate for free and compulsory education, empowering future generations to engage meaningfully in democratic discourse.

The organization is equally committed to promoting the right to write as a fundamental human right for peace and democratic progress. Through literature, art, and cultural events, PEN Sierra Leone seeks to inspire a

society where all citizens can freely share their thoughts and ideas. Public support will be pivotal as the organization continues to work toward a just and democratic society where the rights to free expression, peace, and cultural celebration are firmly upheld. In this pursuit, PEN Sierra Leone remains steadfast in its vision of a future rooted in justice, where every citizen can speak, write, and advocate freely for a peaceful world.

INFORMATION ABOUT BLEED MEETING 2025

57th INTERNATIONAL MEETING OF WRITERS FOR PEACE

Date: 8th - 10th April 2025

Location: Park Hotel Bled, Slovenia

Dear PEN colleagues,

The meeting of the Writers for Peace Committee of PEN International, which gathers in Bled, Slovenia, as part of the 57th Writers for Peace Meeting, will take place at the beginning of April 2025, i.e.,

- April 8th - a closed meeting of the committee (PEN members only);
- April 9th - public round tables in Gorica - European capital of culture 2025;
- April 10th - public events for literary festival Faces of Peace.

We will be situated in Park Hotel Bled which offers this year a reduced price for rooms (single room 109 € + tourist tax).

Like before a special link will be created for reservations.

The round tables will take place in Nova Gorica (Slovenia) and Gorizia (Italy) where we will travel by train from Bled along the Isonzo Valley - former WWI front line.

Topics of the round tables will be:

Climate change, migrations, wars – end of peace

Writers are invited to a thought-provoking dialogue on how literature and storytelling can address the pressing global challenges of our time. It emphasizes the role of writers as observers, critics, and visionaries who navigate these interconnected issues, offering narratives that inspire reflection, empathy, and action. The round table explores how creative expression can contribute to understanding and solutions in an era marked by environmental crisis, human displacement, and armed conflict.

Water

Water, the source of life, flows both as a timeless metaphor and a tangible reality, shaping not only the contours of our physical world but also the landscapes of human thought and creativity. As one of the oldest and most universal literary symbols, water embodies an inherent duality: it is a source of life and death, purity and chaos, a force of connection and separation. The right to clean water is one of the fundamental human rights. People suffer when it is scarce and drought devastates our lives, just as they do when it turns into disasters and floods. Literature is deeply interwoven with writing about it.

The call will be published to all PEN Centres in the first week of January 2025.

Warmest regards,

Germán Rojas, Chair of the Writers for Peace Committee

Tanja Tuma, President of PEN Slovenia

Sara K. Engelsberger, editor and coordinator of the Writer for Peace Committee

Simon Mundy (Wales PEN Cymru) - All Hallows

The night does not have to be silent,
A rumble of wind,
The gentle slap of a window frame,
Familiar traffic and the plod of a late drinker
Grumbling home.

The noises of peace,
Absence of planes bringing desolation,
No cries of fear or anguish
Worries that the coming day
Will turn out bad.

The night the ancestors make themselves known
In person will be a night of warnings
As it is every year, every year unheeded.

To the bringers of war -
Your end will hurt just as much,
To voters whose votes are counted right -
Stop electing belligerent men,
Inciting women.

Greet the ancestors with a light
A fire tower of fallen branches
Desiccated leaves, splintered floorboards.
Just a candle will do fine
To render the dark harmless.

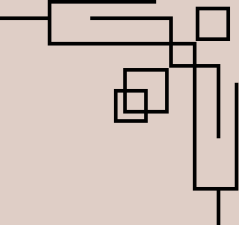
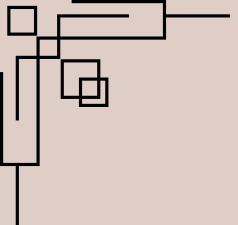
When we meet expect to be reminded
That we tell ancestral stories all wrong.
If we tell the complicated truth, they will help
Silence the stadium bullies and return
Our interrupted nights to soothing peace.

Ben Okri (English PEN) - The Road on Which We Walk

August light in darkened
Cell, where one bold with words
But cautious with living paces
The narrow horizon of the brain.
Outside, those she risked her
Life for go on living the difficult
Path of bread and of pain.

There are jails where writers
Rot and turn into the deadness
Of the walls. The only voices there
Are the low lisps of the dead
Who only have incarcerated ones
For their timeless companionship.
Writers in prison are a separate species.
The world forgets them, to stay sane.
Tyrants love the sound of muffled
Writers. Self-censorship is their
Favourite music. And when the people
Are silent, when they obey, when
Writers keep their heads down,
Their pens still, tyrants sleep
Especially well. Then the noise
Of birds sailing between the trees
Becomes the most prominent sound
In the ghostly land. But leaves of grass
Dream forgotten fictions
And the flowers write poems
In the wind, speaking of things
That poets get jailed for.

Even the rivers, with
Their winding prose,
Sing the lost songs
of rebellious fishes,
While out there in
Lands where truth has
Become rare as epics,
The children grow empty
Spaces in their minds
And the schools breed
Terror in the simplest
Things. Where writers
Perish dreams of power
Grow like wild weeds
On the dying waters.
That's why the death
Of writers impoverishes
The dwindling earth.



But somewhere, those
Who fight for the iron
Freedom dream the charters
That liberate the repressive
Dawns, so that children may
Re-write myths in their slow
Progress through the sunlit
Days and schools may
Unleash the dark matter
And the starlit energy
Hidden in their veins. Our
World is transformed
By those who can redream
It with light and radiant
Intelligence. Then the wise poem
That flowers might scribble,
Or the prose that rivers
Might weave, become
The unknown future that's
Coiled in bright generations.

Our freedom makes
A new future which can
Save the earth, and
Lift a new civilisation
From the dreams of fishes
And the golden sonnets
Of birds. The road on which
We walk was won for us
By the charter-shapers
And coders of humane ideals.

And here, under
An autumnal sun, our
Secret pages are lit
With the fire of the heart's
Long-sighted destiny.

Carina Carriqueo (PEN Argentina) - Selk'nam Lullaby (TN: selk'nam, indigenous people of Patagonia, including Tierra del Fuego islands)

You must sleep, my childbirth

I am already very sleepy.

He rocks on the waves

and will be happy.

I have something to tell him, while he sleeps,

on the land of fire

the sun will soon darken,

there are already feathers in the sky,

Be good, my childbirth

you must sleep now.

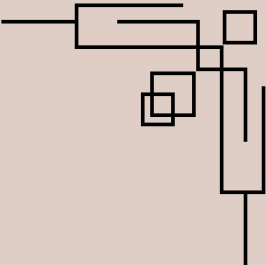
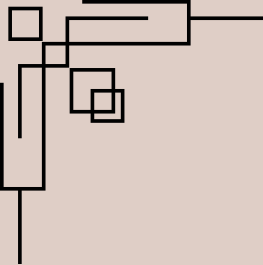


The author wrote the original text in Selk'nam language

Many misten yat'tam
mashenká meyayá
ka kerén hosh chown
kars tokórritém

Mani misten yat'tam
ma shenká méyayá
ón maursó konal
kaier ko'oyurúshká
parnams súikrén

shióshietr'r kaikonner
kársks yat'tam
mánimistén yat'tam.



Boris A. Novak (PEN Slovenia) - Decisions

11

Between two words
choose the quieter one.

Between word and silence
choose listening.

Between two books
choose the dustier one.

Between the earth and the sky
choose a bird.

Between two animals
choose the one who needs you more.

Between two children
choose both.

Between the lesser and the bigger evil
choose neither.

Between hope and despair
choose hope:
it will be harder to bear.

translated by Mia Dintinjana
(The Master of Insomnia, Dalkey Archive Press, 2012)

Hanan Awwad (PEN Palestine) - Rhythms of the Black Time

How the days write me, and I write them
Using my blood as ink,
My poetry flickers, words explode
On tables of farewells leading there...
I do not know the vessel that will carry me,
Nor the path, nor how my steps wander
Upon the lands of youth taxed by cosmic burdens.

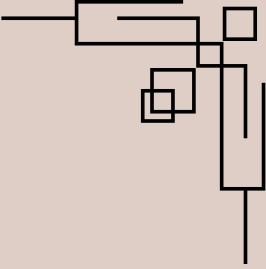
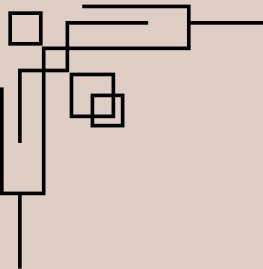
I recall forgetting, and I also forget to think or remember.
I swim in morning clouds, soaked with blood,
and evenings ablaze with fires of dreams.
Hidden behind rocks of gray-shadowed hills.

Days write me, and I write them—
A gypsy poem without rhythm,
Its letters were scattered in the spirit of piercing purity,
embroidered on the processions of the setting sun.

When letters flee from my hand,
fall like autumn leaves,
Bidding farewell to their sun and singing birds.

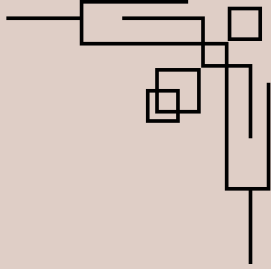
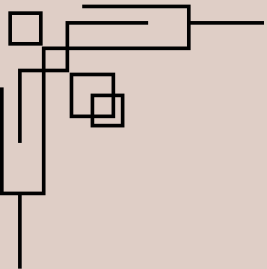
How the days write me, and I write them,
When I hear the roar scented with queries,
the tears of rivers on deserted banks,
Falling as rain, rainbowed memories,
Colors of yearning fading away.
The self within us dies,
While passion remains a delusion,
Infatuation in moments carved with wounds,
In an era shackled in a corner of fear,
Along the streets of a sorrowful city,
Knocking with bronze hands on the keys of time.
The voice moves on, fading,
And dies a martyr in the garb of final farewell.

Do roses love their morning birds,
Awakening to embrace them as the breeze passes by,
With chaste love, waiting at the corner?



How the days write me, and I write them,
Bound in a lake of imagination and confusion,
Thunderstruck by the contemplation of the soul's mysteries,
Pulling away the curtains of inquiry,
When the sun cradles the sky's neck,
In the finest threads of the ideal republic,
Only to find me—fragmented letters,
A postponed wedding.

And how the days write me, and I write them,
On wings directed there,
Where thought ferments,
And words journey through autumn and spring horizons,
Across the spaces of Arab decline,
Wounds of lost grandeur.
I cross to that far corner,
Carrying my restless pain,
Anticipating,
My words trembling with the fear of surprises,
Fires gifted to our children,
Wrapped in the malice buried in dark hearts,
Their fragrance aged in death,
Lulling our decayed dreams
In the massacre of betrayal.
The passionate longing in my eyes extinguishes,
I tap on the threshold of crossing,
Seeking the honey of early hope,
And fervor rises, speech intensifies.
To the rhythm of ringing words,
Youth abandon their prideful nests,
Defeats collapse, one after another,
Gatherings swell, and feasts grow.
The cries of the tormented echo unheard,
Unseen, unmeasured.
The martyr becomes a number,
Forgetting a number,
The past, the present—all numbers,
Letters lost,
We failed to reclaim their dots.
I catch my breath, muttering,
Amulets crumble,
Silence tortures me,
Falling into enforced oblivion,
The soul spins, searching for an answer,
Then sleeps, oblivious to questions and answers.

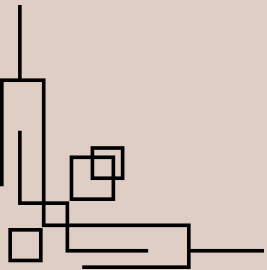


Self-criticism grows within,
The explosion of a lost spirit's blame,
Laying burdens on a nameless, forgotten entity.
A revenge bird pecks with its beak
On the rock of alienation,
Suffering intensifies,
Flames ignite at the memory's edge,
Almost burning letters in a heart
Once full of pure passion,
Now bereft of its beloved,
Buthayna's knight, Leila's Qais,
And the Arab woman who called out for Mu'tasim,
Her cry drowning in Arab blood,
Wars of self against self,
Fleeing from self to self,
Begging for grace,
Mercy vanished,
Delighting in desertion and heat.

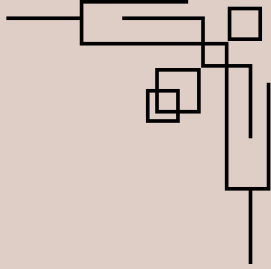
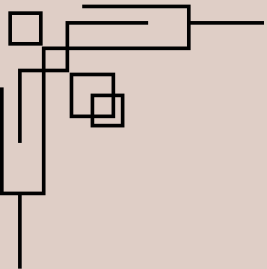
O nation that sold its knights,
Denied its noble steed,
Borrowed a false dawn,
A counterfeit knight,
Weapons turned against the innocent,
Virgins of love and homeland,
As hardships worsened.

O nation that spread its wings and lost itself,
Replaced its essence with strangers,
Losing the sacred meanings,
Teachings of prophets.
How does love become ruin,
The adorned moon robbed of light?
How does departure become a wish,
Death a song,
Wounds hymns,
Until lanterns dim,
The lamp departs from its niche,
The window shuts.

O nation engrossed in functional division,
Scattered by selfishness,
Its meanings lost,
Hair hung from gallows,
Resting on the hearts of the silent.



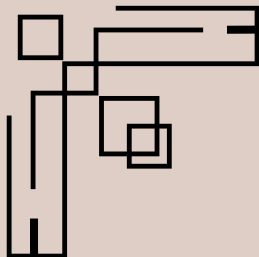
O nation chased by despair,
Changing weather and wind direction,
Rain ceased,
Her resolutions filed against her at the UN,
Baggage left in innocent blood.



How the days write me, and I write them,
Tortured by my blood,
Besieged by tempests and towering walls,
Awaiting victory like an hour of patience.
What victory is there?
Unable to find an enemy,
We attack our brothers,
Or fathers,
The divine light fades in us,
We divided, split,
Returned to deserts and shifting sands,
Burying dreams and resistance.

How the days write me, and I write them,
Exiled across distances,
In a second era of refuge,
Under alienation's shades,
With foreign tongues that lost their Arabic roots,
Our day postponed,
Ending with unreadable headlines,
Unheard speeches,
Futile complaints,
And borrowed expressions.

Translated by Alice S. Yousef



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