
WRITERS FOR PEACE COMMITTEE

NEWSLETTER



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SPRING IN BLEĐ

BY GERMÁN ROJAS (WFPC CHAIR, PEN CHILE)

This issue of our Newsletter is almost entirely dedicated to the meeting of the Writers for Peace Committee which took place - as has become a tradition - in the city of Bled, Slovenia, last May. Unexpected rainy days welcomed us tenderly and helped us delegates to stay longer together in the warm Park Hotel, sharing memories, deep conversations, learning new topics, exchanging experiences and views on issues of the most varied nature. In short, the spring rain helped us to get to know each other better. Somehow, the theme of the meeting "Imagine all the people...", inspired by John Lennon's song, was influential.

We all appreciated and were grateful for the keynote address by Salil Tripathi, member of the Executive Board of PEN International, who opened our eyes and ears to a better understanding of what Artificial Intelligence is and its risks.

Most significant, in view of the future work of the Committee, was the approval of the strategic plan for the three-year period 2023-2025, which sets the framework within which we will work in the coming years. [1]

An important activity in Bled was the presentation by the young Turkish writer Ege Dündar on the need to establish a "Tomorrow's Club", which promotes the participation of new young talents in our organisation.

There was also a brainstorming session on the role of the Writers for Peace Committee in PEN and in the world, moderated by Olha Mukha, member of the International PEN Secretariat. Also, PEN Centres from around the world gave accounts of their activities in promoting peace. The importance of strengthening the work of the Committee through regional meetings of PEN Centres and the establishment of country-specific action groups in different regions or the participation of Committee members in existing groups such as Belarus, China, Cuba, Türkiye, among others, was also discussed.

At the last session, ideas were exchanged on the contents of a declaration on the war in Ukraine, the final text of which is included in this Bulletin. [2]

In the framework of the meeting, 2 round tables were held. The first on the theme "Imagine all people..." aimed at exchanging views on various social orders that could bring about better and more peaceful conditions of coexistence in the world. The second round table was devoted to the theme "Literature is (which?) truth and justice".

The most beautiful literary frame of this meeting was provided by the poet Tajda Lekše. She gave an extraordinary "Poetry Recital with Music" in which she recited 21 poems in 13 languages, giving an account of the universal meaning of PEN and the power of the poetic word that unites all of humanity.

I cannot find the right words to thank Tanja Tuma and all the members of PEN Slovenia for once again making this meeting possible, and preparing it so much love and dedication. Without them none of what is reported here would have been possible.

The spring rain in Bled showed in all its magnitude our Committee's vitality.

[2] See the "Declaration on the Russian Federation's War against Ukraine", on page 14.



[1] More information can be found in this Newsletter in the article "Strategic Plan" on page 7.

SOLIDARITY – A WORD OR A VERB?

BY TANJA TUMA (PEN SLOVENIA)

Everyone wants a voice in human freedom. There's a fire burning inside all of us.»

- Lech Walesa, leader of Solidarność movement, former President of Poland.

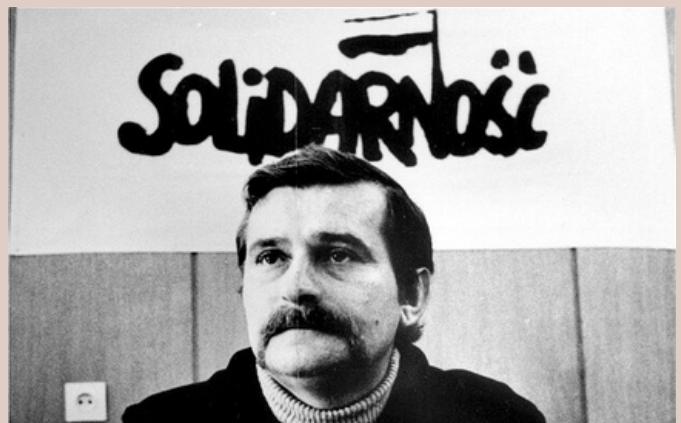
For my generation the word solidarity resonates with the trade union movement Solidarność, which in the 1980s challenged communism as a totalitarian and unjust system. In Yugoslavia, we were living under the same one-party regime, devoid of freedom of speech and burdened by a poor economic system, much like the rest of the Eastern Block. Although we enjoyed certain advantages in terms of travel opportunities, the rest, including gulags and persecutions, remained the same. Reflecting on why our television daily brought news from Gdansk, where a group of brave Polish activists led by iconic Lech Walesa demanded freedom, workers' rights and social change in the shipyards, there is only one plausible explanation: Yugoslavia was no ally of the Soviet Union. Today, workers' rights are enslaved by the capitalist ambition of relentless economic growth, perpetuating a vicious circle that dooms many liberal societies. Solidarność is becoming a relic of the past while millions yearn to earn a living and a few bathe in accumulated wealth. Humanity is plagued by egotism and Darwinism.

When contemplating the meaning of solidarity in today's world and grappling with philosophical and sociological explanations, it becomes evident that solidarity is the glue of humanity and human development. Over the centuries, various dimensions of solidarity have shaped our world, beginning with the Rights of Man during the French revolution and culminating in the elaborated [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) and the [Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union](#). In this context, the PEN Charter embodies solidarity as a principle among writers, pledging *ourselves to do our utmost to dispel all hatreds and to champion the ideal of one humanity living in peace and equality in one world.*

In recent history, PEN International's humanitarian efforts, first organized by Slovenian PEN and later adopted by the whole PEN movement to aid the refugees and writers in besieged Sarajevo in the

1990s stands as a shining example of solidarity etched in PEN's history.

Vice-president of PEN International, Boris A. Novak, was the heart and head of this endeavour. Collecting funds and smuggling them across borders to those in need and assisting those who managed to escape the horrors of Sarajevo in starting a new life away from the onslaught of bombs. This air was extended to writers of all ethnicities provided they did not partake in the attack. The definition of writer was expanded to include journalists, literary translators, intellectuals, and others. PEN members never questioned their safety when participating in the 1993 Dubrovnik congress, even as the historical pearl of the Adriatic was under attack by the Yugoslav army. They sailed their ship avoiding the Dalmatian shores where fierce fighting raged in the hinterland, the fighting that not only severed physical bridges to the mainland but also severed ties among Croatian, Serbian, and Bosnian populations. PEN members planted symbolic olive trees for peace, expressing solidarity with the victims of war, reminiscent of the ongoing war in Ukraine today.



CREDIT: Photo: GETTY IMAGES

Many also joined the Writers for Peace Committee, remaining active members still today. The true value of PEN's solidarity can be witnessed on the page 249 of the [Illustrated History](#).

Maybe Lech Walesa would remark: **“Words are plentiful; deeds are precious.”**

In PEN, we foster solidarity in all forms. Numerous centres extend financial support to others or embark on journeys to dangerous locations or war zones, rescuing writers at risk from perils in their respective countries. Some manage programs like Writers in Exile, others employ different unofficial ways to aid our brave colleagues, who often put their lives on the line their lives for freedom of speech or justice.

I cannot conclude this brief text without paying tribute to the memory of Victoria Amelina, who sacrificed her life to reveal the truth about Russian war crimes. Even when the missiles and the bullets cease, her work, her words, and her story will endure. She will forever hold a place in our hearts, a symbol of courage and beauty.

We should be able to actively participate in regional meetings, promoting our values in all corners of the world.

Our solidarity must be a verb, much more than a mere word.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

BY SALIL TRIPATHI (ENGLISH PEN, PEN INTERNATIONAL)

Even as governments are grappling to understand what artificial intelligence is and how it can be regulated, and companies are experimenting with ways to develop services to streamline their routine activities, and users are entertaining themselves by playing with sites like ChatGPT and sharing outcomes, one group of people who know what the technology represents is sounding out notes of caution. Leading scientists and engineers, some of whom have played significant roles in developing the technology, are warning us, urging us to go slow, and in some cases, fearing devastating impacts on humanity.

Convinced that AI is 'sentient,' a senior Google scientist blew the whistle first, and has since left the company. The scientist known as 'the father of AI,' too, has left Google, so that he could critique the technology more frankly. Another scientist concerned about inherent biases and elitism in developing the technology, too, has left her company. But this isn't about a few scientists acting as conscientious objectors. With all their flaws, western tech companies have tried hard to build safeguards and understand the adverse impacts the technology poses to humanity.

But the genie is out of the bottle – other companies, from jurisdictions with fewer scruples, and with a desire either to make money quickly or to misuse the technology, are not restraining themselves. With the technological prowess Israel, Russia, China, and India have, and with their poorer record of protecting human rights, the future of what AI can do to humanity cannot be rosy. We are at a fragile moment.

AI is meant to make our tedious tasks simpler so that we might do more interesting stuff. But a weaponized form of AI can create havoc. The Internet allows speedy dissemination of information widely, which indeed has advantages when the information is crucial (such as warnings of floods and hurricanes, or places where people can seek shelter during an armed conflict). But it is profoundly problematic when information is propaganda or plain lies, or subtler forms of misinformation and disinformation which appear to be plausible, and is presented in a way that appears to make sense, uses some facts and exaggerates or distorts other facts, with a view to shape public opinion. During armed conflict or civil strife, such information can disrupt social order and cause violence.

I remember when we had gathered in the fine Ukrainian city of Lviv, for the PEN Congress. Ukraine was smarting under the humiliation of Crimea being occupied by Russian forces, and PEN Ukraine had put up banners and posters in the city, saying $2+2=4$. That was of course, self-evident, so why state the obvious, I remember asking our Ukrainian friends. And I was told – the barrage of propaganda from Russia is so intense and sustained, that we need to remind ourselves of basic truths. In other words, Russia was attempting to alter reality – by rewriting history – so that you might get convinced that $2+2=22$, or, whatever you wish it to be. Propaganda works; think of Joseph Goebbels during World War II.

We like to believe that eventually truth will emerge triumphant. I grew up in India, whose motto is *satyameva jayate*, which means truth is always victorious. But as the Irish writer Jonathan Swift wrote in the 17th century, “Falsehood flies, and truth comes limping after it, so that when men come to be undeceived, it is too late; the jest is over, and the tale hath had its effect: like a man, who hath thought of a good repartee when the discourse is changed, or the company parted; or like a physician, who hath found out an infallible medicine, after the patient is dead.”

AI has the ability of creating exceptionally credible-looking documents, even videos, and photographs that seem real. It can add the voices of real people into the mouths of their AI-generated images, and show a scene as though it had taken place, adding sepia tones to make it seem authentic, and help formulate an alternate reality. That can convince a mass population of the country's ‘hidden’ history, formalizing dangerous opinions, giving them currency, shaping minds, creating animosity, the consequences of which could be ethnic cleansing, massacres, even genocide.

Writers have the power to imagine but also the duty to uphold truth. Not by writing pious homilies, but by adhering to facts, by making clear what's fiction is fiction and where facts are facts. When the two blend – something many writers are adept at doing, to emphasise a larger, literary truth – the result can be dangerous only if the reader believes that fiction is fact.

But AI is amoral – it does not know the difference between truth and falsehood. It has no opinion. And it does not even care.

Undoing the AI revolution is no longer possible. To uphold truth, it is important for AI's developers to abide by the science fiction writer Isaac Asimov's rules on robotics:

- A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.
- A robot must obey the orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.
- A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law.

And that means: A robot may not harm humanity, or, by inaction, allow humanity to come to harm.

Replace robot with AI, and you get the basic building block of ethical AI. The chilling future Arthur C Clarke predicted in his short story *Sentinel*, which Stanley Kubrick turned into the film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, where the super-computer HAL takes over the command and control of a space mission, must remain part of our science fiction, and a warning. We must use our empathy and intelligence to ensure that amoral machines don't think for us, decide for us, and rule us.

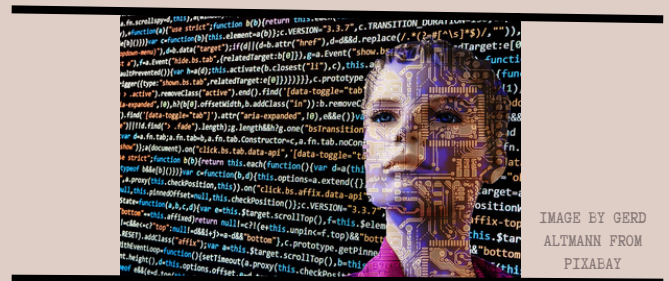


IMAGE BY GERD
ALTMANN FROM
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This is the civilizational battle that we must win. And we can, because writers have fought false narratives through history; we speak the truth, not only facts; we fight post-truth with lived experiences; lies with facts; and illusions with reality. We may be unreliable narrators, but we ultimately uphold eternal values which allows us to think, write, paint, and imagine. It is a challenge worthy of us, as writers, and worthy of us, as witnesses to the lives and events around us, chronicling them, observing them, and through our expression, preserving and improving our lives.

Salil Tripathi, member of the Board of PEN International, delivered the keynote speech in the meeting of the WfPC recently held in Bled. The title of the speech was: “Freedom of expression in the age of human evil and Artificial Intelligence”.

WFPC – STRATEGIC PAPER (SUMMARY)

The Writers for Peace Committee of PEN International (WfPC) discussed a strategy paper for 2023 - 2025 at its May meeting in Bled, Slovenia. The paper has been developed during the first months of 2023 by the committee's President, Germán Rojas, along with the members of its Advisory Board. It sets out the history of the committee's work since it was founded in 1984 and the vision that has informed it - the role writers can play in advocating for peace and using their influence to help communities, governments and political forces achieve it. The committee has consistently used its moral authority to bolster the work of UN and other Intergovernmental Organisations in their efforts to reduce conflict. In particular, it notes that so many conflicts either stem from or use cultural arguments as justification. Therefore writers, as the prime interpreters of culture, have a strong role in mitigating cultural tension.

The strategy is based on adherence to the UN Charter, the Charter of PEN International, and on the determination to reduce hate speech and inflammatory rhetoric. It calls for writers to be careful in their use of news reports and to take a considered view, avoiding propaganda. It notes, 'the role of the WfPC is to concentrate on these larger global phenomena that are trying to tear gaps between people and distance them from each other... Literature is at the core of identity politics and the new narratives modern mass leaders are creating. It is very difficult for an ordinary citizen of the world to hear a clear voice through all the noise, but writers can help to bring out the meaningful facts'.

For the coming years the WfPC has decided to reform its structures and methodology so that it can tackle these issues more effectively. It will take advantage of internet communications to widen global participation through more frequent online meetings. It has opened its activities to all PEN Centres, rather than requiring them to become elected to the committee. As well as the annual meetings in Bled and at the PEN Congress, the committee wishes to hold regional meetings around the world to discuss issues that need to be dealt with in a less global context.

It looks to provide training for participants in social media and have ad hoc thematic groups as particular problems arise (for example its groups on Ukraine and on Balkan tensions). Resolutions will focus on six core themes: condemnation of war; hate speech; migration; populism and nationalism; violence and democracy, and the role of new technologies; and the preservation of historical memory to build peace. Each of these themes has a series of proposed activities, some to be taken at a local or regional level, some that engage committee members as a whole, and some that can be advanced through the WfPC Advisory Board.

As an example, the WfPC can take action to address the following areas of hate speech:

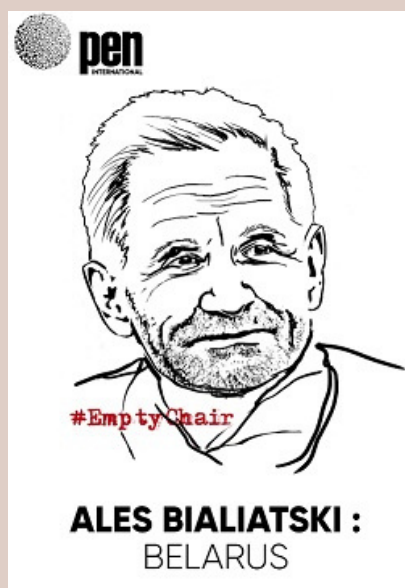
- Dehumanisation, in times of war (the enemies' elimination) and in times of peace (populist and nationalist rhetoric).
- Internet trolls and political agendas: disinformation uses the means of hate speech.
- Online hate speech.
- Political hate speech from state leadership, officials or political parties.
- Institutional discrimination.

The WfPC has its own [website](#), complementary to but separate from, that of PEN International. It posts a frequent newsletter there, as well as statements on conflict and calls for mediation. It also provides a forum for writers to contribute essays and opinion pieces that underpin the committee's work. At all times, the WfPC co-ordinates its work with that of PEN International's other committees and works closely with the officers of the main organisation. Where necessary, the WfPC's President and active associates are available to undertake representational duties on behalf of PEN's overall board.

For further details, the WfPC Secretariat can be reached at email address PENwritersforpeace@penslovenia-zdrufenje.si.

EMPTY CHAIRS

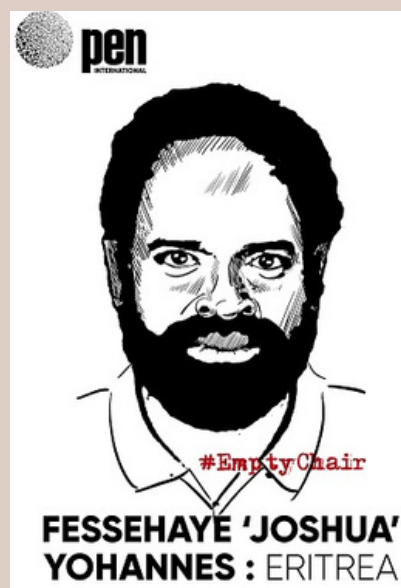
ALES BIALIATSKI: BELARUS



Writer, human rights defender, Nobel Peace Prize winner and PEN Belarus member Ales Bialiatiski is the founder of the Human Rights Centre Viasna, a leading human rights organisation whose work and members have been repeatedly targeted by the Belarusian authorities. In July 2021, Bialiatiski was detained alongside several Viasna colleagues following raids by Belarusian law enforcement officers on more than a dozen civil society and human rights organisations. He was transferred to pre-trial detention on trumped-up charges of tax evasion, and subsequently charged with smuggling and organising and financing actions that grossly violate public order. His trial opened in Minsk in January 2023. Bialiatiski repeatedly asked that the prosecutor and the court conduct the trial in the Belarusian language, to no avail. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison on 3 March 2023. Six members of Viasna are currently behind bars.

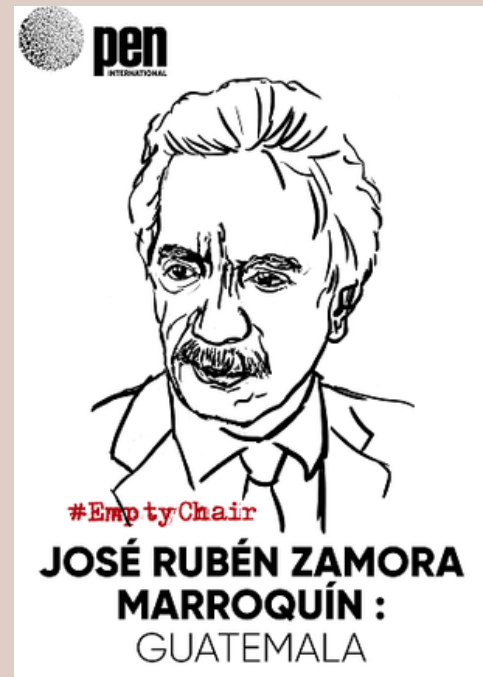
PEN International calls for the immediate and unconditional release of Bialiatiski and Viasna colleagues, and for the verdicts to be overturned on appeal.

FESSEHAYE 'JOSHUA' YOHANNES: ERITREA



Fessehaye 'Joshua' Yohannes is an Eritrean poet, playwright, short story writer, lyricist, journalist, and co-owner of the independent Setit newspaper. He has been held in incommunicado detention without trial for 22 years. Fessehaye was arrested at his home on the morning of 23 September 2001. He is among 16 independent journalists arrested in a massive crackdown between September and October that year for reporting on an open letter by a group of prominent dissident politicians within Eritrea's ruling party popularly known as the Group of 15 or G-15 and conducting related interviews. In their letter, the G-15 had denounced President Isaias Afwerki's abuse of power and called his actions 'illegal and unconstitutional'. In the crackdown, all independent media outlets were banned in Eritrea, and they have remained so to-date. In April 2002, the detained journalists reportedly begun a hunger strike in protest of their prolonged incommunicado detention, demanding a fair trial before a court of law. Shortly after the hunger strike, the detainees were separated and moved to different prisons and detention centres across Eritrea. Ever since, Fessehaye has remained in incommunicado detention and the Eritrean authorities refuse to disclose any details on his location, health, and wellbeing. Based on unverified reports attributed to ex-prison guards.

Fessehaye is thought to have died in 2006 or 2007 due to poor health and mistreatment in prison.

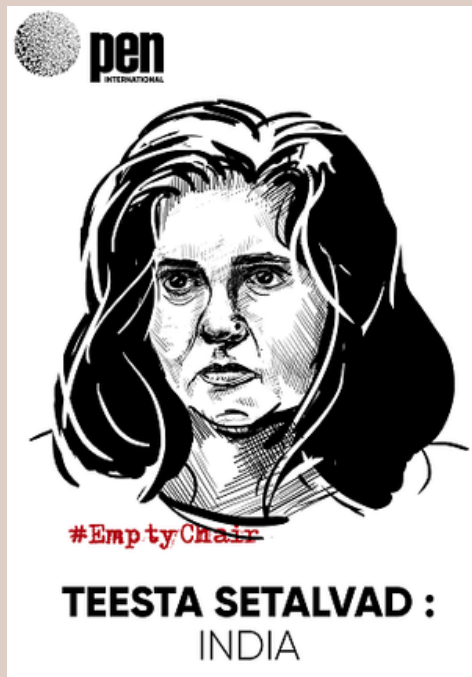


Galal El-Beairy is an Egyptian poet and lyricist known for his criticism of the authorities. El-Beairy was arrested in March 2018 at Cairo International Airport on his return from travels abroad. He initially faced charges of ‘joining a terrorist group’, ‘disseminating false news’, and ‘insulting the President’ for lyrics he had written for the song Balaha, performed and disseminated online by exiled Egyptian singer Ramy Essam. This case was eventually dropped, but El-Beairy remained in detention, serving a three-year prison term for allegedly ‘disseminating false news and rumours’ and ‘insulting the Egyptian army’ in his unpublished poetry collection, *The Finest Women on Earth*. In July 2021, when his prison sentence expired, El-Beairy was subjected to enforced disappearance for three weeks before being freshly charged with ‘disseminating false news’ and ‘joining a terrorist group’ by the Supreme State Security Prosecution. Along with other detainees, he joined a collective hunger strike for several weeks in February 2022 to protest against their arbitrary detention. Galal El-Beairy’s family has informed PEN International that his health has significantly deteriorated due to his imprisonment, poor prison conditions, and lack of adequate medical care.

PEN International calls for his immediate and unconditional release.

On 29 July 2022, renowned Guatemalan journalist José Rubén Zamora Marroquín was arrested at his home by the National Civil Police on trumped-up charges of money laundering, blackmailing, influence peddling and conspiracy to launder money. On the same day his bank accounts were frozen. On 30 July, the headquarters of *elPeriódico*, which he founded, were occupied by officers of the Public Prosecutor’s Office and the National Civil Police. Zamora’s arrest came five days after strong accusations of corruption against several present and past government officials were published in *elPeriódico*, which focuses on investigating and exposing corruption in public administration and the private sector.

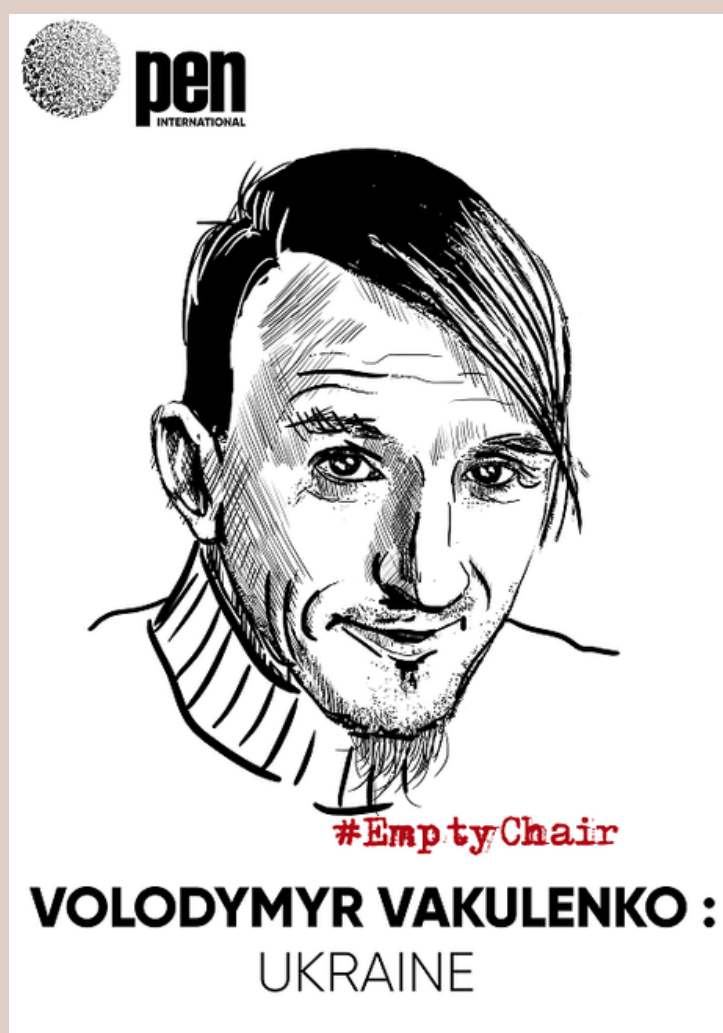
The Guatemalan authorities must immediately and unconditionally release José Rubén Zamora Marroquín and end all criminal proceedings against him.



Teesta Setalvad is a writer, journalist, and human rights defender. On 25 June 2022, Gujarat anti-terror police detained Setalvad at her home in Mumbai, the capital of the neighbouring state of Maharashtra, on allegations of 'criminal conspiracy' and 'forging evidence' as part of her efforts to seek government accountability for the 2002 Gujarat Riots, a period of inter-communal violence that led to the deaths of hundreds of Indian citizens. Setalvad has alleged that she was assaulted by two members of the anti-terror police when she requested permission to speak with her lawyer. Just one day before Setalvad's detention, on 24 June the Supreme Court rejected a plea submitted by Setalvad and co-petitioner Zakia Jafri, whose husband, the former parliamentarian Ehsan Jafri, was killed during the riots. The plea sought to reopen an investigation into the potential involvement of local government officials in the violence. On 2 September 2022, Setalvad was granted interim bail by the Supreme Court. She is subject to monitoring and her movements are restricted while the legal case against her remains ongoing.

Wikileaks founder and publisher Julian Assange was arrested in April 2019 at the Ecuadorian embassy in London, where he had been given asylum for almost seven years. He was arrested for breaching his bail conditions in 2012, and further arrested on behalf of the US authorities under an extradition warrant for his role in obtaining and publishing classified military and diplomatic documents in 2010. In the US, Assange would face trial on 17 counts under the Espionage Act and one count under the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act, which combined could see him imprisoned for up to 175 years. In March 2022, the UK Supreme Court denied Assange's request to appeal an earlier decision by the UK High Court that permitted his extradition to the US – which in turn had overturned a previous ruling by the District Court that found extradition would endanger his life. His case is now before the UK Home Secretary to authorise the extradition. PEN International has repeatedly stressed that Assange's prosecution raises profound concerns about freedom of the press and sends a dangerous signal to journalists and publishers worldwide.

PEN International calls on the UK Home Secretary to reject Julian Assange's extradition to the US and to release him from Belmarsh prison immediately.



On 28 November 2022, DNA analysis carried out by Ukrainian forensic and war crimes investigators confirmed that the body found in grave N.319 in the woods of Izium, Eastern Ukraine, was that of award-winning Ukrainian writer Volodymyr Vakulenko. News that he had been abducted first emerged in April, but information about his fate was only made possible after the Ukrainian army recaptured Izium from Russian forces in September. According to Vakulenko's family, members of the Russian forces raided his home on 22 March 2022, seizing phones, documents, and books in Ukrainian. A day later, they took Vakulenko and his son Vitalii, diagnosed with autism. They undressed the writer to inspect his tattoos and beat him. Both were allowed to return home the following day. Vakulenko subsequently decided to bury his war diary under a cherry tree in his garden. Around 11 am on 24 March, a bus with a Z-sign drove up to Vakulenko's house and took him towards Izium. His relatives never saw him again.

PEN International utterly condemns the killing of Vakulenko and calls for those responsible to be brought to justice. PEN International further condemns the violence unleashed by Russian forces against Ukraine and urges the Russian Federation to immediately end the war in Ukraine.

TO-MORROW CLUB

BY EGE DÜNDAR (PEN INTERNATIONAL)

In the spring of 1917, our founder Catherine Amy Dawson Scott started the To-Morrow Club, a predecessor to the later International PEN. The name indicated the aim: to draw the writers of “tomorrow” and connect them with those established to exchange ideas, advice, and community.

Over a 100 years later, in 2015, this organization felt like a global family to me when my father was illegally thrown behind bars as a journalist and mum and I were left to face up to brutal state power, from a corrupt judiciary to dark media propaganda, from police to clandestine gunmen guarded by impunity. I witnessed how a global family that has your back when governments that should not only fail to but target you, is priceless. I have seen much more than that since joining the organisation 6 years ago: t and that I was one in a long line of countless over the last century who stood up for each other in much the same way, climbing on the shoulders of giants, growing in their collective solidarity. This spirit of support and solidarity is what I hope that To-Morrow Club carries to younger generations, and why re-establishing it with 46 PEN centres at our last Congress in Upsala was a real milestone.

The word youth tends to sugar coat or to paint in a single brush, with rosy colours, a group of people that are in fact widely different like everyone else. Yet they are also likely to get shaped even more differently in the years ahead, sharpening their edges, as an attempt to define oneself as unique from everyone else grows, a pandemic of our hyper individualistic age.

The resolve, however, should surely be the opposite now, to realize the common nature of our difficulties, needs and problems for a safe life in our planet. When we lost over 50 thousand people in under a minute and a half in Türkiye, we were reminded of this. Creative expression has long been a gathering ground for people of various characters, beyond nations or financial disparities.

Creativity, another word like youth, is another one of those brushes that can colour a whole wide group as one. Tomorrow Club, in making a space for both these definitions, the youth and the creative, invites as many people as possible, not just in a sense of

diversity in age but also in form of expression, background, language, geography, gender and more.

To amplify the voices of youths overlooked by high-nosed 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. All this and worse has been witnessed before and PEN is well experienced in dealing with similar trends in history.

I needed such a family when the world I was in felt as if it would fall apart, and I still do today. I know there are many like me who do too. We should build on the moment of To-Morrow Club without delay, to connect writers under 35 with experienced colleagues at centres and beyond in our movement, so this tradition built on creating solidarity strategies, community and opportunities can be passed down and innovated.

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. To-Morrow 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.

ALGERIA: PRISON FOR EVERYONE

BY SAID KHATIBI (PEN SLOVENIA)

In recent years, Algerian journalists are more likely to be found in prison visiting room than in the newsrooms. We broke the record of imprisoned journalists in the Arab world.

On June 18 2023, journalist Ihsane El Kadi (aged 63) was sentenced to seven years in prison, five of which were suspended. Accusation: having received foreign funding for its two media 'Radio M' and 'Maghreb Émergent'. Looking for grants abroad can lead to jail in Algeria. Political powers (represented by the Ministry of Information) hold the monopoly of financing local media. You have to embrace the official narratives to be able to receive funding. If you dedicate yourself to independent journalism (as in the case of Ihsane El Kadi) you are sent to prison. Following his 'Radio M' broadcasts and his articles, this same journalist was accused of 'undermining the security of the State and its stability'. A typical accusation that many journalists and bloggers have faced over the past three years.

Algerian journalists go to jail for the simple reason of publishing articles. The law stipulates that journalists are free to write and comment on the news, but in reality this is not the case.

A few months ago, the correspondent of the TV channel 'France 24' was accused of having received funding from abroad. He was then released. Since the Hirak of 2019, many Algerian journalists have faced legal actions. Journalist Rabah Kareche also spent a few months in prison following an article on a demonstration in the far south of the country. It's important to underline that numerous news websites have been blocked on the internet in the past few years.



Clicker-Free-Vector-Images from Pixabay

A few months ago, journalist Saad Bouakba (aged 77) was placed under judicial supervision (after 48 hours in police custody), following the publication of a satirical article. Apparently, we have no right to laugh in Algeria. Last year, journalist Berkasem Hoam was sentenced to two months in prison after publishing an article about the interruption of dates exports abroad. Unacceptable but true.

DECLARATION OF PEN INTERNATIONAL'S WRITERS FOR PEACE COMMITTEE ON THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION'S WAR AGAINST UKRAINE

We, members of PEN International's Writers for Peace Committee, once again urge the Russian authorities to immediately and unconditionally end their devastating war against Ukraine. The Russian Federation's full-scale military invasion of Ukraine is a violation of international law and a brazen disregard of international norms. It must not be allowed to escalate.

Ukrainians are subjects of their own history. The Writers for Peace Committee expresses its full solidarity with the people of Ukraine as they fight for their freedom.

Summary executions of civilians and prisoners of war, enforced disappearances, torture and other ill-treatment, conflict-related sexual violence, forced deportations and transfer of Ukrainian civilians – including thousands of children – to the Russian Federation, all these actions amount to war crimes.

We welcome the warrants issued by the International Criminal Court (ICC) against Vladimir Putin and Maria Lvova-Belova, Commissioner for Children's Rights in the Office of the President of the Russian Federation, for the war crime of forcible transfer of children.

We urge that further arrest warrants be issued by the ICC as its investigations into crimes committed by the Russian forces unfold. The States Parties to the Rome Statute should do everything in their power to ensure that Putin and Lvova-Belova are arrested and brought to trial immediately.

We strongly condemn the threats to the lives and safety of all civilians in Ukraine, including writers and journalists, resulting from the Russian Federation's war against Ukraine, and urge the Russian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all those held solely for peacefully expressing their views.

We are alarmed at the scale of destruction and looting of Ukraine's invaluable cultural heritage by Russian forces and stand with the many artists and cultural actors who continue their work in the face of adversity. The international community must support Ukraine in documenting such attacks and seek restitution and restoration.

Nuclear threats are unacceptable. Accountability for war crimes is crucial. All those responsible must be brought to justice immediately.

PEN International's Writers for Peace Committee has repeatedly called on the Russian Federation to immediately and unconditionally end its devastating war against Ukraine, including through a [Resolution](#) on the Russian Federation's war against Ukraine, adopted at PEN International's 88th annual Congress in Uppsala, Sweden, in September 2022 and a [statement](#) marking a year of war crimes and resolve in Ukraine, issued on 23 February 2023.

IN MEMORIAM – VENO TAUFER



Photo: BoBo/Borut Živulovič

Veno Taufer, Slovenian poet, playwright, essayist, and translator, died on the May 20, 2023. He was the president of the Slovenian PEN Centre between 2000 and 2005, and the president of the Writers for Peace Committee between 1999 and 2006.

Members of Slovenian PEN Centre and PEN International remember him as a gentle, kind, and warm person. We remember him as someone who never got tired of seeking dialogue between the warring parties, no matter how difficult circumstances were. Slovenian PEN receives expressions of condolence from France, Germany, Sweden, the London secretariat, Balkan PEN centres, Türkiye, and many more.

Veno Taufer was a courageous defender of democracy and a creator of the Slovenian state. He was buried with the honours of a statesman. He was also one of the main supporters of the Slovenian Mira Women's Committee, which was founded by female colleagues in 2013.

An artist has left us, but his poetry remains, for us and future generations to read and be inspired.

Tanja Tuma, president of PEN Slovenia, member of the Board of the International PEN, member of the Advisory board of WfPC.

Veno Taufer was a Man. Actually: a gentleman. Also in the etymological English sense: kind man, gentleman. Dignified and noble. Restless in artistic pursuits, but calm, tolerant, and respectful in interpersonal relationships.

In the company of Slovenian writers of different generations, Veno always stood out by his behaviour, posture, and dressing type: yes, like an English gentleman, original, far from the confection of grey socialism and later colourful consumerism, elegant in a special way, but natural, always in his own and unique, Veno's mode. With his eternal waistcoat, which combined elegant and work style simultaneously, full of pens and papers. Always flawless on official occasions, but in a natural, charming way.

Up to his advanced age, he walked around with his grey mane, like a beautiful, peaceful lion.

Taken from the funeral oration by Boris A Novak, vice president of PEN International, member of Slovene PEN.

Veno Taufer - Anthem

Sadness squeals
in the forgotten corners
in the slippery corners of towns
sadness of the barricades
in deserted mornings
sadness of congealed blood
black sadness of throats
last salvos of golden throats of the new attack
suffocating cloudy sadness
sadness, thou grenade
with imprinted
lines of our palms
heart, thou sadness
heart
from blood and soil
thou sadness of wrath and love
thou starry-eyed
thou cold, thou sharp
oh, thou shuddering metallic screaming
grenade in our chest.

Taken from the poem collection LEADEN STARS (1958).



Germán Rojas - Imprisoned window

Behind the seven symmetrical cylinders
that separate me from a tender past,
the sea and its waves
a future full of hope for not yet having been lived,
and of the very image of my life,
broken gray mirror between rusty bars,
I see your fragile body appear,
sweet dreams figurine,
common suburban sparrow from Antofagasta.

Your light brown, gray, black lines,
never before by my eyes noticed,
are cries of freedom, maritime artillery,
flash of lightning in the nocturnal night of the cell,
your two black eyes are harpoons
fixed, nailed, immobile
stings that look at me intrigued,
funny, compassionate, enigmatic
begging questions that buzz you
for your joyful wings, your elastic little legs,
your pecks of consummate fencer
that do not manage to dent beyond your efforts,
the robust wisdom of the bars,
defenceless little bird, you are
the soft sun that nothing can
against the cold and atavistic snows of the puna,
the iron and my soul.

Do you want to know who I am and why I don't fly?
And why am I alone and imprisoned?
you will never understand
because you are freedom itself
the cry, the escape, the privilege,
you are my union to life
that rebels to rest in my veins,
you are the humanity of the clear face,
not the myrmidon, the headsman, the accomplice,
you are the good Samaritan
who was not afraid of my window.

Tell me, sparrow of the human face,
your time has come to answer questions,
does the sea still break against the rocks
with its crystalline hecatomb of salt and drizzle?
where does the green scent of basil
that dresses up all the delicacies in Chile stop?
is my father still smiling
between the foliage of the wheat and the pregnant caress of
wine?

You who have wings and have fun with life,
you who at this moment are everything to me,
fly, fly, fly away, beyond your region,
that in the agitated sweat of your efforts
you will take me tied to you,
made drop or tear.

This was what I saw from my imprisoned window,
poor little window, still there in the prison.

Translated by the author.



Paul Éluard - LIBERTY (excerpts)

On my schoolboy's notebook
On my desk and on the trees
On the sand on the snow
I write your name.

On all the pages read
On all the blank pages
Stone blood paper ash
I write your name.

On the gilded images
On warriors' weapons
On the crown of the kings
I write your name.

...

On my refuge that crumbles
My beacon-tower that falls
On ennui's walls
I write your name.

On absence on nude
Solitude on each tread
Of the stair of the dead
I write your name.

And on health rekindling
On danger dwindling
On hope without remembrance
I write your name.

And by the power of a word
My life returns to me
I am born again to know you
And to name you

Liberty.

Translated by George Dillon.



Tarık Günersel - Peace Chain

no Peace without Justice
no Justice without Truth
no Truth without Dialogue
no Dialogue without Freedom of Expression
and Listening
no Listening without Concern
no Concern without Awareness
no Awareness without Science and Arts
no Science without Reality: our Earth, Nature
and the need for Solidarity
no Solidarity without Kindness
no Kindness without Politeness
no Politeness without a Smile
no Smile without Love
no Love without Action
no Action without Intention
no Intention without Questioning
no Questioning without a Free Mind
no Free Mind if chained to a Dogma
an assumption which is unquestionable

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