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WRITERS FOR PEACE COMMITTEE

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# NEWSLETTER

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# COLD PEACE OR WARM PEACE?

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BY GERMÁN ROJAS (WFPC CHAIR, PEN CHILE)

For those cultures that follow the Gregorian calendar, we are approaching the end of another year. It is the time when we greet each other warmly with our families, our friends, the people we care about. It is the time when we wish each other good things for the year to come. And that is what I wish to do with all of you, the great family of the Writers for Peace Committee of PEN International, and I certainly include everyone in this message, regardless of whether the Gregorian calendar makes sense to them.

I would like to wish you that the new year, which begins in a few days' time, will be a good year, a year full of personal and professional achievements, a year in which our hand will not be stayed and that we will continue to write the stories and tales that we carry within us and that are struggling to come to the light of day.

And to dream about what we will do in 2024, it is good to think about what we have done and achieved in this year that is ending. What we have achieved during this time gives us the strength to make sense of what is to come in the future. We had two good and fruitful meetings this year: one in Bled, Slovenia, in the middle of the northern spring, and the other held virtually in September, days before the PEN International Congress. We made our opinion public through a statement on Ukraine, another on the disputed territory of Sartakh/Nagorno-Karabakh, we drafted the text of the resolution on the Western Balkans that was later approved by the Congress of PEN International, we contributed to the study that our organization made on freedom of expression in that region of the Balkans, and we prepared in October an extraordinary text that PEN International adopted in favor of Peace and to dispel all hatreds on earth. We also gave our word of encouragement to the ethnic Armenians living in the Sartakh/Nagorno-Karabakh region at the "Breaking the Silence" event organized by the Armenian International Literary Alliance and we embraced in grief our brothers and sisters of PEN Ukraine for the terrible murder of their member Victoria Amelina. And finally, I would also like to mention this very Newsletter which has now reached its ninth edition.

I would especially like to refer to the work carried out during the year 2023 by the Advisory Board of our Committee, composed of representatives of PEN Centers from all regions of the world, who have assisted me throughout this time in the work of guiding this Committee.

To better illustrate the help received, I would like to refer to an anecdote that occurred at our last meeting held recently. We were discussing the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and at one point our good friend Tarik Günersel of PEN Türkiye - referring to the period of the "Cold War" that divided the world into two antagonistic camps and whose only virtue was perhaps to avoid the outbreak of a Third World War - said "what we need to promote worldwide is a "Cold Peace" in which all the parties in conflict do not come to love each other, but can coexist without annihilating each other." This led me to think that in any conflict, no matter how old it may be, the solution does not lie only in defining maps that demarcate territories, nor in the interposition of good offices by actors who act as arbitrators in peace discussions, nor in persuading the powerful not to use their veto powers in the United Nations. The solution mainly lies in the parties in conflict being able to visualize that a better future is possible for all when agreements are based on economic measures and cooperation treaties that bring well-being to ordinary citizens, regardless of their nationality or ethnic origin. It is not necessary to love each other to do so; it is enough to have the intuition that such a perspective is good and possible.

And after Tarik, Simon Mundy of PEN Wales, the most accomplished writer on our Advisory Board, spoke asking the following question, half seriously, half-jokingly, "sure, you don't have to love each other, but instead of "Cold Peace," wouldn't it be better to advocate for a "Warm Peace?"

I liked that phrase and I leave it here, as a Christmas gift, as a necessary reflection on our work now that we are coming to the end of this 2023, "annus horribilis," as a queen who is no longer with us once said.

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# LET'S ALL WAGE PEACE

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BY TANJA TUMA (INTERIM INTERNATIONAL SECRETARY)

The world has changed since the last newsletter. We're witnessing a new war which divides politicians, communities, and writers, even organizations like PEN International. Yet, in the face of this chaos we must unite in solidarity. If we allow ourselves to sympathize with one victim over another, we risk losing not only our movement of writers, we risk losing the world. The beauty of poetry and prose is there to create and to elicit empathy and, with empathy, to create the space for dialogue. Regardless the circumstances, our mission remains steadfast: to champion the ideal of one humanity living in peace and equality in one world.

In my mind, there is no right or wrong in war, only an inherent evil. Ideologies driving people to fight and die are a curse on mankind. Why do humans tend to listen to the thunder of bombs rather than to the serenade of birds?

"It seems like the whole world is either with Israel or with Palestine. It seems like there is nobody who is actually in the middle, because the only loud people are the ones in the extreme," wrote Nuseir Yassin, Israeli-Palestinian founder of Nas Daily blog page, a community management platform to help bring people together. I am not sure how you can digest the violence of wars, atrocities, expulsions, and death when you are alone with yourself and away from the media noise, when you are submerged in silence. I know that I feel physical pain in my chest and my eyes are itching with tears. The snows of Ukraine freeze in my feet and the fires of Gaza burn in my mind. Is writing statements, essays, poems, and literature enough? I feel helpless. Searching for kindness, the essence of Humanity, which would break the spell feels like searching for the Holy Grail.

In Europe and also in Slovenia many tend to look away from the problems. The Mediterranean is not a mass graveyard of immigrants in the quest for a better life; no, it is the blue seaway of trade connections that could bring prosperity to the peoples living on its shores. The nationalist feelings are still very strong in several states of the former Yugoslavia, yet these states are nevertheless candidates for entry into the European Union who, let's not forget, won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012. The only option of my

former co-citizens (I was born in Yugoslavia) is hope. Young people who have lost hope are now professionals abroad; they, too, are in search for a better life. And the question remains: since 2014, how much income from gas and oil from Russia financed the 2022 invasion of Ukraine? In the quest for better economy, democracies easily lose humanity.



Photo by SutoriMedia

This message should be a New Year's greeting, filled with kindness, love, and hope. Forgive me if I am struggling with words. Maybe I should revert to speak in tiny syllables, uttering the babble of toddlers instead of morphemes, learning the speech of toddlers with hope and sparkle in their eyes.

Well, there is little luxury for silent contemplation. My role in PEN International is larger than me. Hope is my imperative, empathy my tools to create a landscape of dialogue, and solidarity the spark to act. Every day I endeavor to "breathe in terrorists and breathe out sleeping children and freshly mown fields," in the words of our friend and poet Judyth Hill whose poem Wage Peace inspired the movement Women Wage Peace. When you land on their website, you see a dove of peace and slogan We must stop this madness.

As we embark on a new year, let's merge our words and good wishes and take action. Let's "breathe in the fallen and breathe out lifelong friendship intact."

Wishing you a Happy New Year, and I look forward to connecting with you soon.

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# 56TH INTERNATIONAL WRITERS' MEETING AT BLEED

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

Like every year, the focus will be on the PEN International Writers for Peace Committee Meeting, which will hold its General Assembly on the first day of the meeting.

The second day will be dedicated to round tables and discussions. The topics that were chosen this year are:

## **1. Navigating Catastrophe: Writers Unveiling the Impact on Peace** (topic chosen by the WfPC).

Within the spectrum of challenges humankind encounters, catastrophes come in diverse forms, from natural disasters to those instigated directly by human hands, such as war and human rights violations. Frequently, our actions exacerbate the impact of natural disasters, either through contributing causes like climate change and deforestation or in the aftermath through flawed responses. Compounded by existing strife, catastrophes often strike regions already destabilized by conflict.

In the face of these challenges, writers play a vital role. Their literary prowess can spotlight the perils, employ poetry and fiction to memorialize the impact of disasters, and passionately advocate for decisive action. Through the lens of writers, the consequences of catastrophes become not just tales of despair but *narratives* that inspire *awareness* and *impel positive change*.



## **2. Multiculturalism and Dialogue in Balkan Literature**

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

The third and last day will be dedicated to the Faces of Peace Festival, a literary and poetry festival organized in cooperation with Tomorrow's Club of PEN International.

Enough time to discuss the present wars in Israel/Palestine, Ukraine and conflicts in the Global South will be ensured.

The official invitation, registration link, link for hotel reservations, more details about the meeting as well as all other relevant information will be sent to PEN Centres in January.

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

Don't forget to save the date!

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# THE CLIMATE CHANGE SUMMIT THROUGH THE LENSES OF A WOMAN

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BY MAXIMILLIA MUNINZWA (PEN KENYA)

As a child growing up in Africa, nature was the source of our joy and inner peace. It was always on our doorsteps. Green trees, bushes and grasses, brown soil, blue skies and white clouds. Even the amber-coloured sand dunes of the African deserts were so pure in their own right. Abiding by the rules that govern life, the people knew they had a spiritual connectedness with nature and a responsibility to conserve and protect the environment. These rules are written both in the nature of things and in our hearts.

In the environmental gloom of things today, I still cherish the African adage, Treat the Earth well. It is not inherited from your parents; it is borrowed from your children. So, when I attended the Nairobi Climate Change Summit recently, my desire was to contribute towards addressing the increasing exposure to climate change and its associated costs, particularly in Africa. As captured in the Declaration and Call to Action at the end of the Summit, the African leaders agreed to lead the way in finding sustainable solutions to the climate crisis. But I will not delve into it, which I, and my fellow women eco-activists, perceived as being merely a protocol document that offers false solutions.

The pain of seeing our indigenous forests, water and mineral sources endangered and aware of the fact that it is our own leaders who are conniving with foreign countries to decimate and loot Africa's natural resources makes our hearts bleed. The same leaders read impressive declarations at expensive gatherings while millions of their people are living in poverty because of the consequences of Third World debt and misplaced priorities.

The other inconsistency that stood out at the Summit was a glaring absence of women at the decision-making arenas. As often happens, the presence and voices of African women were like an afterthought. It is corporations and the developed imperialist partners and their agencies, who dictated the climate debates and decisions. Yet, it is the women of Africa who are directly affected and pained by climate disasters. It is they who know where and how the shoe pinches. For example, they plant trees on land whose title deeds they don't own.

They walk long distances in search of water to nourish the trees and nurture them, yet they have no say about what happens to those trees. The same women who were told to stop using charcoal and harmful fossil fuels but cannot afford the alternative clean energy, had no major say in critical decision-making spaces at the Summit. This leads to the one crucial question that I hope we shall explore later in depth: What is the role of women in matters climate change?

Further, when addressing climate change matters, we cannot be blind to the fact that trade between the north and the south is unbalanced to a fault. The debt crisis has become a great noose around the necks of African countries, yet this wasn't quite addressed. We know that climate change goes hand in hand with debt and institutional corruption. We see African countries being encouraged to replace their food crops with cash crops for the benefit of the West, yet it is the West that sets the bidding price. Our people are left starving and we have to import food at exorbitant costs, while we can grow food and feed ourselves, but our hands are tied by Agreements and Protocols. Protocols that patent our indigenous crops to benefit the West.



*Photo by Pixabay Nike159*

This was and still is my cry. To bring about a new world, we must be ready to oppose, refuse, and resist the status quo. We must become the mouthpiece to create a deeper understating of the tragedy that is unfolding in Africa, and give the environment a positive new world narrative, and the people, a dignity.

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# THE FALL OF ARTSAKH

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BY KARÉN KARSLYAN (PEN ARMENIA)

Shortly after the Second Artsakh War in 2020, Azerbaijan's Transportation Ministry sponsored the issuance of postage stamps celebrating Azerbaijan's victory by featuring a disinfection specialist standing over a map of Azerbaijan and fumigating the area of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh). Today, this conspicuous fascist statement of an intent to commit ethnic cleansing is a reality. Azerbaijan's authoritarian regime took control of a budding democracy. Over two millennia of the Armenian people's continuous habitation in Artsakh ceased in a matter of days, in October 2023.

What started under the guise of an environmental protest in December 2022, over the months grew into a total blockade. The International Court of Justice, in February 2023, ruled that Azerbaijan "shall ensure uninterrupted free movement of all persons, vehicles, and cargo." This ruling was ignored. And on the 9th month of the blockade, Azerbaijan launched an 'anti-terrorist operation' against Artsakh, on September 19, 2023, thus forsaking its commitment to resolving the dilemma via peace talks mediated by both the EU and Russia. How ironic that an authoritarian regime calls its full-scale military offensive against a democratic republic with far better human rights record an anti-terrorist operation. Everything unfolded in the presence and the tacit permission of the Russian peacekeeping troops that the world considers Armenia's allies.

Prior to the offensive, Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev had repeatedly stated that Artsakh-Armenians would enjoy the same rights as the other Azerbaijani citizens. They were giving assurances that peaceful integration was possible as long as Artsakh defense army was disarmed and disbanded. However, the Azeri troops proceeded with killing civilians in captured villages as survivors fled them. Consequently, as soon as Russia brokered a ceasefire 24 hours after the offensive and the only road connecting to Armenia was unblocked, almost the entire Armenian population of Artsakh, over 100,000 people, fled to Armenia.

Azerbaijan allowed the UN mission to identify the humanitarian needs of Armenians in Artsakh only after all of them had fled their motherland, and, ironically, a couple of days after Ilham Aliyev allocated \$1 million to the UN human settlements program.

Loss of Artsakh for the Armenian people is of catastrophic proportions comparable to the loss of Kars and the Armenian Genocide in the early 20th century.



*Photo by Pixabay Jorono*

Scores of Armenian cultural monuments are in danger as a result of the ethnic cleansing and control over Artsakh. The government of Azerbaijan began its campaign to destroy Armenian cultural monuments by bulldozing up to two thousand intricately carved medieval khachkars (cross stones) in late 1990s and early 2000s in Nakhchivan to erase Armenian presence in that territory. Some of the gems of the ancient Armenian architecture in Artsakh currently face the risk of being either destroyed by Azerbaijan or defaced and attributed to Caucasian Albanians.

This conflict has deep roots extending to the beginning of the 20th century. Artsakh became a bone of contention between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 1918 after they gained independence following the Russian Empire's collapse. With the Armenian Genocide underway, Turkey provided support to Azerbaijan in its quest to gain full control over Nakhijevan, Syunik, and Artsakh, which would link both Turkic nations together.

But the situation changed after the newly formed Soviet Union took over the warring Azerbaijan and Armenia in 1920. The Caucasian Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party decided to make Artsakh a part of Soviet Armenia. However, Stalin, then a new Commissar of Nationalities, reversed the decision, and this majority Armenian region was made part of Azerbaijan without any land border with Soviet Armenia.

The conflict erupted again in the era of Glasnost. Troubled by Azerbaijan's systemic discriminatory practices, Artsakh Armenians started a popular movement for reunification with Armenia but their petition to the Soviet government was denied. With tensions growing, ethnic Armenians and ethnic Azerbaijanis were expelled from their homes in Armenia and Azerbaijan. A number of pogroms against Armenians occurred in Baku and other areas of Azerbaijan. Citing self-determination laws in the Soviet constitution, the Armenian leadership of Artsakh held a referendum for unifying with Armenia. Artsakh declared independence in 1991 and formed military units for self-defense. By the time the USSR collapsed, the scattered clashes had evolved into a full-blown war between newly independent Azerbaijan and the unrecognized Artsakh Republic aided by Armenia. This war ended in a 1994 ceasefire with Artsakh's victory over Azerbaijan.

While close to 250,000 Armenians were forced to flee from Azerbaijan at the onset of the conflict, thrice as many Azerbaijanis were forced to abandon their homes by the end of the first war when the Artsakh army, after liberating its own territories, went on to take over seven Azerbaijani regions surrounding Artsakh to secure a land border with Armenia. They were later used as a bargaining chip in exchange for a status.

30 years of negotiations bore no fruit. Finding mutually acceptable peaceful pathways was becoming less and less possible as oil-rich Azerbaijan was getting wealthier and more authoritarian under President Ilham Aliyev. And his government unleashed a hate campaign against Armenians.

From 2012 to 2014 Azerbaijan implemented what later became known as caviar diplomacy. To lobby for pro-Azerbaijani interests and promote its position on the Artsakh conflict, Azerbaijan used \$2.9 billion to bribe European and American politicians, journalists, lawmakers, and academics.

The commitment to peaceful resolution of the Artsakh problem and the chance to start an era of peaceful coexistence were broken, on September 27, 2020. With Turkey's active support, Azerbaijan launched a full-scale war against Artsakh and won it at the cost of about 8,000 deaths on both sides. The international community's reaction was limited to generic expressions of deep concern and calls on both sides to cease hostilities. No sanctions were implemented to hold the Azerbaijani government accountable for its aggression or to prevent future ones. The Azeri war crimes received little to no coverage.

After EU signed a gas deal with Azerbaijan, in September 2022, the EU President, Ursula von der Leyen, called the authoritarian leader a reliable partner. A few days later, emboldened Azerbaijan attacked the sovereign Armenia territories. The EU once again responded with lukewarm expressions of concern.

Now that empty Artsakh is under Azerbaijan's full control, Aliyev's is likely to target Armenia, which he's been openly calling Western Azerbaijan and repeatedly threatening to take over Syunik, Armenia's southern region, in order to secure a land border with its exclave, Nakhchivan.

An eye for an eye may eventually make the world blind, Gandhi warned. But for now, an eye for an eye makes the world turn a blind eye.

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## PEN INTERNATIONAL CALLS FOR PEACE-DISPEL ALL HATREDS

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In the last quarter of this year 2023, the most significant event affecting world peace has been the worsening of the already delicate relations between Israel and Palestine, following the terrorist attack perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October and the merciless response of the Israeli government, which has since claimed thousands of human lives and immense material damage, particularly in the Gaza Strip. The Writers for Peace Committee of PEN International was instrumental in the publication by our institution of the statement reproduced here. This statement does not refer to any conflict that is threatening world peace, but simply emphasizes the full validity of the “Bled Manifesto of the Writers for Peace Committee of PEN International”, which was adopted in 2013. With the publication of this statement in the Bulletin of our Committee, we wish to reiterate the vocation of our organization, as the world’s leading association of writers, to promote a culture of peace, based on freedom of expression, freedom of thought, and dialogue between all cultures living together on the face of the earth today.

Germán Rojas, Chair WfPC of PEN International

20 October 2023 : In the third decade of the 21st Century humans are able to see into the furthest reaches and most distant times of the universe. We can produce literature, art and music of extraordinary resonance and subtlety. And yet, almost every day in the world we are faced with escalating barbarism, mostly directed against our closest neighbours. Vicious conflicts are currently affecting the whole world.

“PEN respects and defends the dignity of all human beings. PEN opposes injustice and violence wherever they are found, including oppression, colonisation, illegal occupation and terrorism.” Bled Manifesto of PEN International’s Writers for Peace Committee.

Revenge killing, acts of terrorism and retaliation against civilians can never be justified, however passionate the cause or sense of grievance. Any such acts remain an affront to humanity. Atrocity merely provokes more atrocity. Some of its perpetrators know this and find glory in their ability to sow carnage. In doing so they relinquish any claim to sympathy. Their

wish to control territory is no excuse for cruelty and repression.

The behaviour of a depressingly large number of governments makes a mockery of United Nations ideals and commitments to which they have signed up to. When members of the Security Council openly flout its purpose, the world can only mourn their vain irresponsibility. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is at risk not only from such governments, who regard its provisions as optional, but from those resistance forces that believe that their cause justifies butchery. Neither are legitimate. Nobody will survive if we spend this century squabbling over inaccurate readings of history, spurious ideas of nationalism and chauvinistic and intransigent demands about names, territorial boundaries, and flags.

“PEN acknowledges that it is of primary importance to be permanently committed to creating conditions that can lead to ending conflicts of all kinds. There is neither freedom without peace, nor peace without freedom; social and political justice is inaccessible without peace and freedom.” Bled Manifesto of PEN International’s Writers for Peace Committee

PEN International reaffirms the ethical imperative of placing the rights of people at the centre of any action by governments or their adversaries.

To sign up onto this statement, please click





We Lived Happily During The War

And when they bombed other people's houses, we

protested

but not enough, we opposed them but not

enough. I was

in my bed, around my bed America

was falling: invisible house by invisible house by invisible house.

I took a chair outside and watched the sun.

In the sixth month

of a disastrous reign in the house of money

in the street of money in the city of money in the country of money,  
our great country of money, we (forgive us)

lived happily during the war.

by Ilya Kaminsky (PEN America)



## It's on us

It's the old grief again,  
come today,

on this night of Shabbat, of Jumu'ah,

a time to rest, ourselves, our lands, our ancient hatreds.

Would this was a night of olives and honey,  
of figs and pomegranates,  
of sweetness.

Who by heart, and who by soul, who by dream and who by drift,

Who by עֲבוּדָה, by prayer, by صلاة,  
Who by love and who by sorrow  
Who by peace and who by disaster

Homeseekers, Godwrestlers, Journey-makers

Who by light and who by forest,

Today, all are called to stand at the gates of Gaza,  
the walls of Mariupol, in the orchards of Donbas.

Rings and words sewn into our hems,  
our hearts hidden beneath suitcase lining.

Today we cry out for peace  
to the Source of all Light,

to all who will listen,  
all who will hear—

Let them hear!

Today we bless and invite the quiet  
the poem summons,  
be for us an alef bet of safety.

Neruda said,  
If we ...for once could do nothing,  
perhaps a huge silence  
might interrupt this sadness  
of never understanding ourselves  
and of threatening ourselves with death.

Love is the User Manual, on hard days & holy days...  
V'ahavta ...and you shall love...

May our lives be a blessing  
May we live and let live  
each day to its fullest  
for the sake of all that is life,

O New ear, that hears! O little sister, o my brother!

Judyth Hill (PEN San Miguel)



## If I Must Die

If I must die,  
you must live  
to tell my story  
to sell my things  
to buy a piece of cloth  
and some strings,  
(make it white with a long tail)  
so that a child, somewhere in Gaza  
while looking heaven in the eye  
awaiting his dad who left in a blaze -  
and bid no one farewell  
not even to his flesh  
not even to himself -  
sees the kite, my kite you made, flying up above  
and thinks for a moment an angel is there  
bringing back love  
If I must die  
let it bring hope  
let it be a tale.

Refaat Alareer





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