

PEN International Publishers' Circle

PEN International celebrates literature and promotes freedom of expression. Founded in 1921, our global movement now involves 144 PEN Centres in 102 countries. PEN is best known perhaps for its work on the dangers surrounding literature. And indeed, under the direction of our Writers in Prison Committee, PEN is the world's leading expert and actor in this field. Our working list of writers in prison or in immediate danger has over 900 individuals.

Of these, a significant percentage are publishers and editors. And the trials which result are normally opened against both the writers and the publishers.

Full membership in PEN includes tens of thousands of writers, publishers, editors and translators. PEN Centres also have a growing category of associate members who could best be described as readers and people who are particularly supportive of literature. PEN's membership includes the world's best known writers as well as those who are less well known and have regional or national careers. Those most in need of our support may be Nobel Prize winners or virtually unknown outside of their community.

One of our strategies in a number of countries is to support the creation of publishing houses in order to regularize the role and income of writers. This has most recently been done successfully in Afghanistan.

PEN International: Regional Programs

What is perhaps less known is the wide variety of our other activities. Our regional programs, regional meetings in Asia, Africa, Central Asia and Latin America, our regular campaigns, events and publications connect writers and readers wherever they are in the world. We use writing workshops and competitions, mobile libraries, public events, pioneering mentoring schemes and PEN school clubs.

Our PEN Centres in Africa, the Middle East, Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean are using all of these tools too create a culture of reading and writing in their countries.

Access to Literature

In 2009, nearly 20,000 children took part in education projects run by PEN Centres in Africa. PEN also benefits teachers, families and local communities. In the past year:

- Uganda PEN has provided intensive teacher training to more than 50 teachers through the Centre's mentoring network. The Centre is working towards publishing stories written by young Ugandan writers for Ugandan students, which will revolutionise education in Uganda;
- Zambia PEN has doubled the number of users in the community libraries they work with in Lusaka. Through partnerships with local government their work is increasingly influential throughout the entire library system;
- Guinea PEN has established capsule libraries in 40 rural schools, providing free access to necessary textbooks to over 10,000 families.

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Similar stories can be heard from Colombia to Pakistan and from Afghanistan to the Philippines. These are all initiatives in which publishers have an important role to play.

We are active in encouraging translations and the publication of translated works, particularly from smaller languages. Having developed the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights, we succeeded in convincing UNESCO to adopt it in 1996. We are now working to actively promote these rights worldwide and in the long term to convince the United Nations to give it International legal status.

Literature and Human Rights

PEN Centres also use literature as a tool to encourage debate and provoke questions about their societies.

- In Nicaragua, PEN writers visit schools and universities to talk about the contemporary literary scene, and use literature to debate and share ideas about freedom of expression and human rights.
- In Pakistan, PEN's work with teachers and schools is combined with involvement in human rights partnerships promoting freedom of expression for writers and readers.

PEN International: Networks and Partnerships

Networks

With such a variety of PEN Centres around the world we find it increasingly important to decentralize aspects of our work into regional Networks. There are now active Networks in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The European Centres are now organizing themselves into a Network. We also have linguistically-based groups such as the Ural-Altay Network that stretches from Japan through Central Asia and Turkey to Hungary and Finland.

Grouped into Networks, our Centres can focus on local issues with stronger Centres supporting both weaker Centres and those Centres that exist in politically dangerous situations. This approach is central to our work in China and Vietnam, with the Japanese and Australian Centres taking the lead. We have used the African Network in order to build up our literacy programs on that continent.

Partnerships – Writers in Exile

Many of the writers we manage to get out of prison are forced to go into exile, temporarily or permanently. Over the last decade we have developed a system to help them find a country of refuge, to welcome them to a particular city and to assist them in the reorganization of their lives. This involves helping them find a job, a place to live and a circle of friends. We do this either directly through individual PEN Centres (such as the German or Canadian), the support of our emergency fund, or through our close partnership with the International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN). This system now functions in some 30 countries and is expanding.

Partnerships – Young People's Literature

PEN International decided at its 2010 Tokyo Congress to expand its involvement into the broad area of Young People's Literature. We are creating a structure which all of our centres can join in order to work in this area, with a focus on writing, publishing, distribution and reading/literacy.

The Publishers' Circle

All of these activities relate directly to publishing, whether in its most traditional or high-tech form, from books to e-books. The creation of the PEN International Publishers' Circle will bring publishers into the heart of our cause and help us to strengthen the publishing aspects of PEN's work.