



The Day of the Dead Campaign November 2011

Summary of Activities



WE ARE CHILDREN OF CRUEL GODS

We are children of cruel gods.
No point looking at their ruined pyramids.
The blood still hasn't washed from the steps.
Their hands still strangle our dreams.

Their likeness is graven on those stones.
Their ghosts stalk our cities.
Deep in the nightmare their enforcers
lie in wait for us with black daggers.

Should they leave this earth for elsewhere
we will go back to beget them – they'll come back up
from inside us with our features,
appalling, merciless. We, parents of cruel gods.

Homero Aridjis

The Day of the Dead November 2011

Mexico is one of the most dangerous countries in the world in which to practise journalism. In the last five years, 36 print journalists, writers and bloggers have been murdered in connection with their work, and eight have disappeared; most of the dead were involved in reporting on corruption and organised crime. The vast majority of these killings, some of them ritualised strangulations and decapitations, all of them intended to send a message of silence, have never been properly investigated. Most of the perpetrators remain unpunished.

On 2 November 2011, on the day when Mexicans traditionally remember their departed loved ones, PEN International launched its global Day of the Dead campaign. The aims of the campaign were to commemorate our fallen Mexican colleagues, and to call on the Mexican authorities to both bring justice to those responsible for the killings and to end the climate of impunity that exists for those who murder, attack and harass writers.

On the traditional Mexican Day of the Dead, colourful altars are built in public spaces and private homes, where they are decorated with flowers, food, candles and photographs of the departed. With this in mind, PEN centres around the world were encouraged to be creative, to build their own altars and to organise events promoting the aims of the campaign.

The response from PEN centres was even more inspiring than we'd hoped, coming from three continents, and in a dozen languages. Impressive too was the contribution by members of the public, both in Mexico and in other countries. Altars were built, poetry was written and obituaries were placed in newspapers around the world. Particularly encouraging was the number of young people and children who got involved through schools and other organisations. The pages that follow provide a summary of the activities inspired by PEN's campaign.

The energy generated by the Day of the Dead 2011 will drive and inform PEN International's Mexican strategy as we move into 2012.

PEN International thanks all those involved in the design of the campaign, in particular Jens Lohmann of Danish PEN, Tony Cohan of San Miguel Allende PEN, the illustrator Maxine Young, and the various translators who generously donated their time and expertise. Special thanks also go to the renowned Mexican poets Homero Aridjis and José Emilio Pacheco, both of whom wrote poems especially for our campaign.

For more information about the Day of the Dead campaign, and to find out more about the murdered journalists and writers of Mexico, please visit the PEN International web site: www.pen-international.org

Report written and compiled by Cathal Sheerin

Campaign Activities: PEN Centres & Members of the Public



PEN Club Mexico: Mexican artist Paloma Díaz designed and built an altar (above) for the centre's campaign. PEN Club Mexico also collaborated with **American PEN Center** in organizing an awareness-raising event at the Mexican La Palapa restaurant in New York City on 2 November.



PEN Croatia collaborated with the small Mexican community in Zagreb, who - at the Museum of Broken Relationships - built an altar (detail below) dedicated to peace and to building cultural relations between Mexico and Croatia. Croatian PEN designed their own Day of the Dead placards (left and overleaf) directing visitors to the presentation of the campaign which took place at the central city library on 3 November. The event was hosted by Croatian PEN and Ana Ferrera Sandoval, an art theorist from Mexico City who currently resides in Zagreb.



PEN Croatia: placard (above) and detail from altar (right)



PEN Canada built a Day of the Dead altar at Martingrove Collegiate Institute in Toronto. Students visiting the altar signed a petition that was sent to the Canadian Foreign Minister, John Baird. They also listened to poetry written for the campaign by poets Homero Aridjis and José Emilio Pacheco. The photo above shows a student standing beside the altar and reading from the campaign poetry collection. (Photograph by Mary Gaudet)

Danish PEN secured valuable media coverage for the campaign, including the appearance of a board member on the radio, where violence against journalists in Mexico was discussed; an article about the Day of the Dead campaign in a daily



newspaper; a reading by actors of the campaign poetry, broadcast by a digital station. The main event took place on 2 November at The Centre for World Culture in Copenhagen's Latin Quarter. Danish PEN built an altar decorated with photos and texts

both by and about the murdered and disappeared writers. Mexican artist Marco Vallejo created a large art installation, referencing one of José Guadalupe Posada's pictures and showing reporter-skeletons arriving at a crime scene on bicycles (below). The Mexican singer Edith Tamayo (above) dressed as Posada's famous figure, *La Catrina*, and opened the evening event singing Mexican songs related to death. There were speeches by the president of the Danish Federation of Journalists, the president of the Association of Danish Fiction Writers, representatives from the Danish Writer's



Association, International Media Support and Amnesty International (all of which supported and sponsored the event). Tequila, mezcal and Mexican food were served.

Jens Lohmann from Danish PEN also spoke about the situation in Mexico, and the campaign poetry was read aloud by actors. The poetry proved to be especially popular, and Danish PEN received many requests for copies, including from teachers.

PEN Esperanto held a private ceremony in front of its altar, with PEN members and the Mexican consul in attendance.



English PEN: On 2 November English PEN organized a vigil outside the Mexican embassy in London. It was attended by members of English PEN, staff from PEN International, students from the Kings College PEN group, and various scholars and translators. Standing next to English PEN's portable altar, Laura McVeigh, Executive Director of PEN International, spoke about the Day of the Dead and read a poem written for the campaign. There followed readings from real-life case studies and from Latin American fiction in which the campaign's themes of death and violence featured strongly. Staff from the Embassy's human rights programme came out to greet the group and offer their thanks. English PEN provided music and food, and PEN International provided masks (above) based on the campaign logo. A minute's silence was held in memory of the dead. (Photograph by Stephen Brayne)

Italian PEN published two articles relating to the Day of the Dead in *Italian PEN Magazine*, one of which was written by John Ralston Saul, president of PEN International.

Norwegian PEN Centre held a joint press release and a letter was sent to the president of Mexico, Felipe Calderón, written in cooperation with Amnesty Norway, the Norwegian Union of Journalists and the Norwegian Institute of Journalism.

¿Con qué he de irme?
¿Nada dejaré en pos de mi sobre la tierra?
¿Cómo ha de actuar mi corazón?
¿Acaso en vano venimos a vivir,
a brotar sobre la tierra?
Dejemos al menos flores
Dejemos al menos cantos

What should I take with me when I leave?
Shall I leave nothing on earth?
How should my heart respond?
Did we, perhaps, come to live,
to burgeon on earth in vain?
Let us, at least, leave flowers
Let us, at least, leave hymns

(Translation by Paige Mitchell. Poem courtesy of **San Miguel Allende PEN.**)

San Miguel Allende PEN created a 'digital chapbook' for the Day of the Dead campaign, with poems written by current PEN members and Mexican colleagues. It also included calaveras - a humorous Mexican poetic genre where the poet pokes fun at death - and some Nahuatl poetry, such as this poem (left), written by the pre-Columbian poet, philosopher and warrior, Nezahualcóyotl.

Swiss Italian and Reto-Romansh PEN placed three obituaries in daily newspapers on 2 November (left). An article written by one of their members about the Day of the Dead was published in the newspaper *laRegioneTicino*

Il Centro P.E.N. della Svizzera italiana e retoromancia, unitamente ai **Centri P.E.N. della Svizzera tedesca e romanda** si associa nella giornata dedicata ai defunti al dolore del popolo messicano vittima di soprusi e aggressioni rimaste impunte per la connivenza delle autorità locali con la malavita organizzata nel ricordo della barbara uccisione della giornalista



Yolanda

Ordaz de la Cruz

assassinata e decapitata il 24 luglio 2011 per aver condotto un'inchiesta sul narcotraffico nello Stato di Veracruz. Una fra le decine di giornalisti e scrittori scomparsi. L'uccisione della collega giornalista e scrittrice è solo uno dei fatti di sangue che hanno colpito il paese nordamericano negli ultimi anni. Ai colleghi messicani va tutto il nostro sostegno morale nella condivisione di ideali a sostegno della libertà d'espressione e d'opinione.

Swiss German PEN: Placed an obituary (below) in the press on 2 November.



PEN Català Centre opened its altar in Barcelona on 2 November. It organized public readings of poems from the campaign material, and also from those written by their members. The altar was placed in the street-facing window of the offices of *Vilaweb* (left), one of the most popular digital newspapers in Catalunya.

En ce 2 novembre, journée des morts, le

CENTRE SUISSE ROMAND DE PENINTERNATIONAL,
d'un commun accord avec le

DEUTSCH SCHWEIZER PENZENTRUM
et le **CENTRO PENDELLA SVIZZERA ITALIANA E RETOROMANCIA,**

s'associe à la douleur du peuple mexicain, victime d'injustices et d'agressions.
En souvenir de l'assassinat barbare de la journaliste

YOLANDA ORDAZ DE LA CRUZ

décapitée le 24 juillet pour avoir mené une enquête sur le trafic de stupéfiants dans l'Etat de Veracruz, l'une parmi les dizaines de journalistes et écrivains disparus ces dernières années. A nos collègues mexicains vont l'expression de notre soutien moral et l'assurance de notre appui à leurs idéaux de liberté d'expression et d'information.

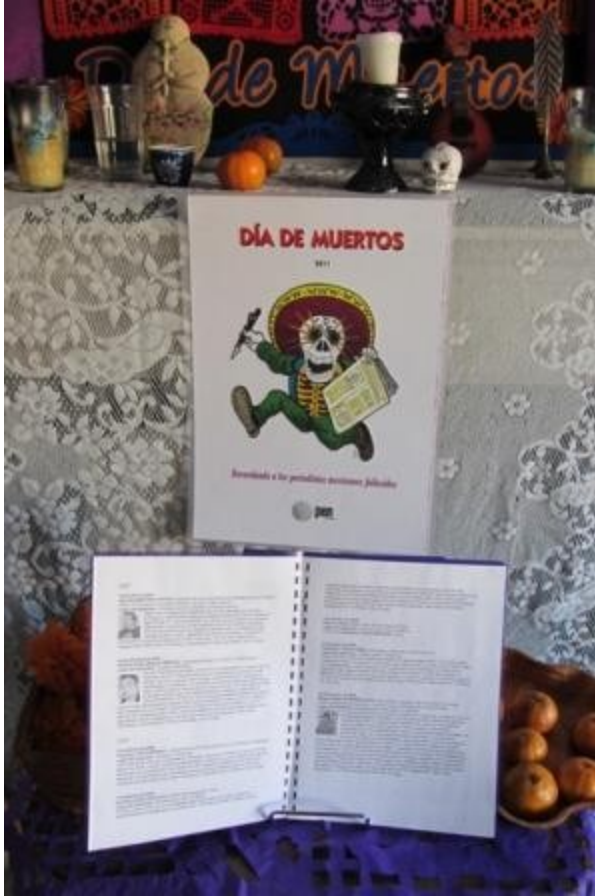
PEN Suisse Romand: on 2 November this centre placed an obituary in the Romand Swiss daily, *Le Temps*, dedicated to Yolanda Ordez de la Cruz, murdered crime reporter and columnist for the Mexican daily newspaper *Notiver*.

Scottish PEN

collaborated with other organizations in two events. The first was on 31st October in the south of Scotland, where readings of the poetry were organized to coincide with an evening featuring the writer Jonathan Falla. On 2 November, Scottish PEN was the



featured act of Marc Sherland's monthly Word Play, a performance-oriented literary extravaganza where many of the participants wore bird masks and unusual hats. A black-draped coffin topped with a colourful wreath was carried onto the stage, and the names of the dead and disappeared were read aloud. The poet AC Clarke read an edited version of Lydia Cacho's 2008 speech to UNESCO. The event ended with a reading in both English and Spanish of Susana Chavez Castillo's poem, *Sangre Nuestra*.



PEN Guadalajara very kindly produced a much-needed Spanish translation of PEN's campaign case list and placed copies of it on its altar (left and below), which was erected at the Writers' School. Students visiting the altar read the list and took copies of it to share with others. PEN Guadalajara added colour to the campaign logo and distributed the poster and the case list among local journalists. This centre will be providing Day of the Dead campaign materials to interested visitors at the Guadalajara Book Fair in late November 2011. PEN Guadalajara was joined in its campaign by the Universidad del Valle de Atemajac (UNIVA) and by the Instituto de Ciencia, both of which built their own respective altars.



PEN Guadalajara's altar (above).

In Mexico, groups of journalists and other members of the public joined with PEN in commemorating our murdered and disappeared colleagues. The journalist Pepe Reveles promoted the idea, which resulted in events in Toluca, San Luis Potosí, Oaxaca, Mexico City and other places. Groups participating included the Club de Periodistas de México (the Journalists' Club of Mexico), and the Frente Nacional de Periodistas por la Libertad de Expresión (the Journalists' National Front for Freedom of Expression). Poems specially written for the PEN's campaign by José Emilo Pacheco and Homero Aridjis were read in front of altars. In Toluca, offerings were made in memory of the murdered journalists and writers, including an emotive indigenous ritual at the Plaza González Arratía. There was a workshop where children (below) could draw and compose calaveras literarias. The President of the Journalists' and Editors' Union of the State of Mexico also participated in the event.





Day of the Dead: indigenous ritual in Toluca, Mexico (above).

The 2011 **Noche de Altares** Day of the Dead celebration in **Santa Ana, California**, included an altar supporting PEN's campaign. The creators of the altar were teachers



and students from Santa Ana, which lies around 90 miles north of the Mexican border and is regarded as one of the hubs of the drug trade between the USA and Mexico. Some of the teachers participating had lost students to drug-related violence, and many of the students of Mexican origin had lost family members due to violence by organized gangs in Mexico. The altar contained over fifty small crosses (left), each bearing the name of one of the murdered Mexican journalists. Crosses also carried the names of slain journalists from Guatemala, China, Russia, Iraq, Syria and many more countries. A ceremonial pan de muerto was placed at the centre of the altar and pierced with pens and pencils, the traditional tools of the journalistic trade. The poems and

essay written for the occasion by Homero Aridjis and José Emilio Pacheco were

distributed among passersby, many of whom showed great interest in the campaign, and expressed interest in finding out more about PEN's work.



Santa Ana, California: PEN's poetry and logo on display.