

**PEN International – Day of the Imprisoned Writer 2011**

**NOVEMBER 15**  
**DAY OF THE**  
***IMPRISONED***  
***W R I T E R***  
**pen**  
INTERNACIONAL

**Report on PEN Centre Activities**

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15 November 2011 marked the 30<sup>th</sup> PEN International Day of the Imprisoned Writer, an annual day of action to recognize and support writers who have resisted repression of the basic right to freedom of expression.

PEN's members from around the world have commemorated the day with a huge variety of advocacy and campaigning activities, ranging from public demonstrations to press conferences, award ceremonies, poetry readings, theatre events and letter writing sessions, to name just a few. Many PEN members also had articles about the campaign published in national and international press.

The huge range of activities highlighted in this report bears testament to the diversity of PEN's membership, the creativity of our Centres and PEN's ability to act as a truly global voice in speaking out on behalf of individuals who have faced persecution and harassment as a result of their work.

Unfortunately it has not been possible to highlight the activities of all PEN Centres in this summary report. However, PEN International would like to take this opportunity to thank all Centres who were involved in activities to mark the occasion.

Finally, the Day of the Imprisoned Writer falls at an extremely busy time of the year for PEN members, with a number other key campaigns occurring during the month of November. It has therefore been very heartening to see that many Centres have linked their Day of the Imprisoned Writer activities with other campaigns which have been taking place during this time, including the Day of the Dead, the International Day to End Impunity and the annual PEN Greetings Card appeal.

We hope that the events outlined below will help us to plan for future PEN International campaigns, and spark new ideas that will inform PEN's fight for free expression in 2012.

For up-to-date information about PEN's current campaigning activity see:

<http://www.pen-international.org/campaigns/current-campaigns/>

## Day of the Imprisoned Writer – Summary of PEN Centre Activities

Catalan PEN's activities for the Day focused on the Mexican writers and journalists who have been murdered in the pursuit of freedom of expression. In **Barcelona** the Centre held a public meeting in the head office of the popular online Catalan newspaper *Vilaweb* on 15 November 2011 (see poster). The event included two poetry sessions in which renowned Catalan writers presented works they had written especially for the occasion. The event was opened by the President of Catalan PEN and the director of *Vilaweb* and also involved presentations from Catalan journalists, musicians and members of the public.



In order to get the different Catalan-speaking territories involved in the Day,

the Centre also organized activities in a number of other locations. On 13 November 2011 they held a public 'Writers for Peace Meeting' in the town of **Argamunt**, in Lleida, which explored issues of freedom of expression in Catalunya and other regions (in particular the Middle East). A number of Catalan poets gave readings on the topic of freedom of speech.



The Centre concluded their Day of the Imprisoned Writer activities with a number of events in **Mallorca**, which placed a special emphasis on engaging members of the public. The events included news conferences, round table discussions and readings, which took place between 21 and 26 November. The Centre also awarded their 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual International Free Speech Award to writer Salem Zenia (pictured here with PEN Catalan President Carme Arenas and Secretary General Raffaella Salierno) at a ceremony in the Mallorcan village of Santanyi.



For more information on Catalan PEN's events, [click here](#).

For more pictures from the events across Catalunya see [here](#).

**Croatian PEN** hosted an event at the Bogden Ogrizovic Library (see poster), which included a panel discussion and readings from the works of their late member Vlado Gotovac, a writer who had been imprisoned during the 1970s, charged with ‘seeking separatism’ and ‘nationalism’ by the Yugoslavian authorities. The event also included readings from a number of other PEN members who have been published in the cultural magazine *Outsider's Fragments*.



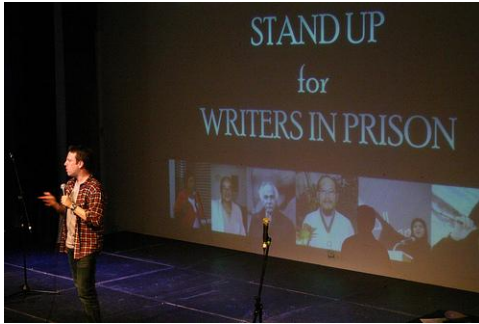
Members were encouraged to join in campaigning and advocacy on behalf of imprisoned writers, in particular, PEN main case and Nobel Peace Prize winner Liu Xiaobo.

**Danish PEN (Dansk PEN)** used their presence at the Copenhagen Book Fair and their media sources within Denmark to campaign and advocate on behalf of the focus cases for the campaign. More than 20 writers were involved in the book fair and events were held over three days. Danish PEN used the occasion to explore in particular the issue of ‘hate speech’ and its bearing on freedom of expression issues.

As a preface to a performance of *Tyranny in Beckett*, a collection of Samuel Beckett’s shorter works at the Smock Alley Theatre in central Dublin, Emer Liston, Chair of **Irish PEN’s** Writers in Prison Committee discussed the Day of the Imprisoned Writer and PEN’s ongoing advocacy work for imprisoned writers. Audience members were encouraged to get involved in the campaign and to write letters of appeal on behalf of imprisoned writers.

**English PEN** hosted a unique evening of theatre, comedy and advocacy entitled *Night of the Imprisoned Writer*, organized with the Ice and Fire theatre and Actors for Human Rights (see picture). The event began with a performance of *Hello Mr. Miller, Hello Mr. Pinter*, a play in which the words of writers PEN has campaigned for over the last three decades – including Burmese comic Zargana, Lydia Cacho, Eynulla Fatullayev and others - were woven together by English PEN’s Cat Lucas and award-winning playwright Sonja Linden.





The play was followed by *Stand Up For Human Rights* comedy performances from Nick Doody (pictured) and Marcel Lucont.

During the event English PEN handed out postcards which audience members could use to write messages of support for Liu Xiaobo. 50 such postcards were collected at the end of the night, which also raised over £1100 for the ongoing work of English PEN's Writers in Prison

Committee.

For a more detailed report on the night see

<http://www.englishpen.org/events/reports/recentevents/nightoftheimprisonedwriter/>

**Finnish PEN** organized an event on 11 November 2011 at the Museum of Contemporary Art in central Helsinki which was attended by around 120 people. The evening was run with a local publishing house, from which a large number of writers attended, and included a presentation on PEN's advocacy for imprisoned writers, focusing on the cases of Vladimir Neklyayev (Belarus), Nasrin Sotoudeh (Iran) and Dawit Isaak (Eritrea). The audience were encouraged to write postcards to the authorities. Finnish PEN have been asked by the Museum to consider organizing similar events there in future.

**German PEN** organized an event at the *Haus der Berliner Festspiele* which was attended by about 200 people. The event was dedicated mainly to German speaking writers who had faced harassment, but also included presentations on freedom of expression in Belarus and the ongoing detention of Liu Xiaobo. There were also literature readings by well known actors Edith Clever and Hanns Zischler and a talk given by the young Palestinian author and journalist Ibtissam Azem.



The German Centre also awarded the annual Hermann Kesten Award to Egyptian publisher Mohamed Hashem, founder of *Merit Publishing House*. Hashem played a crucial role in ensuring that works critical of the Egyptian authorities continued to be published during the uprising against President Mubarak's regime.

**German Speaking Writers Abroad PEN Centre** hosted an event at the WDR Radio



Studio in Cologne which focused on writers and journalists who have been detained in Turkey, in particular addressing the ongoing detention of Ragip Zarakolu (Turkey). The event included readings from the works of German authors who were in exile in Turkey during the 30s and a twenty minute interview with Ragip Zarakolu's lawyer about the publisher's detention. Representatives from other German human rights organizations campaigning on Turkey were also invited to

participate, including the director of the German branch of Amnesty International, who spoke highly of the campaigning work PEN has done in the country. A one hour recording of highlights from the event will later be broadcast by the radio station at a future date.

**New Zealand PEN** held an event entitled 'Writer to Freedom' which focused on the



plight of refugee writers who have relocated to Wellington. The event involved readings from Samson Schele (Ethiopia), Makaei Akan (South Sudan) and Julia Tha (Burma) – pictured here - and Souita Azizi (Afghanistan). The writers



also each told the story of their move to New Zealand. The event was also used to launch a collection of short stories and poems by young refugees in New Zealand entitled 'Beyond the Dark Journey'. New Zealand PEN have designated Day of the Imprisoned writer as 'Courage Day' in memory of outspoken gay writer James Courage.

A full account of the event can be read at

<http://beattiesbookblog.blogspot.com/2011/11/write-to-freedom-refugee-writers-in.html>

**Norwegian PEN** held an awards ceremony at the Oslo House of Literature at which Iranian human rights lawyer Mohammed Mostafari was awarded the 2011 Ossietzky prize "outstanding achievements in the field of free expression". Mostafari, who has successfully appealed death sentences handed to over 50 clients, most of them women and children, was forced to flee Iran in 2010 after being summoned by the authorities. The event also included a presentation from the Secretary General of Norwegian PEN Carl Morten Iversen about the focus cases for the Day of the Imprisoned Writer, and was concluded with poems and music by Jafae Jafarzadeh and Aziz Sangtarash.

**Scottish PEN** held a demonstration outside the Scottish parliament in Edinburgh at which award-winning poet and novelist Ron Butlin was symbolically imprisoned inside a large cage supplied by the Festival Theatre (picture courtesy of Michael McLeod). Scottish PEN Members read poems and prose written by imprisoned writers from China, Mexico, Iraq and Belarus. The event gained a huge amount of public interest, and onlookers were encouraged to get involved in PEN advocacy for the focus cases. The event was filmed by BBC Alba – Scotland’s Gaelic Language TV Station – who are currently making a program about arrested Turkish publisher Ragip Zarakolu. The event was also covered on the BBC’s Book Café and STV online.



**Swedish PEN** have been campaigning extensively on behalf of Belarusian poet and human rights activist Vladimir Neklayev. The writer was due to be awarded with Swedish PEN’s annual Tucholsky Prize at a ceremony in Stockholm’s Culture House; however, he was denied permission to travel to Sweden for the event by the Belarusian authorities as he is under house arrest. The prize ceremony, however, went ahead in Neklayev’s absence, with an empty chair designed by artist Liv Due (pictured) used to honor the writer and mark his absence from the event.



Swedish PEN also organized a number of letter-writing sessions in

which members wrote to imprisoned writers on the PEN International Greetings Card List. Members of Swedish PEN were joined by former International Secretary of PEN Eugene Schougin.



**Swiss Italian PEN** organised a series of events and meetings in Lugano where talks, discussions and reports were presented. **Kurdish PEN**, whose president Berivan Dosky is pictured here (centre), also participated in the events.



**PEN Swiss Romand Centre**, in collaboration with **PEN Swiss German Centre** and **PEN Swiss Italian Centre**, held an event in the Bibliotheque Municipale of Geneva which included a talk and reading from Libyan author Ibrahim al-Koni.



Also to mark the Day PEN Suisse Romand member Nguyễn Hoàng Bao Viêt published an article entitled *Ecrire pour la Vérite* ('Writing the Truth') in the Geneva Independent newspaper Le Courrier and two other articles *Mexique: Journalistes Persécutés* ('Mexico: Persecuted Journalists'), published in the daily Tribune de Geneva, and *N'Oublions pas les Écrivains et Journalistes Persécutés* ('Let us not forget the persecuted writers and journalists'), published in the Swiss newspaper Le Temps.

Le Courrier also published the Centre's *Bulletin des Ecrivains en Prison* on 15 November 2011, which drew special attention to the cases of Abdul-Jalil Al-Singace (Bahrain), Susana Chavez (Mexico) and Dawit Isaac (Eritrea).

**Sydney PEN** hosted an event at the University of Technology, Sydney, including keynote speakers Julian Disney, academic and Chair of the Australian Press Council; Katherine Gelber, Associate Professor in Public Policy and author of 'Speech Matters: How to Get Free Speech Right.

**PEN Turkey Centre** organised a press event on 15 November 2011 demanding the release of detained writer and publisher Ragıp Zarakolu and academic Büşra Esranlı. A joint press meeting was held by PEN Turkey Centre, the Turkish Authors Syndicate, the Turkish Journalists' Society, the Contemporary Journalists' Society and the Turkish Publishers' Association.

The Centre also organized a stand at the Istanbul TÜYAP book fair, which was used to launch the book *The Imam's Army*, by imprisoned journalist Ahmet Şık, eight months after its digital draft was seized by the Turkish authorities. Edited and signed by 125 Turkish writers – among them the world-renowned Yaşar Kemal – the newly entitled THAAAT Book (OOOKitap) was launched on 16 November 2011. Şık was one of the focus cases for Day of the Imprisoned Writer 2011.

Finally, **PEN Uyghur Centre** launched an appeal for the release of imprisoned Uyghur writers in China and calling for the end of all harassment of writers and intellectuals in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.