



DAY OF THE DEAD 2017

Remembering Latin America's fallen journalists

*“Una civilización que niega a la muerte, acaba por negar a la vida.”
 (“A civilization that denies death ends by denying life.”)*

Octavio Paz, from his essay entitled *Day of the Dead in Labyrinth of Solitude*

On 2 November each year, in rites both sombre and festive, the families and friends of the departed in Latin America and beyond commemorate the lives of their loved ones. Families and friends of the departed visit cemeteries to pray, leave offerings and spend time with their late relatives and friends. Altars are constructed in homes and in public spaces, using candles, incense, flowers, special foods and photos to remember the departed. On the Day of the Dead, the deceased are rescued from the shadows of obscurity and oblivion.

Since 2003, at least 180 journalists and writers have been killed or disappeared in countries like Honduras, Mexico and Brazil. Violence, drug-trafficking and impunity are on the rise, affecting writers' ability to exercise their right to freedom of expression. Writers and journalists are faced with innumerable threats, acts of harassment and intimidation, and censorship.

Despite pressure from national and international groups, the vast majority of these killings and disappearances have not been properly investigated or punished, making it impossible to determine who is responsible and the precise motive, preventing the family of the victims to obtain redress, and creating a climate of impunity and fear. However, PEN International believes that it is likely that many of these writers were targeted in retaliation for their critical reporting, particularly on corruption, organised crime, drug trafficking and public security, or for their activism. Moreover, while organised crime groups are responsible for many attacks, state agents, especially government officials and the police, are reportedly also perpetrators of violence against journalists, and complicit in its continuance.

PEN's Day of the Dead campaign aims to focus public attention on the appalling violence and concomitant impunity affecting journalists and writers in Latin America and to mobilise pressure on the relevant authorities to bring an end to it.

On 2 November 2017, PEN members and writers worldwide will be commemorating their fallen Latin American colleagues with traditional Day of the Dead activities such as special altars, as well as with public readings, editorials, interviews and talks.

Suggested actions

PEN members, writers and other interested parties are asked to do at least one of the following on or around Day of the Dead on 2 November 2017:

- Build a Day of the Dead altar in memory of killed and disappeared print journalists and writers for use at a reading, demonstration or other public event (*for details of how to build a Day of the Dead altar, see attachment*)
- Organise a public reading of poetry and articles written for PEN's Day of the Dead and other relevant texts
- Write your own poems or articles to read at events and/or publish in the press (*please feel free to send these to PEN International; we may consider including them in an online anthology at a later date*)
- Place a death notice or obituary in your local or national newspapers announcing the death of one of the journalists listed in the attached documents (you could ask if the newspaper will donate the space). For example:

*Javier Valdez
d. 15 May 2017
and 87 other Mexican journalists and writers murdered between 2004 and 2017
Cause: death by impunity*

- Encourage your national and local media to cover PEN's Day of the Dead 2017: write a press release; publish the poetry and articles written for the campaign and other relevant texts; hold a press conference; carry out media interviews; etc.

For additional guidance and ideas for action, please refer to PEN International's [Guide to defending writers under attack](#) (also available in [Spanish](#)).

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