



International  
Women's Day  
FREESPEAK



exchange  
and dialogue

PEN Melbourne Quarterly

Issue 1  
April 2011

## PEN Melbourne Committee

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Secretary	Jackie Mansourian
Writers in Prison officer	Toni Jordan
Asia and Pacific liaison	berni m janssen
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## Honorary Members of PEN Melbourne

### Anne Bihan

Anne Bihan has lived in New Caledonia since 1993. She was a guest poet/translator representing New Caledonia at the 2008 Franco-anglais Poetry Festival and was subsequently invited to work with berni janssen, co-ordinator of the APWN (Asia and Pacific Writers Network). Anne will be an invaluable link with the Pacific region.

### Seedy Bojang

Seedy Bojang is a journalist and writer from The Gambia. After the closure of independent newspapers in The Gambia, Seedy was briefly employed by the government-supported Gambia newspaper. His employment was terminated because he would not write articles supporting the government.

### Wajeha Al Huwaidar

Wajeha Al Huwaidar is a writer and women's rights activist from Saudi Arabia. Wajeha has often been a lone voice for women's rights, campaigning for women to be allowed to drive cars and against their treatment as second-class citizens.

### Zhang Jianhong

See our statement on the death of Zhang Jianhong on page 9

### Lucina Kathmann

Lucina, an International Vice-President of PEN, has had a long association with the San Miguel de Allende PEN Centre in Mexico and helped establish PEN's Women Writers' Committee. She has travelled through Kurdistan, including into Iraq with Kurdish writers who had been in exile from their homeland. Lucina is a supporter of Latin-American centres, especially of women writers, and lobbied successfully for Spanish to be PEN's third official language.

### Rosa Vasseghi

After facing years of repression in Iran, Rosa has made a new life in Melbourne. She is the author and illustrator of eight children's books, a painter, an organiser of musical gatherings, and is currently completing an Iranian cookbook. In 2009 she published her book *Where is the justice? Stories from behind closed doors*, which documents the stories of women and girls persecuted in a range of countries.

**PEN Melbourne welcomes new honorary members Natallya Radzina and Irina Khalip. See page 11**

## Newsletter Production

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International PEN  
[www.internationalpen.org.uk](http://www.internationalpen.org.uk)



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### PEN Melbourne at The Wheeler Centre: Books, Writing, Ideas

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You will be contacted as soon as possible

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### CAL funding for FREESPEAK, 2011

PEN Melbourne has been successful in attracting a grant from Copyright Agency Limited (CAL) for FREESPEAK. FREESPEAK is a project comprising five events around the notion of 'exchange and dialogue'. These events will promote PEN and the key concerns that PEN upholds in its Charter and its work. PEN Melbourne will organise events in regional areas in order to provide regional writers and the general public in these areas with exposure to and an opportunity to participate in the discussions and critical thinking around the ideas and concepts presented.

The first event will be across cultural poetry and translation salon—a celebration of cultural diversity bringing together local non-English-speaking-background poets and their translators to promote poetry, translation and its publishing and, at the same time, to honour and promote the ongoing importance of Collected Works Bookshop.

Monday 25 July 6.30 for 7pm  
Collected Works Bookshop  
Level 1, Nicholas Building  
37 Swanston Street  
Melbourne



**For further information please contact [elaine.lewis@gmail.com](mailto:elaine.lewis@gmail.com)**

### PEN Melbourne Centre to work with PEN in Cambodia

At a committee meeting on 1 March 2011, PEN Melbourne Centre voted unanimously to support with a donation of \$1000 the setting-up expenses of a PEN Centre in Cambodia. The PEN Melbourne Centre will continue to work with and support the PEN Cambodian Centre.

Asia and the Pacific became the focus region for International Programs in 2009. In July of that year, members of 16 PEN centres from Asia and the Pacific came together at the International PEN Asia and Pacific Regional Conference in Tokyo to further discuss the work of PEN centres in this region.

PEN International is working with the centres in the region to identify their priority areas and ways in which it can support the centres' work. Groups in the Asia Pacific area agreed to work together, exchange information and assist each other.

PEN Melbourne looks forward to a long and fruitful collaboration with the PEN Cambodian Centre.

**Please read the report on the situation in Cambodia on page 32.**

### 77th International PEN Conference

#### Literature—Language of the World Belgrade, 12–18 September 2011

Dear Colleagues and International PEN Members,

You are kindly invited to participate at the 77th International PEN Congress, which will be held in Belgrade (Serbia) in September 2011.

Kindest regards,  
Neda N. Bobic, Secretary-General

#### WELCOME TO BELGRADE!

Belgrade is an ancient European city; people have lived at the estuary of the Sava and Danube rivers for thousands of years. The Old Roman name for Belgrade was Singidunum. Our ruler and writer from the Middle Ages, despot Stefan Lazarević, proclaimed it the capital of Serbia at the beginning of the 15th century.

Belgrade of today is a rushing, dynamic city with more than two million inhabitants. It unifies the many symbols of its deep historical past with all the signs and signatures of the modern age. Over the past couple of years, Belgrade has entered a new phase in its development—an intensive transformation—which has, among other things, once again confirmed its role as an important cultural hub in this part of Europe.

All year round, an intensive cultural life is evident in and around Belgrade. The city has, for decades, been the host of some of the most prestigious cultural events in the world. They have all been organised and supported by different state institutions and independent associations.

The history of Belgrade is a mosaic puzzle of biographies of our famous writers and scientists—Nikola Tesla, Ivo Andrić, Vasko Popa, Danilo Kiš. . .

The Serbian PEN center is one of the oldest PEN groups in the world. It started its life in 1926, thanks to the effort of some of the most influential Serbian writers of that era.

Serbian PEN nowadays has about 100 members, all highly influential Serbian writers and intellectuals working hard to improve regional cooperation and promote Serbian literature worldwide.

All the actions of the Serbian PEN Centre follow one unique ideal: to represent the spirit, the openness, the variety and the richness of our culture in the best possible way.

We wish you a very warm welcome to the Serbian capital!

## President's Report



Arnold Zable

We began 2011 where we left off, defending the rights of persecuted writers. Coinciding with our first scheduled event on 20 March, PEN Melbourne took part in a worldwide reading on behalf of jailed Chinese writer Liu Xiaobo, who had been awarded the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize. Liu, a former president of the Independent Chinese PEN Centre, is serving an 11-year sentence. The reading was organised by the Berlin International Literature Festival as part of its Freedom for Liu Xiaobo appeal.

PEN Melbourne joined with the Melbourne Writers Festival's events co-ordinator, Jenny Niven, in reading the chosen work, Liu Xiaobo's moving poem: *You Wait for Me with Dust*. Dedicated to his wife, 'who waits every day', it personifies one of the most devastating aspects of imprisonment: the separation from loved ones. We include the entire poem at the end of this report.

The organisers of the reading had written: '*A courageous activist all his life, Liu Xiaobo once wrote that "in a dictatorial country, open letters signed by individuals or groups form an important method for the civilians to resist dictatorship and fight for freedom." And so we, citizens of the world, sign this appeal—some with our names, and many, many more with our voices, which will be raised on 20 March 2011 to read Liu's words—and show solidarity with him, and others in China, who are not free to say what they want. We will continue to speak up until there is an end to the unjust incarceration of Liu Xiaobo, and others like him.*'

This week I received a copy of Liao Yiwu's powerful collection of true stories, *The Corpse Walker*, to be published next month by Text Publishing. Liao, a poet, novelist and screenwriter, is a close friend of Liu Xiaobo, and was imprisoned for four years for the publication of his poem 'Massacre' written in response to the Tiananmen Square killings in 1989. Liao continues to be harassed for his writings and courageous defence of fellow dissidents. Last year, just as he was about to leave for a literary festival in Germany, he was removed from the plane and placed under house arrest. Though he remains under surveillance, he has been given permission to travel to Australia in May.

In 2007 he received a Freedom to Write Award from the Independent Chinese PEN Centre. His latest book, *The Corpse Walker*, reconstructs conversations with Chinese citizens whose voices are rarely heard. *The Publishers' Weekly* has described it as 'a stunning series of portraits of a generation and class of individuals ignored in history books and unacknowledged in the accounts of New China.' I have begun reading it, and find it a riveting account of grassroots China, put together by a writer who has sought out lesser-known citizens and outcasts and given them a voice.

PEN Melbourne committee member Toni Jordan continues to respond to Rapid Action Alerts, highlighting urgent cases of imprisoned writers. This is a critical, ongoing aspect of our work.

Judy Buckrich introduced our first event for 2011, 'She Must be Seeing Things: Women, Film and Censorship', at which Deb Verhoeven spoke with great verve, humour and clarity about the role and status of women in film. A report on this event is included in this edition of the Quarterly. Our committee member Cynthia Troup joined Deb for an engaging public conversation that further explored the ideas expressed in Deb's presentation. The event was widely advertised and supported by The Wheeler Centre. We thank the centre's Michelle Dorian for helping to organise the event.

This edition of the quarterly includes a powerful poem by Indigenous writer Rosemary Plummer. I first met Rosemary at the 2009 'Eye of the Storm' NT writers festival in Alice Springs. She was a guest again in 2010 when the festival took place in Darwin. Rosemary is one of an emerging wave of Indigenous writers from Central Australia, many of whom are women like Rosemary, intimately engaged with the challenges of their communities and remote settlements. Often, the only time for writing is late at night. The women impressed me with their life experience, gentle presence, underlying strength and their dedication to the wellbeing of their communities.

In common with other others of this emerging school, Rosemary weaves her Indigenous language into her writing. I once heard her read her work, at night, under the stars, at an event at

Simpson's Gap, and I was taken by the musicality of the language. It belonged perfectly to this wonderful setting. I was also impressed by her succinct, direct expression and the way it captures both the ongoing politics of dispossession, and the enduring spirit of her people and the land that sustains them.

PEN Melbourne is hoping to expand its connection with Indigenous writers in the near future. This has been made possible by a grant from the Copyright Agency Limited (CAL) for a series of events titled 'Freespeak'. The idea was conceived by our committee members Chris McKenzie and Berni Janssen, in consultation with Judy Buckrich and Elaine Lewis. Each event will reflect an aspect of International PEN's mission. The first one will look at translation and a subsequent event will reflect upon Indigenous writing.

As members of an international community of writers, PEN Melbourne joined many other PEN centres in sending messages of support to New Zealand and Japan PEN centres after the earthquakes that devastated their communities. We urge members to continue their support.

We return to Liu Xiaobo's poem. It is a fitting way to conclude our first PEN Melbourne Quarterly editorial for 2011.

Arnold Zable

April 2011

### You Wait for Me with Dust

—for my wife, who waits every day

nothing remains in your name, nothing but to wait for me, together with the dust of our home  
those layers amassed, overflowing, in every corner  
you're unwilling to pull apart the curtains and let the light disturb their stillness  
over the bookshelf, the handwritten label is covered in dust  
on the carpet the pattern inhales the dust when you are writing a letter to me and love that the nib's  
tipped with dust  
my eyes are stabbed with pain  
you sit there all day long not daring to move for fear that your footsteps will trample the dust you try  
to control your breathing using silence to write a story.  
At times like this the suffocating dust offers the only loyalty  
your vision, breath and time permeate the dust in the depth of your soul  
the tomb inch by inch is piled up from the feet reaching the chest reaching the throat  
you know that the tomb is your best resting place  
waiting for me there with no source of fear or alarm  
this is why you prefer dust  
in the dark, in calm suffocation waiting, waiting for me you wait for me with dust  
refusing the sunlight and movement of air  
just let the dust bury you altogether  
just let yourself fall asleep in the dust until I return  
and you come awake  
wiping the dust from your skin and your soul.  
What a miracle—back from the dead.

Liu Xiaobo

9 April 1999

Translated by Zheng Danyi, Shirley Lee and Martin Alexander  
Published by the Asia Literary Review.



Toni Jordan

Since the last newsletter in mid-October, Melbourne PEN and our wonderful volunteers have responded to Writers in Prison alerts on 46 separate occasions, on 37 individual cases. We've written emails and letters to Kyrgyzstan, Yemen, Russia (2), Azerbaijan, Sudan (2), Myanmar, Syria (3), Singapore, Ethiopia, Egypt, Cameroon(2), Iran (2), Armenia, Kuwait, Burundi, Turkey (4), Belarus, Tunisia, Norway, Sri Lanka, Rwanda, Cuba (3), China (2), Angola and Bahrain.

**The last three months particularly have been marked by political and public unrest in a number of countries. At times like these, the work of independent writers and journalists becomes even more important—yet it's also a very dangerous time to be a writer.**

International PEN has issued alerts on a number of countries, including the following:

*Bahrain Writers Association and Bahrain PEN Centre appeal for help in the face of excessive force being used against the unarmed people of Bahrain who are exercising their legitimate rights for a democratic system.*

*Since 15 March 2011 unarmed citizens who were expressing their protests peacefully have been brutally attacked. Systematic attacks by security services on many Shi'ite cities and villages has resulted in a number of deaths and hundreds wounded.*

*At dawn on Wednesday, 16 March, mounted riot police, backed by the armed forces of Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates, without warning, attacked hundreds of families at the sit-in on Pearl Square, using Apache helicopters and all kinds of firearms. They closed all ports to prevent the protestors' escape, and also prevented the access of medical aid and ambulances.*

*After that, riot police besieged and raided the main Salmanya hospital. The Bahrain International Hospital and Ibn Al-Nafees hospital were also surrounded, and as a result the number of deaths is expected to rise because people could not be treated. More troops from neighbouring countries in the Gulf are expected to arrive in the coming days, in violation of the fundamental principles of freedom and democracy.*

*Bahrain Writers Association and Bahrain PEN Centre appeal to the international community to rapidly intervene to provide protection for the defenceless people of Bahrain in the face of oppression and brute force exercised by the Bahraini authorities and Gulf allies.*

But here is better news, from Egypt:

*Egypt PEN reiterates its support for the Egyptian Youths' Revolution and their calls for free expression along with political and economic reform. The first stage of this revolution is over. Before we move on, this is the time to send our condolences to all those families whose children were sacrificed while struggling for the liberation of our country from a corrupted regime that had usurped power for 30 years. We, of Egypt PEN, associate ourselves with their demands.*

*The Youths' Revolution unified the people of Egypt in Tahrir Square and throughout Egypt around the common goals of reconstructing our society and addressing the unacceptable levels of inequality and poverty in the country. This can only be accomplished through the restoration of full freedom of expression, which means freedom of the mass media—whether print, radio, television, or Internet. We call for the end of all forms of censorship of creativity, the end of book seizures, and an end to the censorship of dramatic works. We call for the abolition of all penal laws that imprison people on grounds of their political or religious views. All of this can only be accomplished with the ending of the Emergency Laws.*

*The Youths' Revolution has demonstrated that both free expression and ideas based on facts are powerful weapons when people are faced with oppression. What has been lost over three decades cannot be restored overnight. However, we call upon the Council of the Armed Forces to uphold the promise of the Youths' Revolution by adhering to the principles of free expression and transparent democracy.*

Toni Jordan

March 2011

### PEN Melbourne mourns the death of prominent writer and honorary member Zhang Jianhong

Dear everyone,

Mr Zhang Jianhong, a member of Independent Chinese Pen who was also an honorary member of Melbourne PEN has passed away. Following is an ICPC Statement on his passing.

Thank you very much for the honour you gave to Mr. Zhang Jianhong and your long support to all of the writers in jail in China.

Helen (Jia Zhen)

1 January 2011

#### ICPC Statement on the Death of Zhang Jianhong

Independent Chinese PEN Centre (ICPC) mournfully announces that its beloved member Mr. ZHANG Jianhong passed away yesterday at a hospital in Ningbo City, Zhejiang Province, East China, on New Year's Eve. Mr. Zhang, also an honorary member of Melbourne PEN and PEN America centres, was a freelance writer better known by his penname, Li Hong.

He was a former prisoner of conscience who had been released on medical parole after having served 3 years and 9 months' of his original six-year sentence for the offence of 'inciting subversion of state power' by his writings. He had been under intensive care in a hospital for severe amyotrophic lateral sclerosis since his release on 5 June 2010.

Mr. Zhang Jianhong, a prominent poet, playwright, editor and author in Ningbo, was born on 6 March 1958 in Yin County, Zhejiang Province. He started publishing his poems and essays as a university student in 1980. In 1985, he joined the Writers' Association of Zhejiang Province and became an editor of *Wenxue Gang (Literature Harbour)* magazine. In 1988, he was appointed the deputy secretary-general of the Writers' Association of Ningbo City and the director of its committee for poems, essays and reportages.

**In 1989, the Public Security Bureau of Ningbo City jailed Zhang Jianhong for a 'three-year re-education through labour' on a charge of 'counter-revolutionary propaganda and incitement' for his support of the student-led pro-democratic movements throughout China. As a result, he was expelled from the Writers' Association and dismissed from all his posts.**

In 1991 he was released with a reduction of 18 months off his sentence, after which he had become a freelance. He was a prolific author of numerous books, poems, plays, novels and essays, and his several TV series have been broadcast on CCTV and also published on DVD.

Zhang Jianhong was editor-in-chief of *Zhejiang Shaonian Zhuojia Bao (Zhejiang Children's Writers News)* for some months before he resigned in August 2005 to be the founding editor-in-chief of the humanity and literature website, *Aiqinghai Net (Aegean Sea)*. The website soon became very popular among intellectuals but only seven months later, on 9 March 2006, it was closed down by the Zhejiang News and Communication authorities.

Since then he had been publishing his articles at various overseas Chinese websites, including Boxun, Minzhu Luntan, Dajiyuan, Yi Bao, Guancha, Minzhu Zhongguo until he was arrested in September 2006. On 19 March 2007, Mr Zhang was sentenced to six years' imprisonment and one year's deprivation of political rights for 'inciting subversion of state power', based only on his on-line writing and publishing of 62 articles of dissent.

On 15 May 2007, the month his appeal was rejected, Mr. Zhang Jianhong, in declining health, was diagnosed with a rare neurological disorder due to muscular atrophy caused by nerve damage during his detention in early 2007. Since October 2007, he had been held in Zhejiang Provincial Prison General Hospital, Hangzhou, the capital city of Zhejiang Province. Although paralysed and unable to manage his daily functions without a personal aide, his application for medical parole under doctors' advice had been continually turned down for no valid reason until his disease was diagnosed as amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, by which time he was unable to breathe without an intensive-care ventilator.

PEN International, of which ICPC is a branch, and other international human rights organisations extremely concerned about the case of Mr. Zhang Jianhong, had called several times on the Chinese authorities and international communities for his release and raised funds for his treatment. Although he was released on medical parole six months ago, it was too late to save his life.

**ICPC considers Mr. Zhang Jianhong as the most recent victim of contemporary literary inquisition in China and one of the worst cases in the 30 years since China started its policy of 'reform and opening-up' in the late 1970s.**

ICPC holds the relevant authorities in China responsible for the development of Zhang's disease, for delaying medical parole for proper treatment, and for his premature death. Therefore, ICPC angrily condemns and strongly protests against the Chinese authorities and calls for the investigation of this case. ICPC also calls on the Chinese authorities to take note of this case in dealing with all applications for medical parole submitted by prisoners, especially ICPC members Shi Tao and Yang Tianshui, and its honorary members Zheng Yichun, Xu Wei, Hu Jia, Huang Qi and Tan Zuoren, and others who are suffering severe ill health.

Mr. Zhang Jianhong was a long-standing activist for freedom to write in China where there has long been a lack of freedom of speech and freedom of the press. He made an outstanding contribution to the creation of contemporary Chinese literature, defending freedom of speech and the promotion of civil society in China. His passing is an irrecoverable loss to us, but the large number of his works devoted to the spirit of freedom to write will be the valuable outcome for Chinese literature and heritage. Defending freedom of expression and promoting the free development of Chinese literature are ICPC's aims. Therefore, to uphold the spirit of PEN is our best way to commemorate Mr. Zhang Jianhong. ICPC expresses its deepest condolences on the passing of Mr. Zhang Jianhong, and shares in the mourning of his widow, Ms. Ong Min, and his family.

May Mr. Zhang Jianhong rest in peace!

PEN International is the oldest human rights organisation and international literary organisation. The Independent Chinese PEN Centre is among its 145 member centres. We aim to protect Chinese writers' freedom of expression and freedom to write worldwide, and advocate for the rights of Chinese writers and journalists who are imprisoned, threatened, persecuted or harassed.

#### Dr Yu Zhang

Executive Secretary and WiPC Coordinator,  
Independent Chinese PEN Centre (ICPC)  
Websites: <http://www.chinesepen.org> and <http://www.liuxiaobo.eu>

#### Background to the situation in Belarus

Belarus is often referred to as Europe's last dictatorship. The former soviet republic retains many characteristics associated with the old Soviet Union, including the name of its security services, the KGB. Through a combination of state violence and corrupt elections, the president, Alyaksandr Lukashenka, has maintained power there for the past 16 years. During this time, three opposition candidates have disappeared, more than 4000 people have been imprisoned on political charges, and countless others have been arrested or beaten up by the state security services.

In December 2010, Lukashenka was returned to office for the fourth time with an incredible 80 per cent of the vote in an election that international observers condemned as flawed and lacking in transparency. Thousands of protesters flooded the streets of Minsk demonstrating against the result, and were set upon by riot police and KGB agents who used extreme violence—including stun grenades—to disperse the crowd. More than 600 people were arrested, including six of the nine opposition presidential candidates, and about 20 journalists. The Minsk office of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), which criticized the lack of transparency during the election, was forced to shut down. In February 2011, the European Union reinstated a visa ban on Lukashenko and 157 members of his government.

#### Freedom of Expression in Belarus

**Independent journalists and writers put their lives at risk working in Belarus. For writing negatively about the government, journalists have received death threats, been beaten up and arrested. Sometimes Belarusian authorities have targeted their families, intimidating spouses and children and ransacking homes.**

Following the mass arrest of journalists and opposition activists on 19 December 2010, KGB teams raided newspaper offices and journalists' homes all across Minsk, confiscating reporting materials and computer equipment. A presidential candidate for the Tell the Truth movement and a former President of Belarus PEN, writer Vladimir Neklyayev, was one of those brutally beaten and detained without access to medical treatment or legal advice.

Leading journalists such as the editor of the pro-opposition news website *Charter 97*, Natallya Radzina, and a correspondent for the Moscow newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*, Irina Khalip, were among those arrested and placed in KGB isolation units.

During 2010, Lukashenka's government implemented laws that strictly regulated the use of the Internet, and the news website *Charter 97* came under a series of heavy cyber attacks. The attacks are widely considered to have come from the government. On 3 September 2010, noted *Charter 97* journalist and opposition activist, Aleh Byabenin, was found dead, hanging by his neck. Although the authorities quickly declared the death a suicide, family and colleagues believe the KGB was behind it: Byabenin had been openly critical of the Lukashenka regime and had been a vocal supporter of an opposition presidential candidate.

#### Relevant Human Rights and International Treaties

The UN Declaration of Human Rights was devised in 1948 in the aftermath of World War II as 'a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, ... shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms.'

The UDHR served as the foundation for the original two legally-binding UN human rights Covenants: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. Although the declaration is not legally binding, it continues to be widely cited by academics, advocates, and constitutional courts.

Belarus has been a member of the United Nations since 1945.

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

*Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.*

The ICCPR was adopted in 1966 as a means of enabling states to pledge their commitment to the rights it enshrined. The rights broadly reflect those in the UDHR, although most articles are more detailed, and there are additional rights not included in the declaration. Signing the ICCPR also indicates a state's agreement to come under scrutiny by the UN Committee on Human Rights, based at the UN headquarters in New York. States are required to report on their adherence to the ICCPR every four years and are then subject to interview and questioning by the Committee.

Article 19(2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights:

*Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any media of his choice.*

Belarus ratified the ICCPR in 1973.

### PEN Melbourne welcomes Belarusian writers Natallya Radzina and Irina Khalip as honorary members



Natallya Radzina

#### Natallya Radzina

The Writers in Prison Committee (WiPC) of PEN International calls for the immediate lifting of the severe restrictions placed on the movements of Belarus journalist and editor Natallya Radzina [Natalia Radina], and for the dismissal of the political charges against her.

Radzina was arrested by the KGB on 19 December 2010 during the mass detentions that followed protests against the results of Belarus's flawed presidential elections. She was badly beaten, detained in a KGB isolation unit and charged with 'organizing and participating in mass disorder.' In late January 2011 she was forced by the authorities to relocate from Minsk to the town of Kobrin. Her passport has been confiscated and she must report to local police daily.

Radzina faces at least 15 years in prison if convicted. The WiPC considers Radzina's charges to be a politically motivated breach of Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Belarus is a signatory.

Natallya Radzina is an editor for the pro-democracy news website *Charter 97*. She was detained alongside all the staff and volunteers at the website on 19 December 2010. During her arrest she was badly beaten and there were distressing reports that she suffered bleeding from the ears. During her almost two months in detention, she was denied adequate medical treatment and legal advice. Currently, Radzina is prohibited from visiting Minsk, where she has been living and working for the past 15 years. Although she has not been barred from working as a journalist, she has been told to avoid making 'value judgments' in her work. However, she is barred from speaking about the case against her and her lawyer has been forced to sign a gagging order.

Radzina has suffered harassment at the hands of the Belarusian authorities throughout her working life. In an interview that she gave in May 2010 to the freedom of expression organisation, Index on Censorship, she described her life living and working as a journalist in Belarus:

*It's difficult for me to describe the 16 years that Belarus has suffered under the dictatorship of Alyaksandr Lukashenka [Alexander Lukashenko]. Half my life. People have been killed, abducted, arrested, intimidated, jailed and blackmailed by the regime throughout these years. ... Two criminal cases have been opened against the Belarusian opposition's most popular internet resource: charter97.org. In March our office was raided and eight computers were seized. I was beaten by a masked policeman. I am called in for interrogation all the time. It's annoying and hinders my work. This is the aim of the authorities. Two criminal cases have been initiated against Charter 97, in connection with articles about the corruption among high officials, that had allegedly defamed a KGB regional head, and with readers' comments on the articles on our website.*

Amnesty International has declared Natallya Radzina a prisoner of conscience.

1 April 2011 news: *Charter 97.org* editor-in-chief Natallya Radzina has informed *Charter 97* that she is out of reach of the Belarusian KGB. She has made a getaway to a place of safety.

<http://charter97.org/en/news/2011/4/1/37306/>

[http://www.ifex.org/Belarus/2011/02/01/house\\_arrest/](http://www.ifex.org/Belarus/2011/02/01/house_arrest/)



*PEN Melbourne celebrates International Women's Day 2011*

### Writers for Peace International Conference Haifa, Israel, 14 December 2010

The International Conference of Writers for Peace took place in Haifa with 40 writers from 13 countries in attendance.

The objective of the conference was to discuss issues concerning peace and freedom of expression. It brought together people from many parts of the world to meet each other and become friends, if they weren't already.

The choice of time and place, coinciding with the Holiday of Holidays Festival—which celebrates Ed Al-Adha, Hannukah, and Christmas—underlines the intention to carry on a free and frank discussion of issues specific to the region.

Many themes were discussed in this spirit, such as Language of Writing; Literature Facing the Challenges of our Time—Environment and Peace; Liberty of Conscience and Freedom of Expression; Writers in Periods of Conflict; and Human Rights.

Writers from different places, with profoundly different opinions, told their personal stories, but they were all united in understanding the necessity and urgency of searching for a peaceful solution to the problems of Israelis and Palestinians.

The reduced participation of Arab and Palestinian writers, despite the insistent invitations, remains an open issue. But such participation in future meetings is very necessary: the hall should not be half empty again. Writers and intellectuals should continue to pursue dialogue with each other even in complex situations, making full use of freedom of expression and in complete independence of political authorities.

The main issues of the Haifa Conference can be summarised in the following three points:

- 1) Freedom of conscience is only a first step but no guarantee of freedom.
- 2) It remains to be seen whether Israeli and Palestinian writers will fight for freedom of expression to make peace or whether they will tolerate the various kinds of censorship.
- 3) If peace is to become a basic human right, it needs to be constructed through education, attention, dialogue, and artistic creation.

Similarly, during these past few days we have seen countries such as Turkey, Egypt, Jordan, Cyprus, and Greece sending assistance and support to Haifa to extinguish the fire that has ravaged the region and caused 40 deaths. Such solidarity reveals that there can always be a will to work together in emergencies. If people are able to come together under such tragic conditions, they can also cooperate in order to make peace.

**Antonio G. Della Rocca**

President, PEN Trieste, Italy

As part of our celebrations for the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day PEN Melbourne held a fabulous event at The Wheeler Centre featuring feminist film historian Deb Verhoeven speaking about women and film making. As part of the program, PEN Melbourne committee member Cynthia Troup also talked with Deb in a Q & A session.

Deb was able to show us many examples of previously unseen or rarely seen footage taken by women filmmakers in very difficult situations. It is always enlightening to be reminded of the difficult circumstances creative women have faced and continue to face around the world. Deb herself has written about her presentation so I will not duplicate, but thank her for the marvellous afternoon we all enjoyed. As immediate past chair of PEN International's Women Writers' Committee I am delighted that we were able to have someone of Deb Verhoeven's eminence talk to us. She was not only informative but also very entertaining.

Judith Buckrich

#### Introducing International Women's Day and Deb Verhoeven

Each year in March, PEN Melbourne celebrates International Women's Day with an event focused on women writers to draw attention to the vital work of the International PEN Women Writers' Committee. For 2011, the occasion was organised in partnership with The Wheeler Centre, and took place in the centre's auditorium on Sunday afternoon, 20 March. Titled 'She Must Be Seeing Things: Women, Film and Censorship', the theme of this year's event acknowledged the pertinence of global screen culture to an appreciation of the long history of women's resourcefulness and creativity in defence of their freedom of expression. Screen culture includes not only cinema, digital video, and the film industry, but also on-line video sharing websites and social networking services.

The speaker was film historian and critic Deb Verhoeven, Chair and Professor of Media and Communication at Melbourne's Deakin University. Verhoeven had prepared a highly original and engaging presentation structured as a series of five case studies. Each of these foregrounded a different aspect of screen culture through discussion of a particular, remarkable woman who has variously highlighted—and sometimes influenced—habits of women's exclusion that still prevail in the mainstream media industries, habits usually associated with broader, systemic forms of censorship. Opening with a protest video made by Wajeha Al Huwaidar in 2008, Verhoeven re-titled her talk 'The Road Less Travelled: Women, Mobility and the Movies', linking the five case studies by thought-provoking observations on the relationship between women's social mobility and their visibility in the history of cinema—their roles in the businesses of filmmaking, film distribution, and cinema-going. Other subjects of the case studies were Mary Stuart Spencer, known as 'Señora Spencer' (1871–1940), who was one of the world's first female projectionists; controversial Saudi Arabian film director Haifaa Al-Mansour (1974–); a necessarily anonymous North Korean film distributor, and Australian émigrée, actor, writer and filmmaker Catherine Duncan (1915–2006).

Deb followed her formal presentation with 30 minutes of conversational Q & A with Cynthia Troup. Drawing on the context of the case studies, the discussion included broader reflections on the significance of the international film festival circuit as a source of support for risk-taking filmmakers and distributors; on the history and conditions of internet censorship in different nation-states, and on the power of the image—as distinct from that of the word—to cultivate human empathy on a global scale.

## Feature



Deb Verhoeven speaks about film history and activism, 20 March 2011, The Wheeler Centre  
Photo: Cynthia Troup

Although it competed with one of Melbourne's picturesquely sunny autumn days, the event drew a very attentive audience of 60 or so. As PEN Melbourne's president, Arnold Zable, remarked after the event, Verhoeven is a vivacious communicator who conveys information with humour, rich anecdotes and stories while staying true to the rigour required of topical research and documentation. Indeed, Verhoeven can be said to 'break the academic mould', moving effortlessly between the boundaries of academia and activism, in a way well aligned with the aims of an organisation such as International PEN.

The event coincided with the 20 March date of the 2011 'Worldwide Reading for Peace' organised by the Berlin International Literature Festival. The initiative this year was dedicated to the imprisoned Chinese dissident writer and 2010 Nobel laureate Liu Xiaobo. To participate in this campaign, PEN Melbourne entered into partnership with the Melbourne Writers Festival. Following a brief introduction by Arnold Zable, MWF Program Manager Jenny Niven read Xiaobo's poem, 'You Wait for me with Dust' translated into English by Zheng Danyi, Shirley Lee and Martin Alexander. This poem was written by Xiaobo for Liu Xia, his wife, in 1999. It served as a poignant reminder of the unremitting urgency of the work of International PEN, its committees and centres throughout the world, and a stirring beginning to the afternoon at The Wheeler Centre.

### Cynthia Troup

*The following is a short extract from Deb Verhoeven's presentation, which opened with reference to the activism of PEN Melbourne honorary member Wajeha Al-Huwaider.*

#### The Road Less Travelled: Women, Mobility, the Movies

I am by trade a film historian. My academic specialisation is the history of cinema-going. You could be excused for thinking this is a somewhat prophetic pastime since all current indicators suggest that the practice of going to the cinema (certainly as we have experienced it) is about to become history.

But there are many such paradoxes in the world of cinema. Consider the position of filmmakers in Saudi Arabia, a country in which cinemas are officially banned. I often speak about the philosophical conundrum of the largely invisible Australian cinema in terms of the question, *If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?* Much more starkly, if Saudi Arabian films can't actually be seen by the local audiences they are intended for, are these films and their filmmakers effectively silenced?

It should go without saying that films are made to be seen. They are intended to be distributed through space to audiences. Conversely, audiences travel to see them. My interest is in how films themselves move and how they move people—not just emotionally but logistically.

The method by which films find their audiences and audiences find films is sometimes just as important, if not more important, than the specific qualities of a film's content. The act of moving films—of getting them to an audience—is never a transparent or passive connection between a place of production and a place of consumption. And for some film distributors and audiences it can involve a journey fraught with personal difficulty and occasionally danger.

For example, for Saudi Arabian film audiences, the drive to the 'local' cinema is a somewhat longer journey than for most, all the way to neighbouring Bahrain. The film *Cinema 500 km* (Abdullah Eyaf, 2008) traces this expedition in some detail. In Bahrain, cinema owners claim that during holidays 80–90 per cent of their customers are Saudis.

This background sketch, revealing an intimate link between driving and cinema-going in Saudi Arabia, brings me to the short film I want to briefly discuss. On International Women's Day in 2008, the Saudi feminist activist Wajeha al-Huwaider posted a video on YouTube in which she is shown driving a car in a rural area—where women drivers are tolerated, despite widespread restrictions on their movement. The year 2008 was particularly important for the women's 'right to drive' campaign in Saudi Arabia: activists collected some 1000 signatures on a petition which sought to convince King Abdullah to revoke the ban on women's driving.

Huwaider's short film suggests several things to a western film critic: it neatly undermines a staple motif of so much documentary cinema and news reportage—the 'driving interview'. In the conventional driving interview, the filmmaker sets the subject behind the steering wheel to discuss just about anything except driving a car, the point being to exploit the camera's capacity for capturing moving vision. Yet in her video, Huwaider speaks directly to the camera about what she is doing; about *driving*. In this instance the moving image itself becomes a metonym for a larger vision for Saudi women's lives. This is an intelligent example of the medium's contributing greatly to the message—if not 'the medium being the message'.

Huwaider's point is most effectively made in video form, and has the added advantage of being easily and widely distributed outside the formal conventions of cinema release. Stewart Brand once famously observed that 'information just wants to be free'. What Huwaider's short drive around the backblocks somewhere in Saudi Arabia seems to further suggest is that women—and cinema—also legitimately aspire to be free: unconfined, uncensored, dynamically and potently at liberty.

#### Useful Links

- Edited video footage from the 20 March 2011 event at The Wheeler Centre can be found through the following web page: <http://wheelercentre.com/videos>
- <http://bit.ly/htseeI> [Wajeha Al-Huwaider driving]
- <http://wapo.st/dWieai> [Wajeha Al-Huwaider, 'Saudi Women Can Drive. Just Let Them'. *Washington Post*, August 16, 2009]
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deb\\_Verhoeven](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deb_Verhoeven)

### Deb Verhoeven

## Feature

### Whoop-Dee-Doo at the UN: Bachelet Girls Stand Up for Women



Dr Michelle Bachelet

#### Lucina Kathmann reports on progress for women at the UN lead by Dr Michelle Bachelet

By last year the murmurs had become a loud chorus. When I came to the United Nations in New York in March 2010 for the meetings of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), everyone was talking about the ‘new gender entity’ at the UN; it would be created very soon.

This is typical of the United Nations. Everyone suddenly starts talking about some strange thing which sounds extremely awkward in every language. What is a gender entity, much less a new one? I started wondering: Would we soon be saying things to each other like ‘Bye bye, I’ll be seeing you around the Entity’?

I knew a little about the background because of publicity generated by the GEAR campaign, (Global Gender Equality Architecture Reform), the coalition of women’s organisations which had mobilised for reform within the United Nations system. The UN has had at least four different organisations with a special mandate to women. There was confusion over which problems were in the province of which organisation. Some sorts of problem were well covered; others hardly addressed at all.

The GEAR campaign people said the problem was larger than that.

**All the programs for women were underfunded and lacked prestige; there was no priority program for women anywhere within the system. No wonder the Division for the Advancement of Women couldn’t advance many women; there had never been a woman Under-Secretary-General.**

The UN lower ranks were filled with women; in the higher ranks there were few. The GEAR campaign said women were sick of band-aid and stopgap measures. We needed a new gender entity with muscle, under a woman who was really, really high.

GEAR won the battle. On 2 July 2010 a new gender entity was created. It would subsume some of the existing UN women’s mechanisms and start new initiatives. It finally got a name: UN Women. Best of all, its head was to be an Under-Secretary-General. That sounded good, but what woman had a high enough profile to unite us? I could not think of one, and I worried for two months.

On 14 September the Under-Secretary was named. I can’t remember where I was when I found out, but I remember jumping for joy. It was the former president of Chile, Dr Michelle Bachelet, under whose leadership Chile had grown by leaps and bounds. Her father died in one of Pinochet’s jails; it fell to her to finish off the most deep-seated effects of Pinochetism in her country. A paediatrician by training, she finished her term as president in 2010 with the highest approval rating of any president in Chilean history. Many of us had already been ‘Bachelet girls’ for years, and there are plenty of ‘Bachelet boys’ too. In fact, the 20 nations of Latin America are already peppered with her supporters.

The official launch of UN Women was scheduled for 6.30 p.m. on Thursday, February 24 at the UN headquarters in New York. In January, I got an invitation to attend, and I wasted no time signing up for a ticket. I was there when the doors opened at 5.30, and I got a seat in the huge General

Assembly only a couple of rows from the front, next to some very nice girls from South America who were passing out buttons promoting a 5th World Conference for Women. Women were jumping up on the high dais in the Great Hall trying to have their friends take their photos. Women in saris, in niqabs, in suits, in grand boubous, in mini-dresses, in hijabs. The guards shooed them away with limited success.

The event began. One after another fascinating speaker took the stand, followed by another and another. Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon appeared, at his usual best, having a complete fit about violence against women; then the Under-Secretary-General herself in a bright blue suit, speaking in three languages, and Nicole Kidman, who is Goodwill Ambassador for the Secretary-General’s Campaign against Violence against Women; plus Ted Turner, Geena Davis, Shakira, Princess Cristina of Spain, a woman who led a peacekeeping army in Sierra Leone composed entirely of Indian women, and more. Most appeared live, but some of the Hollywood actresses sent videos. It was staggering. The show ended with a song especially composed for the occasion: *We Are One Woman*. Here is a link to a webcast of the event: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKAf5IOdML4> At the end you will see us all on our feet, singing and dancing in the aisles.

Afterwards, I dropped to earth with a bump when someone asked, ‘What exactly does UN Women propose to do?’ I couldn’t tell from that event alone. The speakers mentioned a few areas of concern, but mostly, it was just a launch. They said ‘Whoop-dee-doo!’ and we all agreed, and it was beautiful.

It was like another morning when I had arrived at the chapel at the Church Centre at the United Nations, where the morning NGO briefing takes place, in time to join the end of their morning worship service. A Brazilian Methodist minister, Margarida Ribeiro, had everyone dancing around the pews. I did *dos-y-dos* with a Salvation Army officer in uniform, and many other colourful characters.

However, at the time of the launch I already knew that I would know more soon. Bachelet had already called for 15 NGO representatives from each region for a consultation on the following Saturday. At that event she told us about the priorities for UN Women. Partly to avoid duplicating existing UN mechanisms, she has set these five priorities:

1. Empowerment and visibility of women in the public sphere
2. Violence against women
3. Peace and security (implementing Resolution 1325 mandating women’s inclusion in peace processes)
4. Economic power
5. Gender budgeting

Bachelet said that she was mainly there to listen to us. She was taking advantage of so many women’s NGO representatives being in New York for the CSW. She would gather information to take into account in formulating the UN Women’s strategic plan. One by one, the women took the microphone. Bachelet took notes and later commented on what every single one said. She had said she was a good listener and she proved it. There was no air about her of a politician who knows how to get votes. She was just working hard at doing what she said she was doing.

I saw her in many other places during the CSW sessions. She moderated a panel on maternal mortality, commented at a Grass Roots Women’s Speakout, and spoke at an event at Hunter College. It is too soon to tell what difference Bachelet’s UN Women will make. As Dr Bachelet said, she was only one woman and we were bringing her the problems of the whole world. My impression was that she sees her strongest role in getting women into leadership.

Meantime, we Bachelet girls will certainly keep standing up for women. We have made it this far, and it can be shown on YouTube that we are still dancing.

Lucina Kathmann

## A Foundation for a Flow of Literatures: a background to the A&amp;PWN

**On Cockatoo Island**

The lower mandibles from five giant earthmovers  
line up on the foreshore, biting on air.

An abandoned crane frames a steely blue cube of harbour.  
Gantries and derricks, ship-building paraphernalia

scattered for effect. Overhead, postcard blue  
backdrops the ochres and reds of rust. Dust settles,

is swept away. What was industry is now gallery,  
a post-industrial chic. The vogue of distress; timbers and

metals boast rust's flake and scratch, its insatiable hungers.  
The limits of paint are plain; muted kaleidoscopic colours

agree on a theme of corrosion. Dull black on pale  
magenta, faded '50s red and green. Underneath disguise

even metals defer to time. Here is the modern day  
version of ruin, relics of industry for tourists

to gawk at. We thought industry would last forever,  
progress would never end. Were we wrong?

Anne Carson

2011 marks the 10th year of the Asia and Pacific Writers Network (A&PWN), a landmark initiative undertaken by PEN Melbourne. In this first of three reflections on the A&PWN, convenor Berni M Janssen considers some of the context and incentive for the network's foundation.

In 2001 I was contacted by Judy Buckrich, then president of PEN Melbourne. Judy had attended the 1996 Asia-Pacific PEN Conference in Tokyo, organised by Japan PEN; she was also a regular attendee at International PEN congresses. Judy knows the benefits to people of meeting face to face, so in 2001 she thought it would be timely to discover what was happening for writers in the Asia and Pacific regions—and to consider the feasibility of another Asia-Pacific conference. She asked me whether I would be interested in such a project.

I was greatly interested. Over the years, as a text artist and facilitator, I had worked with many people from different cultural backgrounds and communities. At the time that Judy contacted me, I had most recently collaborated in Melbourne with people of Timorese and Vietnamese backgrounds. Through this work I became aware of the gaps in my knowledge about working in diverse cultural settings: I was bumping into misunderstandings and incomprehension because of different ways of being in and viewing the world. Captivated by this experience, I applied for an Asialink Literary Arts Residency with the Cultural Centre of the Philippines, which I received. I then spent time in Manila, being bumped around one way and another.

I was fascinated by what happens when people meet from different cultures, on the basis of what we know about one another, what we assume we know about one another, how much we do not know—and how deeply we are aware of our shared humanity. We need to speak with each other, beyond the presumptions, the parade of egos. As much as any other's, my ego needed to be shattered.

I spent time researching in the Philippines, because there was already a strong history of writers connecting in South-East Asia. There had been conversations; people had read each other's work. There had been conferences, anthologies, magazines. I also attended readings, workshops, book launches, and events, and realised how little I knew about the writing and writers from that region.

It was some months after this residency that Judy contacted me on behalf of PEN Melbourne, to see whether I might be interested in undertaking a feasibility study for a PEN Asia-Pacific Conference. This study was guided by the aims of International PEN: to promote friendship and intellectual co-operation among writers everywhere, to fight for freedom of speech, work for good understanding and respect between nations, and to champion the ideal of one humanity living in peace.

I began by emailing a survey to all the PEN Centres in the region but this produced a very low number of responses. Since most PEN Centres are run by volunteers with limited time and resources, it can be difficult to maintain communications, especially if correspondence is not in your first language, or 'mother tongue'. From those who responded to the survey it could be seen that most of the energy and resources of PEN Centres was dedicated to issues or projects of local importance. While clearly always desirable, looking out to the wider world and connecting was not top of the priority list. Nonetheless, survey respondents expressed interest in the opportunity to meet, share, discuss—to be connected. They were interested to know what other people were doing, writing, wondering and thinking.

At that time I had also become a member of the Asialink Literature Committee and could see, from that perspective, that there was a wide variety of networks of communication between many parts of the broader 'writing industry', whether established, being developed, or being newly created, even some in countries where PEN was not so welcome.

In 2002, Asialink organised a forum titled 'Asia and the Arts, Policies and Possibilities for the Future', which identified major issues for arts development in the region for the next 5 to 10 years.



berni m janssen with Filipino writers and artists

This forum also noted that there were many existing networks, but we needed to understand these better and identify what was there and where were the gaps. It struck me that this was relevant also for the PEN Melbourne feasibility study: to research and map the networks of communication for writers in the region, or to ‘network the networks’ between and among practising writers.

The resulting feasibility study identified the lack of communication and flow of literatures at that time in the Asia and Pacific. While an international conference would bring people together, some kind of formal network based—at least at first—on the existence of PEN centres in these regions, could well provide a foundation that an Asia-Pacific Conference could consolidate.

**It had become very evident that most of us in the region were not particularly familiar with one another’s writers and writing, but that we thought it important that we should be.**

From the feasibility study, PEN Melbourne proposed a project having the following aims:

- to establish an Asia-Pacific regional network
- to create a highly participative, non-hierarchical conference
- to assist in the establishment of new PEN centres in the region
- to improve communication between countries
- to gain an understanding of current issues and writing cultures.

Looking back now, I can confidently observe that each of these aims has been addressed by the Asia and Pacific Writers Network (A&PWN), though in the process we had so much to learn, especially when it came to devising practical strategies from the feasibility study.

PEN Melbourne established a partnership with Asialink, and received funding from The Myer Foundation through its Beyond Australia program to undertake the research and development phase of A&PWN. This brought together the networks of International PEN centres, the personal networks of PEN Melbourne members, and the networks of the Asialink Literature program and committee, which included universities and academics, publishers and cultural organisations, as well as individual writers. I remember particularly the indispensable support and inspiration provided by Amanda Lawrence (then Literature Program Manager at Asialink), writer Larry Thomas (University of South Pacific in Suva, Fiji), and the artist and poet Kirpal Singh, based in Singapore. As the ‘development’ phase proceeded, a great many of the people whom we contacted provided advice, further contacts and ideas, creating an ongoing informal advisory group, and indeed the vigorous beginnings of an ‘Asia-Pacific regional network’.

‘The Asia-Pacific’ was the phrase used by International PEN in the preceding years to describe a region that required focus, enhanced co-operation and communications. PEN Melbourne also used the phrase. However, early in the research we became alert to a problem with this term of reference: many people in the Pacific felt that the ‘Pacific’ was subsumed in ‘Asia-Pacific’. They asked us to recognise that ‘Pacific’ placed after the hyphen treated them as ‘poor second cousins’. After all, the Pacific was a distinct geo-political and cultural region of our globe. The ‘and’ is of utmost importance for a people to be acknowledged in their own right; it is also a word that is frequently left out. We did recognise this, hence the use of ‘Asia and Pacific’ in the name of the network.

Another pressing question arising from plans to establish the A&PWN was, *How did the*

*incipient network define ‘Asia and Pacific’?* Together these regions cover more than half the world, including Mexico and Russia, so eventually it was decided that if you felt that you lived or had a background in the broadest reach of these regions and wanted to participate in the network, you could. We wanted to be as inclusive as possible.

The inaugural meeting of the A&PWN took place in Melbourne in November 2005, part of a far-reaching, six-day event at The Asialink Centre and Trades Hall under the rubric *Beyond Borders*. On the occasion of the inaugural meeting, a key resolution concerning the scope and reach of the network was passed, as follows:

That A&PWN recognises the Pacific as a separate region to Asia, and will work to include more writers from the Pacific in the network to ensure that there is an equal partnership between Asia and Pacific.

That the Pacific regions be defined as:

- a. the University of the South Pacific region: Fiji; Cook Islands; Kiribati; Marshall Islands; Nauru; Niue; Samoa; Solomon Islands; Tokelau; Tonga; Tuvalu; Vanuatu;
- b. Australia; New Zealand; PNG;
- c. Hawaii and US Trust Territories and Easter Island etc.

The vast array of languages within the Asia and Pacific regions confronted our aim to communicate, and, in particular, to share writing. We did not want to conduct the network in English alone; we wanted to converse, and, ideally, to publish in the region’s many languages. In 2005 the A&PWN established a multilingual, multi-scripted website hosted by PEN Melbourne ([www.apwn.net](http://www.apwn.net)), as a focus and framework for communication. However, in spite of its capacity to include a range of languages and scripts, most of the dialogue and writing on that website has been in English. We are still tackling translation, and not just translation into English.

The 2005 inaugural meeting passed a resolution to identify, list, promote, and disseminate translations of literary works from any and all of the languages of the region into Chinese, English, Japanese, and Indonesian/Malay. Clearly such a resolution entails numerous challenges, not least securing basic resources such as time for collaboration, and contributors with appropriate expertise. Moreover, the magnitude of this resolution remains to be more clearly and widely appreciated. Another issue recognised early in the development of the network and reconfirmed at the 2005 meeting, related to indigenous and minority writers and the critical endangerment of their languages.

These were among key concerns identified in the feasibility study; their importance was identified again at the first meeting of the network in 2005 and during the development of the A&PWN website. Today, for those with a connection to the A&PWN, and for the PEN Melbourne committee and members, each issue represents an ongoing motivation, even a provocation, to further cross-cultural listening, questioning, dialogue, and creative work.

An example from my own recent work illustrates ways in which such a motivating role for the A&PWN can manifest. During 2009–10 I was part of the *In-Habit* residency program associated with the live arts organisation Punctum, in partnership with Melbourne’s Abbotsford Convent. The brief was to develop a project that investigated site/place/space and cultural exchange. The preceding years of conversations, of ‘bumping about’ in other cultural settings, and of convening the many aspects of A&PWN for PEN Melbourne led me to create *the tongue-atorium—a research laboratory dedicated to all things tongue*. I was delighted to be able to invite members of A&PWN and PEN to contribute to the research in a range of languages. Some of the many writers who contributed poems, stories, recipes, tongue-twisters, facts, sounds, images, and snippets were: Cath Koa Dunsford; Nakamura Kazue; Susan Hawthorne, Javant Biarujia, Ivy Alvarez, Sampurna Chattarji, (India PEN), Samay Hamed, (Afghanistan PEN), and local PEN members Dewi Anggraeni, Judith Rodriguez, Elaine Lewis, Christine McKenzie, Toni Jordan, Sue Jackson, Anne Carson, and Marina Alamo Bryan. A&PWN and PEN, with their focus on dialogue, exchange and shared writing endeavours gave the project a truly global reach and resonance.

berni m janssen with Cynthia Troup

### **PEN International champions the essential role played by freedom of expression in healthy societies and the rights of citizens to transparency, information and knowledge.**

The WikiLeaks issue marks a significant turning point in the evolution of the media and the sometimes conflicting principles of freedom of expression and privacy and security concerns. The culture of increasing secrecy in governments and the rise of new technology will inevitably lead to an increasing number of transparency issues of this sort. PEN International believes it is important to acknowledge that while the leaking of government documents is a crime under U.S. laws, the publication of documents by

WikiLeaks is not a crime. WikiLeaks is doing what the media has historically done, the only difference being that the documents have not been edited.

PEN International urges those voicing opinions regarding the WikiLeaks debate to adopt a responsible tone, and not to play to the more extreme sections of society. In a world where journalists are regularly physically attacked, imprisoned and killed with impunity, calling for the death of a journalist is irresponsible and deplorable.

PEN International is also concerned by reports that some web sites, fearing repercussions, have stopped carrying WikiLeaks, and that individuals, under threat of legal action, have been warned against reading information provided by the organisation. PEN International condemns such acts and calls upon corporations and states to avoid breaches of the right to free expression. Governments cannot call for unlimited Internet freedom in other parts of the world if they do not respect this freedom themselves.

The WikiLeaks matter is a dynamic issue which we shall continue to monitor closely and on which we will refine our position as the situation requires. We welcome this debate and look forward to further discussion with the worldwide PEN membership.

#### **John Ralston Saul**

President  
PEN International

Christopher Warren, **Federal Secretary, Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance** delivered the following talk at a rally early this year.

As a rule, governments like secrecy. And as a rule, journalists don't.

A journalist's job is to inform the community about what's going on, so that society can hold governments to account for the way they govern. That's why the debate over WikiLeaks so often sounds like people talking across each other, rather than with each other.

As the trade union and professional organisation for the people who inform and entertain Australia and New Zealand, we speak for journalists.

Julian Assange is one of our members; he has been for several years. That's why I am here, but I would be here whether Julian was a member or not, because this issue is about free speech and its companion-in-arms, freedom of the press. That's why right now, we're right to welcome the fight for press freedom in Egypt and Tunisia, in which so many Egyptian and Tunisian journalists are participating. And why we condemn the attacks on journalists, including Australians like Mark Corcoran from the ABC, John Lyons from *The Australian*, Dan Nolan from *Al Jazeera* and Hamish McDonald from Network Ten, and the many brave Egyptian journalists. The fight is about our right to see, hear and read stories that someone, somewhere, doesn't want us to know. Journalism has always been about that. The rest, as they say, is advertising.

Laurie Oakes, whose work you will have seen either in the *Herald Sun* or on Channel 9 (ninemsn), has been breaking important news stories for decades. In December 2010, Laurie won the top award available to Australian journalists, the Gold Walkley, for the most outstanding piece of journalism in that year. He did so for broadcasting news stories based on leaks—leaks about what was really going on in the federal Labor Party leadership. He gave us two of the best stories of the year, thanks to the leaks he received. He gets such leaks because he is *trusted* by his sources whom he has skilfully managed over many years as a journalist.

Apart from his own integrity, Laurie is trusted because, on this at least, journalists are trusted. Over the past two decades, almost 25 Australian journalists have faced the risk of jail through court proceedings to uphold our important professional principle that we do not reveal a confidential source. Three of them have ended up in jail. Consider the case of *Herald Sun* journalists Michael Harvey and Gerard McManus, who were convicted and fined for contempt of court when they refused to name the source of one of their stories. Michael's career as a political journalist has been hampered by the fact that he is now a convicted criminal so was unable to get a visa to visit the U.S. when Kevin Rudd made a prime ministerial visit there. All this because Michael adhered to his profession's code of ethics.

As experiments with freedom of information often demonstrate, governments prefer to keep things to themselves. Not just on matters of national security, either. Here's a number to think about: when Australia's news organisations got together with the Media Alliance and sponsored an independent audit of free speech in Australia, we found more than 500 separate secrecy clauses on the statute book. That's 500 areas in which the government can bluntly say to you: 'We don't have to tell you that.' Sure, some of that is to do with national security, but it could just as likely be about stuff like wheat exports.

Governments like to think that the public can't handle information, so it is their job to handle it on our behalf. But in a democracy, information is held by the government in trust, on behalf of the people, and it is we, the people, who have the right to be informed. The more important the information, the more important it is that we be informed. It's also abundantly clear that governments get a little irrational when it comes to leaks: governments don't like whistleblowers. But in many cases some of our whistleblowers should be hailed as national heroes for what they have done. Can we forget Bundaberg Base Hospital nurse Toni Hoffman who went public with her allegations surrounding surgeon Jayant Patel?

Here in Australia we've fought hard for workable legislation that protects the brave men and women who risk their jobs and sometimes their liberty to bring us important stories. Too often, however, there is a witch-hunt of whistleblowers that aims to isolate them, denigrate them, take them to court. For their troubles, whistleblowers can end up with a criminal record.

The Government has proposed new legislation to protect whistleblowers, but action has slowed in the past 12 months. However, as a result of the hung parliament and the intervention of Independent MP Andrew Wilkie, our lobbying has given us commonwealth legislation that provides some protection for journalists—but only in the commonwealth jurisdiction. It is critical that all state governments extend this protection to all areas, including the multitude of statutory investigatory bodies such as the Office of Police Integrity here in Melbourne and the Australian Building and Construction Commission.

**All this tells us that there's a lot in the WikiLeaks we've seen before: journalists bringing to light information and governments trying to stop them. But what makes WikiLeaks more complex than the run-of-the-mill press freedom issues we normally confront is the fundamental change to information—and access to information—that the Internet has wrought.**

It's the failure to understand these changes that has led governments—and even some journalists who should know better—to engage in what is, frankly, a last-century debate about whether Assange is a journalist. There are plenty of people who want to say that Assange can't be a journo, so he should not be given the same protection as somebody like Laurie Oakes. Leaving aside the meaningless debate of who is or is not a journalist, too many of these people fail to understand what journalism is or how fast and profoundly it is changing.

Over the past few months, I've been proud of the fact that the Australian journalism community has shown that it does 'get it'. In December 2010, virtually every newspaper editor in the country signed a petition to our government recognising that as a media organisation—albeit a new kind of media organisation—WikiLeaks should be treated with the same respect as established traditional media. As Laurie Oakes says: 'Whether it is a letterbox full of classified cables or a quarter of a million on a CD, the principle is the same.'

Unfortunately, within the U.S. media community, there hasn't been the same understanding. We all have to adjust to this shift, not stand on a claim to exclusive privileges from last century. Our government doesn't seem to 'get it', either. Initially, it claimed that WikiLeaks was 'illegal' and has since spent months trying to climb down from that position. Now it's invoking some sort of claim to 'moral force'. Frankly, I'm stuffed if I know what that phrase 'moral force' means. The argument seems to go like this: denying people the right to know important information about world affairs is morally valid, but revealing that information is somehow morally wrong.

I'm here tonight as a journalist to offer my support, and that of all the journalists in the Media Alliance, to Julian Assange in his struggles. The idea that WikiLeaks has unthinkingly put information up for anyone to see is just absurd. On the contrary, Assange has sought out, and worked carefully with, media groups and professional journalists around the world to ensure that information has been contextualised and any sensitive information redacted from the documents.

WikiLeaks suggested much of this 'harm-minimisation' strategy, as *New York Times* editor-in-chief Bill Keller admitted last week.

Keller also said: 'Long before WikiLeaks was born, the Internet transformed the landscape of journalism, creating a wide-open and global market with easier access to audiences and sources, a quicker metabolism, a new infrastructure for sharing and vetting information, and a diminished respect for notions of privacy and secrecy. Newspapers have been publishing texts of documents almost as long as newspapers have existed—and ever since the Internet eliminated space restrictions, we have done so copiously.'

In other words, in this new digital environment, journalism continues to do what it has always done: reveal information that is in the public interest in an accurate, timely and responsible fashion. Wikileaks and Assange tick all these boxes. So what it boils down to is this: the criminalisation of information and those who seek to make that information public in a century where technology allows and democracy demands that information be free.

In November last year, Assange got in touch with the Media Alliance to explain that he might have trouble paying his union dues because his credit cards had been made inoperable and his bank accounts had been frozen. The Media Alliance agreed that, given he was facing the most extraordinary circumstances, we would waive Assange's union dues for a time. So now, I'd like to present his Australian lawyer, Rob Stary, with Assange's union card and ask Rob to ensure he receives it, to confirm that Julian Assange is a journalist member in good standing with his union, the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance.

Christopher Warren

### Without any explanation

The only time I remember my mother hitting me  
was when we were on holiday at Hulanki

where there was a lake with row boats and kayaks  
my cousin, who studied engineering in Belgium

had come back for the summer, we made a bet  
about who'd be first at the lake in the morning

except he forgot and slept in, while I got up very early  
and waited for what must have been hours

since my mother woke up  
and was frightened I'd gone missing

and when she saw me, the first thing  
she did was to strike me

Later my mother and I had to leave Poland,  
we travelled to Russia, to a town called Brzesc

where we met up with my cousin  
who they arrested, then sentenced

without any explanation or trial  
and sent him to the Gulag

For years, my mother used to send him food  
parcels until the Polish Government in exile

made a pact with the USSR, and all  
the Polish prisoners were freed

Some time ago my cousin told me that those food  
parcels were all that had kept him alive

I still remember my mother's anger though  
that morning, there, by the lake.

Ann Shenfield

## Feature

### Rosa Vasseghi and the fate of the Baha'is in Iran

Rosa Vasseghi knows the consequences of speaking out, the risks she incurs in recounting her story. In January 2009, within minutes of being interviewed on Melbourne's radio station 3CR, she received a phone call.

'We are going to catch you and rape you,' the caller threatened in Farsi, before leaving the phone dangling in the public booth from which he was phoning.

'I was very shocked by the call, but I am no longer afraid,' says Rosa in her one-bedroom flat in Northcote. 'What more is there to be afraid of? In Iran I was imprisoned and tortured. What can get worse for me, and for the Baha'is?'

Rosa is no stranger to threatening phone calls. Her regular calls to her family in Iran are monitored and often interrupted by direct threats from Iranian intelligence officers.

'Your family is in our hands,' they say. 'We can do what we like to them.'

Despite her efforts to remain positive, the anxiety is evident in her face. Rosa requires sleeping pills to get through the night, and she often dreams of her years of imprisonment. A shrill laugh can trigger off memories of the screams of fellow prisoners.

'I relive everything they did to me,' she says. 'I sometimes think I am back there. I try to run away from the memory, but it always comes back.'

Rosa's anxiety has intensified since the imprisonment of her sister Rozita, with eight other Baha'is in March 2010. Rozita is serving a five-year sentence for allegedly teaching the Baha'i Faith, acting against national security, and of allegedly being a spy because she spent six weeks in 2008 visiting her sister in Melbourne. After enduring over half a year in solitary confinement she was moved to a cell with four other Baha'i women. They are isolated from the other prisoners and allowed only restricted contact with their families. Rozita's elderly mother, allowed just nine-minute visits, was horrified by the sharp decline in her daughter's health and her wasted appearance. Now Rozita is back in the courts, facing unspecified charges. She faces many more years in jail—or worse—if judged to be guilty.

'When I learned that Rozita and other Baha'i women were taken to court shackled in chains, I wept,' says Rosa. 'They are treated like criminals, when their only 'crime' is to be Baha'i.'

**'This is not about me,' Rosa stresses. 'Please mention all Baha'i people. Write about the increase in persecution of Baha'is. Write about my sister. She is a warm, gentle person. She loves life. She has a lovely sense of humour. These are false accusations. Prison authorities have told her "You will stay in prison until your hair turns the colour of your teeth."'**

Rosa's remarkable life story mirrors the fate of the Baha'is in Iran. Born in 1955, in the city of Mashhad, Rosa grew up at a time of relative opportunity for members of her religion, and a degree of protection from the state. She recalls her childhood years as a time of peace and family support, despite periodic outbreaks of violence against Baha'is.

She began writing at the age of 12. Her first poem concerned the fate of a prostitute.

*Do not blame the girl for her predicament,* she wrote. *Society was at fault.*

While her father admired her courage he was extremely worried for her safety.

'Be careful,' he warned. 'If you tell the truth, you may get attacked.'

During her teenage years, Rosa's poems, essays and stories were intermittently published in local newspapers and magazines. She focused on themes reflecting the teachings of the Baha'i faith: peace and social justice, and the struggle for women's rights. At 18, Rosa moved to Teheran. She studied accounting and management, and enrolled in international law at a private university.

The troubles for the Baha'is began in earnest in the wake of the 1979 revolution, which saw the overthrow of the Shah and the creation of an Islamic Republic and theocratic state.

All universities were initially closed, and when they reopened, the Baha'is were banned from attending. After completing her second year, Rosa was never allowed to resume her studies.

In the summer of 1986 Rosa's life was turned upside down. The events of the day of her arrest are seared in her mind. She was in a public taxi in Teheran, when one of the passengers began criticizing various religions. Rosa felt compelled to speak out.

'I am a Baha'i, and we must love all people and respect everyone.'

The driver brought the taxi to an abrupt halt and ordered all passengers out except Rosa. He made a phone call and within minutes several patrol cars surrounded the taxi. A number of women, their faces covered, jumped out and grabbed Rosa. They blindfolded her and dragged her into one of the cars. After some time she heard the sound of an iron roller door being raised, and the car seemed to be descending a long tunnel. When it stopped, the woman who was sitting on her right took hold of Rosa's hand with a piece of cloth, refusing to have direct contact with her skin because she considered Baha'is impure. With the help of a woman sitting to her left, Rosa was hurled from the car.

'Pain spread through my body,' says Rosa. 'I brought my knees to my head and covered them with my arms and hands. I asked: "Why are you doing this to me?" They told me: "Shut up. You are an infidel. You are unclean."' Her captors dragged her to a flight of stairs. Her body bumped up and down on each step. She heard the sound of a door.

'I thought I could open my eyes. I began to move my arms when suddenly they struck me with their hands and kicked me. I begged them: "Please don't beat me!"

"Shut up, infidel," the women replied. "We must root out all Baha'is from the earth. Your blood is impure and doing anything to an apostate is halal."'

The women beat her, says Rosa, until the world went black and she lost consciousness.

When she opened her eyes she found herself in a small, dark cell. She was hungry and thirsty, and smelled of blood. She heard the voices of women and girls screaming and calling out for help. Her cell measured about one by one and a half metres. It contained a steel door and no windows. She could not fully stretch her legs when she lay down.

Rosa spent much of the time in darkness and in solitary confinement. Her diet often consisted of raw or barely cooked potatoes on a tin plate placed on the floor. She groped around in the darkness to find it. There were no separate toilet facilities and she had to relieve herself in the room.

She was forced to witness a rape from a distance of about 50 metres to conceal the identity of the man, and was forced to watch people being executed. To this day she is haunted by their screams and entreaties, and her inability to help them.

Whenever she was taken for interrogation or moved for any other purpose, her eyes were blindfolded. She lost track of night and day. From time to time she was allowed to go home overnight, or unceremoniously dumped on unfamiliar streets, then re-arrested. Her incarceration was to continue on and off for three years.

'Why such brutal treatment?' I ask Rosa.

'My story, and the story of my family, is just an example of what is happening to many Baha'is in Iran,' she says.

Her people have suffered periodic persecution since the faith was founded in the mid-19th century on the basic tenets that all the world's religions were one, humanity was one family, and the time for world unity had arrived.

**With 300,000 followers—less than 1 per cent of the population—the Baha'is are the largest religious minority in the country. Fundamentalists accuse them of being apostates. In the 30 years since the revolution many have been tortured and imprisoned, denied government jobs and tertiary education, had their cemeteries desecrated, their businesses and properties confiscated or attacked by arsonists, and many have been arbitrarily arrested and tried on spurious charges. Some 200 hundred have been executed or murdered.**

'My father,' says Rosa, 'lost his government job as a legal worker, and was denied his retirement pension and forced to repay his salary. My mother's shop was seized along with her inheritance, and my sisters were not allowed to continue their university studies.'

When Rosa's father died in 1991, he was buried in an unmarked grave, and only five people were allowed to attend the burial. His grave can no longer be located.

After her final release from prison, Rosa worked in a series of secretarial, accounting and

## Cambodia gagged: democracy at risk? Report on Freedom of Expression in Cambodia

advertising positions, and resumed writing. Several of her essays and stories were published in the annual *Teheran* anthology in 1993 and 1994. The writers had to sign a document promising to conform to strict government guidelines. In 1995, the anthology was banned, and the publishing house was burnt down. When she left Iran in 1997, Rosa fully intended to return in about six months.

‘I was so tired,’ she says. ‘I wanted to take a break and study English.’

She travelled to Singapore and India, and stayed in the Baha’i house in New Delhi until she had to move when Iranian agents came looking for her. She moved about the country, and began writing and illustrating children’s books while she applied for refugee visas to the USA, Australia and many other countries.

‘I became homeless in strange cities,’ she says.

When Rosa arrived in Australia in November 1999, she immediately set about learning English. Her sense of isolation and the enduring trauma of her incarceration were relieved by counselling from the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture. With the aid of several teachers she began writing in the new language. She has now written and illustrated eight books for children.

In 2008 Rosa published *Where is the Justice? Stories from behind closed doors*. A detailed account of her imprisonment forms the central thread of the book, around which Rosa weaves many other tales that illustrate the fate of imprisoned women worldwide. Her depiction of the sexual assaults, the beatings and interrogations, the mental torture, denial of basic hygiene, the threats and killings, are harrowing in the extreme. Yet Rosa also touches upon unexpected acts of kindness. She explores the ebb and flow of her hopes, and the women’s defiance in the face of their interrogators.

Rosa is a creative force. Her children’s books are morality tales reflecting the principles of the Baha’i faith. In striking contrast to her years of persecution and enduring trauma, the illustrations are light and joyous. Her desire to acquire new knowledge and skills, and to be of service is irrepressible: as soon as one project is finished, she moves onto the next. In 2005 she received a Bachelor of Community Development from Victoria University, and completed a certificate in child care in 2008. She is currently writing a cookbook with recipes, stories and illustrations reflecting her extensive knowledge of Iranian cuisine.

‘You are very determined,’ I tell her.

‘I got this from my father,’ she says. ‘I always must finish what I start out to do.’

‘You seem to be a strong woman, despite it all,’ I say.

‘I try to be. I don’t have a choice. If they know I am suffering, they would be happy.’

‘Do you hate your persecutors?’

‘They have hurt me physically and emotionally, but they cannot take my spirit. I can’t find the right words to describe these people. But I don’t hate them. From childhood the Baha’i faith taught me that all races, all religions, all people, are equal, and that men and women should have the same rights. We are taught to believe in world peace. So I cannot hate them.

‘But I can hate their actions. I cannot forget, or forgive them for their actions, but I can forgive their ignorance. I don’t believe that what they do is real Islam.

‘We don’t want revenge,’ Rosa concludes. ‘Revenge is dark in the light and brings fear and war. But the truth about the abuse of my people must be made known throughout the world.’

### Arnold Zable

*Where is the Justice? Stories from behind closed doors* by Rosa Vasseghi can be ordered through the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture at [www.foundationhouse.org.au](http://www.foundationhouse.org.au)

### Phnom Penh, 14 September 2010

A number of non-government organisations, community organisations and unions have released a report on the state of freedom of expression in Cambodia: *Cambodia gagged: democracy at risk?* The report finds that over the past year, freedom of expression has continued to be seriously undermined, with a Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) crackdown targeting the pillars of Cambodia’s democracy. Opposition parliamentarians’ parliamentary immunity has been lifted to allow politically motivated criminal charges of defamation, disinformation and incitement; journalists have been imprisoned or threatened with imprisonment; lawyers have been threatened with disbarment; human rights activists have been intimidated, harassed and punished; and the ‘criminalisation’ of certain opinions has meant that the people have been denied their voice.

This report shows that the judiciary has been used as an organ of repression, silencing dissent and opinion critical of the RGC. The fear is that with the continued use of intimidation, harassment, threats and spurious legal charges to silence dissenting voices and criticism of government policies, the RGC is moving away from the democratic principles enshrined in the Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia to a *de facto* one-party state; a closed society in which laws, systems and actions of the ruling party prevent free opinion and criticism, ending democracy in the kingdom and seriously eroding the rights and freedoms of all Cambodians.

### Parliamentarians

Intimidation, harassment and legal sanction have undermined legitimate political opposition and consequently democracy. The parliamentary immunity of three opposition parliamentarians—Sam Rainsy, Mu Sochua and Ho Vann—has been removed to allow politically motivated criminal charges to be made against them. The Supreme Court of Cambodia upheld Mu Sochua’s conviction for defamation, despite her trial had been marked by political interference and inequality before the law. Opposition parliamentarians face threats of defamation and other charges for expressing opinions on matters of public interest. Archaic debating rules further stymie their ability to express opinion in the chief debating chamber of the kingdom, the National Assembly. The semblance of democracy may remain in Cambodia, with elections taking place every five years; however, in a climate where the legitimate role of opposition is thwarted and opposition voices silenced, these trappings are rendered meaningless.

### The Media

Freedom of expression and the freedom of the press are fundamentally important in ensuring Cambodians a real opportunity to understand the nature and direction of the RGC and make an informed choice in the next general election. Excessive use of repressive legislation and a climate of fear made real by the prosecution and imprisonment of journalists such as Hang Chakra, editor of the *Khmer Machas Srok*, and the intimidation and harassment of Dam Sith, editor of *Moneaksekar Khmer*, both opposition-aligned newspapers, have acted to prevent open journalism, ensuring that many media professionals self-censor to avoid offending the RGC or other powerful actors. An environment that necessitates self-censorship is worrying, particularly with respect to accountability, transparency and democratic development. In spite of the decision to pardon Hang Chakra and allow *Moneaksekar Khmer* to resume printing, the reality is that there is no freedom of the media when journalists are forced to curb their views.

### Lawyers

Lawyers play a pivotal role in any democracy and have the potential to be great levellers between the powerful and the less powerful by providing access to justice through the courts. Charges of defamation have been used to intimidate and harass lawyers who represent those opposing the RGC, for example,

Mu Sochua's attorney, Kong Sam Onn. Such action has the very real possibility of stripping lawyers of their levelling role, affecting their willingness to represent those who have filed complaints against the powerful, or have had complaints filed against them, and allowing violations to go unchallenged with impunity.

#### Human Rights Activists

The space within which human rights activists can express their concerns and voice their opinions is shrinking by the day, and is becoming even more precarious with the proposed enactment of an NGO law. Representatives from international organisations to grassroots community groups have been threatened and harassed by the RGC for speaking out on issues of public concern, demonstrating the RGC's contempt for the monitors working to improve human rights and promote democracy. Human rights activists have been intimidated, harassed and punished, and criminal charges of incitement have been used against those who speak out. Rights groups and unions have been prevented from holding public forums to discuss issues that affect their daily lives. There is a danger that if this repressive action continues, Cambodia could reach a point of no return where there is ultimately no room for activists to speak out about human rights abuses.

#### The People

The space within which the Cambodian people can voice their opinions and concerns is diminishing. The criminalisation of certain opinions, particularly those related to corruption, land grabbing and allegations of authoritarian rule, has denied Cambodians a voice. Distributors of leaflets claiming that Cambodia was a puppet of communist Vietnam have been warned by the RGC to be careful or be arrested. Police have brutally silenced or stopped the peaceful demonstrations of protestors from communities affected by land grabbing and illegal concessions. Peaceful demonstrations by aggrieved workers demanding higher wages have been blocked with 'public order' being used as a blanket term to thwart legitimate, non-violent expression of opinion through peaceful assembly. The exercise of freedom of expression can act as a safety valve for both stability and change. There is a real risk in a nascent democracy such as Cambodia that the continued suppression of the right of freedom of expression may force this safety valve to burst, jeopardising the peace and development which many have spent the last three decades working for.

#### Conclusions

The authors hope that this report serves to remind the RGC of its constitutional obligations and to recognise the importance of protecting and promoting freedom of expression, not simply as a right in itself, but as a fundamental condition to the continued stability and development of Cambodia. The report urges the RGC to take heed of the recommendations made in the report and pursue the substantive changes required to protect and promote freedom of expression in the kingdom.

The international community equally needs to take notice of the backward slide in Cambodia's democratisation and the ramifications should freedom of expression continue to be eroded. It is important to recall that a number of countries undertook in the Paris Peace Agreements to '*promote and encourage respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Cambodia ... to prevent the recurrence of human rights abuses.*' Yet for over a decade the international community has provided aid to Cambodia but has remained largely silent while human rights have been violated and democratic space eroded. It is not enough to throw money at problems and hope the RGC will act in the interest of the people. Countries that value democracy and human rights and want to honour their commitment to Cambodia have the ability to make a real impact on the human rights situation in Cambodia by putting genuine conditions on their dealings with Cambodia, making it clear to the RGC what rights violations will cost them. The report urges the international community to take responsibility and speak out against the deterioration of rights and democracy in Cambodia. Equally it urges the international community to speak out in support of parliamentarians, the media, lawyers, human rights activists and the Cambodian people who are being persecuted for exercising their fundamental right to freedom of expression. This support can be an invaluable source of strength and confidence for Cambodians who risk so much in their struggle for human rights.

As respect for civil and political rights in Cambodia deteriorates it is time for all to sit up, take notice and take action before forms of authoritarian control become normal and Cambodia is pushed to the precipice of instability.

For information on the report, please contact the Project Coordinator, Ms. CHOR Chanthyda, [thyda@cchrcambodia.org](mailto:thyda@cchrcambodia.org)

In the wake of the welcome and peaceful move towards democracy in Tunisia, PEN International notes with great concern the violent response to anti-government protests elsewhere in the region, notably Egypt, but also in Yemen and Syria.

The president of PEN International, John Ralston Saul, said PEN warmly welcomed the democratic developments in Tunisia.

'However, we are alarmed by the trampling on the rights of citizens to transparency, information, knowledge and freedom of assembly elsewhere, most recently in Egypt over the past several days.'

Mr Saul said PEN welcomed in particular the release of all Tunisian journalists, bloggers and other political prisoners, following the protests which ended 23 years of President Ben Ali's rule. It also welcomed the lifting of many restrictions previously imposed on freedom of expression and hoped for a full recognition of free speech and the right to assembly in Tunisia.

'In Egypt, scores have been arrested in the crackdown on peaceful protesters calling for democratic reform since 25 January 2011, including several journalists. At least 10 journalists covering the demonstrations have been attacked, tight restrictions have been imposed on freedom of assembly, and there has been widespread disruption to internet and mobile-phone connections. Egyptian authorities have also shut down the websites of two popular independent newspapers, *Al-Dustour* and *El-Badil*, and a number of social media sites. On 30 January 2011, Egypt shut down the *Al Jazeera* bureau in Cairo.'

Mr Saul reported that in Yemen, tens of thousands of peaceful opposition activists took to the streets demanding democratic and social change. In Syria, the authorities blocked *Facebook*, other social networks and mobile-message facilities (SMS) to suppress anti-government protests. He feared that opposition activists, writers and journalists in both those countries were at increased risk of arrest.

**'The worldwide community of PEN reiterates our solidarity with our colleagues as they seek democracy and practise their fundamental rights to speak, write and join their fellow citizens in peaceful protest,' Mr Saul said.**

PEN International urges the authorities in Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen to refrain from using violence to respond to peaceful protests, and reminds these governments of their commitments to freedom of expression as guaranteed by Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Current events are teaching us that people power is the new dictate of our time. Recently we have seen powerful rulers sent packing—dictators who have long subjected their people to arbitrary rule by subjugating them to their whims and caprices.

Cases in point are Egypt and Tunisia, where people organised themselves to defeat the strongest armies of their regions. These armies were robots serving the interests of the dictators, programmed to deny the citizenry freedom and dignity.

We have all witnessed the ineptitude of these regimes, their inability to observe international best practice or good governance, the brutality of their police and the vicious excesses of a reign of terror that have caused many citizens to flee to other parts of the world.

On a wider scale in Africa, despots seized power in the name of promoting the welfare of the people, democracy and social justice, only to turn around and do the opposite. In the shortest span of time they got rich—and richer every day—amassing stupendous wealth for themselves while the rest of the population wallowed in desperation.

While all seemingly goes well in the corridors of power, it is, on the contrary, far from reality for the citizenry who are left to survive on crusts or at the mercy of God. Those paranoid rulers pretend to be able to solve all their self-made problems, by claiming messianic miracles. Like manna from heaven, the public coffers allow them to cling to the seat of power.

While they purport to be fighting against corruption in their respective countries, making public declarations and sacrificing some of their 'enemies' (most of whom are being set up and framed) they accumulate weapons to terrorise their people, and illegal money to bribe the electorate. But their words do not translate to reality when they live flamboyantly beyond their legitimate earning capacity. The amounts they lavishly dish out to build monuments to themselves could not be accounted for by their presidential salary. Just take a tour of the region and see for yourself what properties they own under cover, or—if you could—scrutinise their personal deposits in foreign bank accounts.

However, recent events are a clear indication that when the people come out in their thousands, any army or government whose object is to deny democracy and inflict terror on its citizens can be overcome.

Seedy Bojang

I finally have a couple of hours to write. I have been putting in 13 hour days all week. It is because of the chance to speak on Tuesday afternoon, 1 March, 2011, in the plenary of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). My caucus, the Caucus of Latin America and the Caribbean, has a chance to talk for two and a half minutes responding to an expert panel on maternal mortality.

This might not be the perfect opportunity, but we, like all the other 1500 representatives of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) here, leap at any opportunity at all to present our point of view to the governmental representatives. This is the first opportunity I have wangled in 15 years of trying.

The United Nations is basically a club for governments. It is set up to give governments a chance to talk to each other and make agreements with each other. It is not set up for any aspect of civil society, much less grassroots women's NGOs.

Governments can make whatever deals they want without ever consulting the situation on the ground in their countries, and of course, many do just that. However, as of the 4th World Women's Conference in Beijing in 1995, the women's NGOs which attended were invited to attend the CSW sessions in New York every year. The CSW became the rare UN organism that systematically receives input from organisations on the ground.

Many government representatives don't like it. The NGOs who attend sometimes counter their governments openly, producing 'shadow reports' which give their experience of the level of implementation of their government's programs for women, with their own statistics. The governments don't like to be embarrassed by this call to accountability and this erodes our welcome. We are also very numerous. Thousands of us descend every year hoping for a tiny chance to influence women's lives for the better. We cause traffic problems and overloading of every facility. For many UN people, we are just a bother.

From our standpoint it isn't too good either. We are about 1,500 and there are often only 70 seats available to observe the proceedings. So we queue up at the UN for secondary passes and the first 70 get them. Many women arrive from faraway countries, queue up for hours only to find that they can attend nothing in the UN building that day. There are seminars sponsored by NGOs in other venues that they can attend, but that won't influence their governments.

Tsung Su, of the Chinese Writers Abroad PEN, and I go to the CSW every year as representatives of the PEN International Women Writers Committee. As PEN representatives we act like a women's NGO, entering coalitions for change for the benefit of women, doing whatever we can do, working through the UN system. The UN works through regional caucuses, so even though PEN is worldwide, we work through the Asia Pacific Caucus and the Latin-American Caucus.

Every year the NGO representatives coming to the CSW are different. Between the yearly sessions, we lose track of each other. This puts us in the heartbreaking situation of having to redefine our regional priorities anew every year. Furthermore, most of the important deadlines for opportunities to influence governments occur before the sessions start, so even if a caucus gets a lot accomplished a lot during the sessions, it is usually too late to get the floor.

Over the past few years the Latin-America Caucus has become more savvy about the system. Three of us saw that we were pretty dependable repeaters, so we started to take responsibility for the caucus's continuity. One woman established a Yahoo internet group that kept us in contact throughout the year. Last year we had a lot of women who knew the UN system and its language—UN-speak—very well. (It really is a language unto itself, even though there is a version in every language.) The result was that we generated a very good declaration document of our priorities.

## Around the Globe in 28 Novels 28 books, 28 authors, 28 countries ... and 1 year



Lucina Kathmann (second from left) preparing the maternal mortality statement for the UN.  
Photo: Liliana Cisneros.

We tried to promulgate it; we reported on it among the NGOs; we solicited a chance to present it to the commission, and we almost did. We were on the floor of the commission in a line of NGOs who might be given a chance, but our chance did not come.

But we were heard. This year, on the last day before the deadline, the president of the NGO umbrella organisation for the CSW wrote to me to explain how to apply via a certain website to get the floor this year.

I was both ecstatic and terrified at once. Last year's document was outdated already. Who would come to the Latin-American caucus this year? Would our spokeswoman return? How could we modify the document in time?

Within a couple days I received a message saying my request would be granted. I or whoever I represented could speak for two and a half minutes after a panel on maternal mortality on 1 March.

Maternal mortality? It was in the document but not even in a very prominent place. We surely had to retool the document. I sent an SOS to everybody I could think of. Rosangela Oliveira and Liliana Cisneros, the two women I had learned to count on, responded. I asked about the young Argentinian who was to be our spokeswoman. Since our document stressed reproductive rights, we had been happy to have a spokeswoman of reproductive age. But I got no answer in time!

Rosangela unearthed the reason: a cosmic irony. Our young ex-spokeswoman was in labour, giving birth! So we needed another spokeswoman and a revised document right away. The UN requires copies of the statements, and since we work in Spanish and most of the government representatives prefer English, an English translation is essential too.

The CSW started on a short week this year, on Tuesday, 23 February, because Monday was President's Day and the UN was closed. It was a royal rat race trying to get the caucus scheduled, getting arranging a room for it, notifying the women, putting together the work group, finding a place to work, fixing and translating the document, finding a new spokeswoman.

As of this moment, Sunday, 27 February, I think we have what we need, though we still have to rehearse the spokeswoman. She is a very small Nicaraguan physician, feisty and full of opinions. She has helped a lot in rewording the statement and she handles language about maternal mortality with authority. It will be a challenge for her to read the document in 2 minutes 30 seconds.

Lucina Kathmann

Sunday, 27 February 2011

Why am I embarking on this reading project?

I was two weeks shy of age 18 before I read my first novel fuelled by my own motivation. I'll start this post, cathartically, with that embarrassing, stale, shrivelled yet undeniable fact. It was Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. You know the one. I recall mooching around at home on a Friday night, so bored I was practically levitating with indifference, when it occurred to me to have a crack at a novel.

Yes, I'd meandered through high-school curricula that force-fed students *The Scarlet Letter*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *The Good Earth* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, among others. I can't say I ever completed any of those. Like a wannabe marathon runner straining to avoid yet another ignominious 'DNF' result, I did eke out one completion, wheezing with non-focus across the finish line of Ayn Rand's *Anthem*—all 105 whopping pages of it—in grade 11 to fulfil some reading list quota or other. This book I chose specifically for its slenderness and nothing more (embarrassing fact number two).

I arrived at the reading-for-pleasure office a bit ... tardy. But *The Great Gatsby* floored me. Jump-started me. Had me enchanted, dead, gone and up to the heavens from first word to last. *Gatsby* remains the only novel I have read, cover to cover, sea to shining sea, in one blissful abracadabra stretch.

Which brings us to here. Now. Twice the age I was then. I've read considerably more in that time: the oeuvres of Brautigan and Carver, say; some Breton, Nabokov and cairns of *Critical Inquiry* back issues that helped me navigate the clutter in my office at University of Chicago Press. Dalliances came and went and with *The New Yorker* and *Granta* I even read atlases, conniving my weakness for geography to crowd out classics. More than any form, though, I've read poetry. And still not as many novels as I'd like.

**So it struck me, just after midnight, early Boxing Day morning, that I would embark on a reading project for 2011. The plan is to read one 'important work' by a 'major author' I've not yet read from every nation I have travelled to. Strictly novel-length fiction, modern or contemporary era. No short stories. No poetry. No essays. That makes 28 books, 28 authors, 28 countries ... and one year to get it done.**

OK. But what kind of books are we talking about here?

The works need not be about the nation(s) whatsoever. Jose Saramago's *Blindness* does not contain a single wisp referring to Portugal, which would be anathema to the author's arresting spin on human fallibility. The national aspect of this project is, primarily, a device to plant in front of my face books I would otherwise never know about nor read. And to also kick my ass into gear to read a few authors I've meant to check out but haven't. Like Roberto Bolaño. His popularity is rocketing across the firmament nowadays. As anticipated, his *By Night in Chile* is a riveting barrage of despair and capricious rumination on ruination ... well, it was after I shifted into the proper headspace to blaze through the ranting prose.

Back to geography for a moment, as Bolaño's book presents the other angle on why this project involves the countries I've travelled to. When *By Night in Chile*'s central padre character slumps into a café chair and drains a Bilz soda for lack of anything better to do with his crestfallen mood, I admit that I relish knowing that Bilz is to my taste a sickeningly vile soda, ubiquitous in every corner shop in Chile. And that I've browsed shops with Bilz walls and walls of the stuff, in person.

So what? I've been to Chile and hoo-bloody-ray for me? No. The point is, I did feel a spiked rush of engagement with Bolaño's passage featuring his lone reference to this Bilz elixir; a surge triggered by that tiny detail. The extant memory signpost in me of having once swigged a Bilz in Calama, Chile, entwined with that passage like mile-a-minute vine. And it shunted ideas both to the

fore of my thoughts and under the author's magnifying glass of detail, raising questions as to why he may have included it. I appreciate that it could be nothing more than meaningless texture, but I hope not.

Does this render me a shallow or underdeveloped reader? Maybe so.

Of course, many of the books I've selected are fully steeped in, engaged with, and refract an author's native country inside their prose. Economics, colonisation history and complexities I cannot begin to note here abound—at least so far as I have researched the authors and their bibliographies, and found them to be canonical in a nation's literary history. Pin Yathay's *Stay Alive, My Son* and Jorge Icaza's *The Villagers*, from Cambodia and Ecuador respectively, will be outstanding examples of such books. We know both countries have endured beatings, purges and takeovers that are difficult to fathom. Yet, truculent forces—political, military, economic or all of the above—that plough across nations like glaciers with orders to scrape clean every 'undesirable' speck are forces that never entirely erase affected cultures. Their voices, community minutiae, wit and artistic durability so often foment into notable, lasting literature. But, such forces certainly camber the national output into staggering directions à la Egger's *What Is the What: the autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng*, or Elie Wiesel's classic, *Night*.

And yet, it was the strictures of this project that made Jorge Icaza's *The Villagers*—a hugely important Latin-American work about indigenous class struggles—known to me. Some nations offer a far larger bounty to select from. When searching for an Ecuadorian, for example, I discovered quite a few titbits that made *The Villagers* an irresistible novel: It's actually not titled *The Villagers*. Its true name is *Huasipungo*. And the English edition title isn't a direct translation. *Huasipungo* was an indentured servant 'employment' tactic used by hacienda kingpins to force peasants into sweating all the hard work needed to run their spreads. As payment, peasants got a miniscule plot of crap soil to till as their own, in their own free time, to produce 100 per cent of their food. Nice. Why supplant the original title with a generic one for its translation?

A few excerpts of the book were translated into English in the early 1930s, but only ever published in Russia, of all places.

The snippets in English proved such a hit with Russians, that Russia asked Ecuador whether Icaza could be its ambassador. Now that's a fan base!

It was considered such a proletarian gem that it took another 35 years for an approved English translation to seep out to the world.

It's said that Icaza still runs a bookstore in Quito. That would make him a 105-year-old shopkeeper. Possible, but highly unlikely. Either way, I wish I had known that such a bookstore existed when I was prowling the city streets. Last April, in Ecuador, I observed, heard evidence of, and inadvertently stumbled through daily proof of feudal juggernauts, jockeying clergymen, political factions, ruthless oil companies and strife among all non-fellow tourists I encountered. Am I skating dangerously close to exploitative, voyeuristic reading? You decide; I'm reading it anyway.

But why not simply resolve to read more?

Because parameters foster odd results and the hunt itself has bewitched me. And I josh you not, not 20 minutes after this plan parachuted into my head, an earthquake relocated Vanuatu. 400 kilometres away in Noumea, New Caledonia, fifteen floors up in the apartment my wife and I were staying in; my beer, on a coffee table, shook and foamed over. The concrete structure swayed but gamely kept its composure. Best heed the seismic reinforcement that this project would be earthmoving for me.

What are some of the hurdles in finding all the books?

Translations into English, and the lack thereof, has proved to be the largest hurdle in cobbling together my reading list. Not a surprise. It's my own fault I'm not at least bilingual, so I've had to bend the rules in a few selections.

At the beginning, finding a novel for Monaco that ticked all my boxes was, well, a wide-open blank. I held hope that some universally published genius would surface from the woodwork of my research and 'Wow! Hey? Fancy that! \_\_\_\_\_ is from Monaco!'

Hasn't turned out that way.

I've settled on W. Somerset Maugham's *Of Human Bondage*, widely considered to be his masterpiece (even if he admitted late in life that he was surely a cut-rate author). The 'breach' in my set parameters occurs in that Maugham was not born in nor technically from Monaco (although I have strong reservations on the idea of one's 'fromness'). No, Maugham was born a privileged son of an Englishman in Paris. Close enough? Close enough in the way that novelist Hella Haasse was born in

Indonesia to Dutch parents, then moved to the Netherlands early in life? Not really. But Maugham did live the last 25 years of his life in Monte Carlo baled up in some ostentatious mansion. So there we are. And, well, his life was the precise embodiment of a jet-setting tospot with endless spigots of cash, closets bursting with garish frippery, affairs rearing up in far-flung countries like couture fads or spooked gazelles and well-oiled manoeuvres in conniption throwing. All news to me. Can't say I knew boo about William Somerset Maugham before. So, here, he acts as the pastiche many think Monaco to embody. It's certainly not a fair embodiment applicable to all mensch from the area over the eons, but I had to go with somebody.

But here's whom I would very much have preferred to read from Monaco for this project: Louis Notari.

Without doubt, Notari is the man of letters from Monaco. He singlehandedly revived studies of and writings in various Monégasque languages—the first author to have known published works in those tongues. As late as the early 1920s! La Bibliothèque Louis Notari, Monaco's national library, clearly is named in his honour. He wrote the words for Monaco's national anthem, too. And, oh yes, he was also an accomplished civil engineer, designing Monaco's only major gardens, the Jardin Exotique de Monaco (mostly comprised of cacti from around the world, thornily juxtaposed with and lording above all the gauzy Rolls Royces thrumming to and fro). Notari was also the first to discover, around 1950, the huge caverns that lay under his nation and trumpeted garden—incidentally, the very same caverns in which I would nearly meet my death 52 years later, after sliding down some dank, rickety stairs and nearly impaling myself in an iron maiden of razor-sharp stalagmites protruding below. Thanks, Louis.

I emailed the Notari Library, inquiring if they knew of any translations from the past 75 years. No reply. I wrote to the Monaco International Forum of Cinema and Literature seeking the same. No reply. For Chrissakes, I even wrote to the arts society headed by one Mr Albert Alexandre Louis Pierre Grimaldi, aka Prince Albert II. Thrice, no reply.

I cannot find a single trace (including many libraries' online features) that any of his work has ever been translated into English. Can you? Please let me know if you can.

So, Maugham's my chap for Monaco.

My inability to read French has also stymied my plans for New Caledonia and its premier literary figure, novelist and poet Jean Mariotti. Never had I heard a peep about him before my wife and I recently set off on our babymoon (read: honeymoon for expectant parents) to Mariotti's homeland. We stayed a few nights in a rustic bungalow amidst araucaria pines that swish and bend to spell the region's beauty. Turns out this Mariotti fella is from the next ravine over. Learning this fact seeded in me my first inklings of this project.

Widely lauded in France, generally unknown everywhere else, Mariotti, too, receives the library and academic college-naming homage in Noumea. From what I can prowl online, many of his novels sound like Jack London-y tales with a South Pacific bent and doused in farragos of local politics (although he also penned travel guides and economic surveys of the indigenous cultures to pay the bills). Frustratingly, the only English translation of his work ever to be published, *Tales of Poindi*, was a one-off run from Domino Press, New York, in 1938. And that was a children's book.

Undaunted, I pressed on with correspondence (choppily translated by Google) to L'association pour L'Édition des Oeuvres de Jean Mariotti. Did they know of any translations? Their reply was eager, excited that somebody from Australia enquired about their god, but also wistful with resignation. Alas, they have grand plans to publish all his works in translation, but, to date, haven't raised enough cash or international interest to do a single one. Are you reading this, entrepreneurs out there with small presses? I know it's often about rapier margins and dollars in publishing books, but what an opportunity.

New Caledonia represents the lone loose-end I have with this project. I could stumble through Mariotti's readily available French language originals, insufficiently gleaning only the phonemes his words offer my ear. There isn't really anybody else to choose from. So I might do just that.

I did have another first-choice dead end, for identical reasons, in hoping to read heralded Montenegrin author Mirko Kovač, owner of more brass badges of honour (for literature) than his nemesis, Slobodan Milošević, could have possibly sported (for shame) on his erstwhile epaulettes. After coming up goose eggs for any Kovač translations, I wrote to indie Croatian publisher Fraktura to see if they had any English language editions planned, adding to what they currently publish of

his work in Serbo-Croatian. Again, I received a most eager reply: they'd like to do exactly that, but haven't found any foreign publisher to invest in such a co-project (still looking at you, small presses of Australia). Thankfully, I ran across Mihailo Lalić, fellow esteemed Montenegrin scribe, and located a bookshop in New Iberia, Louisiana, that had a used copy of his *The Wailing Mountain*. This book got a lone English translation printing in the 1960s.

A few more bends to my project rules

When looking at whom I would select from Cambodia, I dearly wanted to discover that one or perhaps two novels by Mao Somnang had been translated into *English. Curses*. Not a one that I've come across, anyhow. She has been, undoubtedly, the most widely read author in Cambodia for the past 30 years. I'm gleaned her books were more lengthy serials, at times cranked out in a fortnight. Writing under the nom de plume of The Rabbit, she stealthily concocted and freed more than 100 titles under the Khmer Rouge's bulbous nose. It's said her books helped keep people sane during such hard-to-imagine barbarism. Pin Yathay's recount, *Stay Alive, My Son*, my selection for Cambodia, has done the 'imagining' for me. It is one of the first and more renowned texts of the survival of that wrath. Yathay's book is novel-length, definitely literature, but not much fictionalising going on, I suspect. I've chosen it anyhow.

In the end, I did select one book of poems: *Black Stone* by Grace Mera Molisa of Vanuatu. She was, by miles, the grand swami of Vanuatu's modern literary incubation: poet, activist, leading Pacific intellectual, agitator, polyglot extraordinaire. Also, an interesting point to note is that she was the first indigenous Vanuatian, ever, to be awarded a university degree—or so attest various pages on the internet. Could be true.

**Melanesian cultures are saturated in a dizzying bombardment of languages and oral traditions which are as rich as any region on the planet. Scads of dough-eyed students traipse off into PNG, Solomon Islands, Wallis and Futuna to study this linguistic trove. But there's not been a whole lot of printing presses out there chugging away on tiny islets.**

Ergo, little of this tradition has found its way into printed novels, let alone in English. Pasifik Paradaes, Molisa's novel written in Bislama—a creole hewn from English, French and indigenous languages and woven into the modern tongue spoken by all Vanuatans—remains untranslated. And so here, finally, is my selected reading list! Of 11 women, 17 men, in no particular order.

*Agamemnon's Daughter*, Ismail Kadare, Albania

*The Crystal Frontier*, Carlos Fuentes Macias, Mexico

*Paradise of the Blind*, Duong Thu Huong, Vietnam

*The Museum of Unconditional Surrender*, Dubravka Ugrešić, Croatia

*The Villagers*, Jorge Icaza Coronel, Ecuador

*Faces in the Water*, Janet Frame, New Zealand

*Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter*, Mario Vargas Llosa, Peru

*The Shrimp People*, Rex Shelley, Singapore

*Miracle Workers*, Slavko Janevski, Macedonia

*Black Stone*, Grace Mera Molisa, Vanuatu

*Blindness*, José Saramago, Portugal

*Snow Country*, Yasunari Kawabata, Japan

*The Tea Lords*, Hella Haasse, Netherlands

*Frangipani*, Célestine Hitiura Vaite, French Polynesia

*Cosima*, Grazia Deledda, Italy

*The Vivisector*, Patrick White, Australia

*The Girl in the Photograph*, Lygia Fagundes Telles, Brazil

*Nowhere Man*, Aleksander Hemon, Bosnia-Herzegovina

*Stay Alive, My Son*, Pin Yathay, Cambodia

*TBC*, Jean Mariotti, New Caledonia

*By Night in Chile*, Roberto Bolaño, Chile

*Bear*, Marian Engel, Canada

*Of Human Bondage*, Somerset Maugham, Monaco

*The Wailing Mountain*, Mihailo Lalić, Montenegro

*The Time of the Doves*, Merc Rodoreda, Spain

*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Maya Angelou, USA

*Mobile*, Michel Butor, France

*No Harvest But a Thorn*, Shahnon bin Ahmad, Malaysia

My preference is to acquire new copies where I can, then go for used copies when necessary.

Many thanks to Martin Shaw of Readings and Kris Hemensley of Collected Works for helping me get my grubby mitts on some of the new copies tucked hither and yon across the world.

Will anything keep me from completing the project?

My wife and I are expecting our first child this April. Very exciting. Fatherhood will certainly consume much of the remaining snippets of free time I currently have to laze around in and read, as I am plentifully told. Bring it on! I'm not ready, but whoever is with their first child?

So I'm quite enthused that I've managed to read six novels in January alone. That's easily the most I've ever read in a month's time (although I'd wager the aggregate word count from all six is still less than the total for Shantaram).

Perhaps the greatest threat to this reading project is feline in nature. One of our two cats, Henry (a headstrong female whom I adore), is equipped with a spooky knack for knowing when I am sprawled out on the couch, on our bed or anywhere on the floor with a book in my hand. She slinks up to me, real coquettish-like, and with stealthy aplomb, winnows herself between my face and the book I'm holding up to read. When she obtains a perch on my sternum that satisfies her proximity requirements of utmost interruption, she begins purring like an ebullient Whipper-Snipper. And there she sits, smug little scamp, scrunched up like a yogic bunny.

Wouldn't you know? She's actually allergic to literature!

It's true. For when she is moored in these perches – blocking all view of my book and elastic in her resistance to be being nudged out of my line of vision – she stiffens her legs, uncoils her lanky frame like a baseball pitcher winding-up for a fastball, and with enormous velocity, uncorks an almighty cat sneeze directly in my face.

At point-blank range. Me, fully glazed like a doughnut.

I never see it coming. Even though I know it's lurking somewhere, craftily, artfully, in her sinuses. It's like I'm somehow entranced. Too late. My countenance, once peaceful, has been mugged. Again. My entire face coated with goo, shot at me in a frantic mist from the turbo atomiser that is our dear pet. Even the book's pages don't escape, what with the back spray and all.

So you can see how this is problematic. And it's a deeply grody experience. But 28 books, 28 authors, 28 countries ... and 1 year to get it done will not be as viscous.

On to book thirteen ...

**Kent MacCarter**

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<http://blogs.crikey.com.au/literaryminded/2011/03/15/guest-post-around-the-world-in-28-novels-by-kent-mcarthur-part-one/>

## Commentary

### Red faces over Interpol's Red Notice for Australian Julian Assange

What's with the Interpol Colour Chart for the world's most wanted?

Recidivist mass murderer Muammar Gaddafi, he of the all-girl vestal virgin Clit Squad cops a mere clockwork Orange Notice whilst our Julian Assange of WikiLeaks, exposé of state-sanctioned killers and war crimes and who is fighting extradition to Sweden for uncharged sexual allegations, is king hit with the big ticket Red Notice. Go figure.

There's something shonky going on in the shady world of interpolitics. Let's move in for a closer shufti. Have you checked out the profiles of alleged crims who normally make the Red Notice billboard? Go for it. Have a squiz. We're talking bigtime felons here. Terrorists, mass murderers, people traffickers, drug barons and their ilk. Got the picture?

**Try as I did I just couldn't find anyone else in the entire of Red Notice history as far down the criminal dude chain as our Julian. And apparently never before has Sweden requested a Red Notice based on similar circumstances and allegations. What's more, Interpol sources say that the Red Notice posting of Julian Assange is the first and only case of its kind. Is that true, Interpol?**

Interpol is such a funny little secretive and paradoxical clubette; always going on about how worthy and important it is to data sharing, preserving international security, the ongoing tumultuous fight against terrorism and corruption and the eradication of international crime by enabling all of its 188 members with the power to fight organised crime, including Libya, that well known bastion of human rights, justice and democratic egalitarianism—ipso facto, Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen, Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the Philippines, Morocco, Sudan, Australia, Britain and the United States, Russia, India, Indonesia, China, Pakistan and Afghanistan and all of the rest of us who are guilty of hypocrisy and political expediency and who wallpaper our economies with banknotes sullied with the sweat and blood of the disenfranchised, the bullied, the defeated and the enslaved.

We dance naked before their fully clothed despotic masters and do their bidding on the pretext they do ours. Ahhh... political fellatio—such a higher art form when conducted between consenting countries.

Only a matter of weeks ago, the West and its subordinates were extolling the virtues of important geopolitical positions and posturings of the likes of dictatorial psychopaths Egypt's Hosni Mubarak and Gaddafi, Libya's self-proclaimed 'King of Africa'.

The fact that these two share the same incompetent hair colourist as Italy's Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, and that all three appear to have been dipped in formaldehyde should have given us a few clues. They've had so much cosmetic surgery they probably haven't any tear ducts. That's why they can't cry for pity's sake and why they didn't need all those tear gas canisters we authorised and branded with our logo.

What do we care about their people; our brothers and sisters; our kith and kin? Other tribes they may be, but of our own species. Well, sort of. Just. But hey, they were really losers, weren't they? Bigtime. They deserved the governments they didn't vote for. Like us. Just like Interpol deserved its former president, who was done for corruption, fraud and racketeering. True dinks, I kid you not. Yes. The president of Interpol! While we're at it, I'm puzzled as to how an international agency such as Interpol could be so incompetent that it couldn't even find a photo of Julian Assange to go with his Red Notice posting. (Haven't they heard of Google or in-your-Facebook?)

Interpol remains publicly contemptuous of and unaccountable to the world it purports to serve. For a start, it's supposed to be one of the top guns, the crème de la crème of information sleuthing, data merging, analyses and people tracking. I'd like to see a group like Transparency International investigate Interpol. You know that Interpol is not supposed to do any political favours? I'm not convinced. Call me churlish; perhaps I've been inhaling too much tear gas. Or not enough.

Take the way Interpol crisis managed its corrupt president, Jackie Selebi.

In 2002 the then National Commissioner of the South African Police Service was elected as Interpol's vice-president and a couple of years later he was voted president.

I'm assuming that Interpol would practice normal HR due diligence and conduct background checks not only on its thousands of employees worldwide but also on its elected officers. That's its forte. Surely no-one would be exempt from these basic policing protocols and security checks.

Of course, on the surface of it, Mr Selebi's credentials were impeccable. No question. As were his connections. Most of them. After all, he was a former head of the ANC Youth League, an MP, South Africa's representative to the United Nations and Chair of an anti-landmine conference, Chair of Justice, Crime Prevention and Security and all of that. Goodness, the man even won a Human Rights Award! (What a co-incidence, Julian Assange has won several too.)

On 10 September 2007, the National Prosecuting Authority of South Africa issued a warrant for Selebi's arrest. Did Interpol post a Red Notice on its president? Course not. How come he didn't resign as President of Interpol until months later, on 13 January 2008?

And why is my feverish mind suddenly darting over the Kenyan border and thinking of the tragic murders of human rights activists lawyer Oscar Kamau Kingara and his assistant, John Paul Oulu, both gunned down in their car whilst in a traffic jam near the University of Nairobi on their way to a human rights meeting, as I understand it.

**These courageous whistleblowers had refused to cower before corrupt police and political thugs—and the report they helped produce in 2008 was to result in that courage being met with even greater cowardice by their killers on 5 March 2009—and indifference by the rest of the world.**

Like their brutal executions, 'The Cry of Blood'—Report on Extra-judicial Killings and Disappearances (and there were thousands of killings attributed to the Kenyan police) was largely ignored by Western and mainstream media. Still is. But Julian Assange and WikiLeaks grasped the significance of the report and published it and were damned, earning Amnesty International's New Media Award for 2009.

So, a kangaroo hop and a carjacking skip from Kenya back to South Africa. Both Interpol members. We shan't bother joining any dots. On 2 July 2010, after a scathing dressing down by the judge in South Africa's High Court, Selebi was found guilty of corruption. He was subsequently sentenced to 15 years imprisonment but is still free pending an appeal.

From the evidence submitted to the Court it was obvious that Selebi abused his privileged position—like alerting people that they were under police surveillance; not a good look for the President of Interpol—and made preposterous assertions that he was unaware of the criminal activities of his longstanding decidedly criminal civilian associates—this from a man who was his country's Police Commissioner and the head of Interpol. Our Interpol. The world's Interpol.

And let us not forget that while holding dual office, Selebi was the dude who first suggested legalising prostitution—but only for the duration of the 2010 World Soccer Cup, mind you. Nice one Jackie. Your heart was in the right place. Right behind your trouser zip. You can see why he was elected head of Interpol.

But let's be fair about this. Just because a President of Interpol turns out to be corrupt should not mean we condemn the whole organisation. After all, excreta (it's the lapsed Catholic in me) happens, to misquote Australian federal opposition Leader Tony Abbott.

Nor can you blame today's Interpolsters for what happened years ago. There is the Hitler connection, of course. Yep. SS Excreta happened there. The organisation that was the forerunner of Interpol had a succession of four Nazi presidents because of Germany's annexing of Austria in 1938, but we must remember that for two of the gang of four, the Allied Fates intervened. Ernst Kaltenbrunner, a lawyer and war criminal replaced Reinhard Heydrich who was mortally wounded in an assassination ambush by patriots, was executed after the Nuremberg Trials.

My sources confirm that the Lyon-based organisation is not a happy place to work in these days. Here are just a few reasons, according to informants:

- There continues to be great disquiet within Interpol about the Assange Red Notice.
- The Assange Red Notice was distributed to all 188 Interpol member countries on 20 November 2010—a mere 10 days after a remarkably short speech was delivered to the 79th Interpol General Assembly in Doha, Qatar, by the current President of Interpol and Singapore's former

Commissioner of Police, Khoo Boon Hui. (Interpol's bio on Khoo has yet to be updated). Mr Khoo is also an Honorary Officer of the Order of Australia and has a number of other international gongs, including from Thailand, Indonesia, Brunei and Malaysia.

- In December last year, Fairfax Media (and others) published sections of a WikiLeaks US State Department cable relating to former Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim. The explosive headline in *The Sunday Age* read, 'Sodomy charges were a set-up'.
- In an exclusive, journalists Philip Dorling and Nick McKenzie wrote that 'A leaked US State Department cable reveals that Singaporean intelligence officials told their Australian counterparts that Mr Anwar engaged in the conduct of which he is accused, a claim he has steadfastly denied.'
- The journalists wrote that 'Australia's Office of National Assessments (ONA) also states the conduct was the result of apparent entrapment by Mr Anwar's enemies' and that 'The document says the Singaporeans told ONA they made this assessment on the basis of "technical intelligence," which is likely to relate to intercepted communications.'

According to Dorling and McKenzie, the cable that 'deals with Mr Anwar's sodomy case' is dated November 2008 (a month after Mr Khoo formally replaced the disgraced Jackie Selebi as President of Interpol) and was 'released to *The Sunday Age* by WikiLeaks.' At the time, Mr Khoo was also Singapore's Police Commissioner.

Many of the players in this complicated and ongoing saga, including Interpol, would have scores to settle with Julian Assange and WikiLeaks. Join your own dots.

Wait, there's more. At last year's General Assembly, regarding what Interpol Secretary-General Ron Noble described as an 'investment' but what, Qatar's Minister of State for Internal Affairs, Sheikh Abdullah Bin Nasser bin Khalifa al Thani, pointedly described as a 'donation' on behalf of the Emir and his heir apparent (who said there was no succession planning in the Middle East?) it was announced that Singapore would be the happy recipient of US\$2 million towards the fund set up to establish the Interpol Global Complex, housed in Singapore. That's a bit of a coup for Singapore and Singaporean-born Interpol President Hui. (In truth, Qatar seems to have shouldered the financial and practical responsibilities for a number of Interpol-related initiatives.)

Incidentally, Australia's Federal Police Commissioner Tony Negus, also attended the General Assembly and gave a short speech, quite rightly complaining that he was given only 10 minutes of airtime.

In the mere 11 paragraphs of Mr Hui's closing speech, a precious single one was devoted to extolling the virtue of the Red Notices. Interpol insiders say President Hui's reference was a primer for the Assange Red Notice bombshell and that in preparation Sweden withheld permission for the Assange Red Notice to be immediately posted online, and ordered it to be held over.

Inexplicably it was not posted on Interpol's website until 1 December 2010. Sort of defeats the whole purpose of the urgency of a Red Notice, dunnit? Unless it wasn't really urgent.

I was told:

- 'There were several reasons for this: Firstly, there was an internal dispute about the posting of the Red Notice for Assange. Secondly, Sweden kept revising their requests; and thirdly, our bosses wanted to do a bit of showing off. Julian Assange was a star chamber pin-up for us and the Red Notice program and the Pres wanted to highlight that at the Assembly.'
- the paperwork for the Assange Red Notice failed to comply with Interpol's own regulations.
- Sweden revised its requests on several occasions.
- the documents were incorrectly filed.
- the Assange Red Notice was designed to compromise and damage the personal reputation of Julian Assange and cause him to be held in disrepute.
- that there was a serious internal dispute between Interpol staff and Interpol Executives over the posting of the Assange Red Notice.
- that the Assange Red Notice, may, in fact be defamatory because it breaches Interpol's guidelines.

- that the tenuous and spurious requests made by Sweden to Interpol could be used as supportive evidence that Sweden and Interpol (and others) deliberately colluded to inhibit Assange's chances of a fair trial and diminish his international public standing.
- That Interpol has email correspondence, text and communication notes/recordings that confirm such discussion and collusion between Sweden, Australia, the United States and Interpol Executives and these materials attest to political interference by these countries and their representatives, in contravention and violation of Interpol's own regulations.
- That the current Secretary-General of Interpol, Ronald K. Noble is 'too close' to US intelligence and remains partisan to preserving and protecting the legacy of the George W. Bush administration and that despite his formidable qualifications, he is now in his 11th year as Secretary-General and has been in the position for too long (he is now in his third term). Some of the other 188 member nations understandably want a stint in the high chair.
- Interpol's own rules and regulations allow for Julian Assange and his representatives to access and have copies of his Interpol files. These rules are available in a document entitled Operating Rules of the Commission for the Control of Interpol's Files'.

Informants within Interpol are fearful of being exposed but say they will be prepared to speak with an investigatory body such as Transparency International. They do not trust any of Interpol's internal mechanisms or dispute resolution procedures. Moreover, they are concerned that the Travel Document program—designed to fast track travel for Interpol operatives and preclude the need for visas—can be easily abused by rogue member states and despotic regimes and their familial groupings and coteries, especially when trying to flee their countries and safeguard loot.

They cite the irony of the Orange Notice postings of Muammar Gaddafi and members of his family and close associates.

Said one operative on condition of anonymity:

'Typically, these close family members and associates are nearly always in charge of security and intelligence. They are the last people in the world who should have unbridled access to international travel. But that places us in a diplomatic cleft. We need to revisit the eligibility criteria of the travel documents, and we need to subject card holders to more stringent security and character checks.'

Despite Prime Minister Julia Gillard's assertions that she would not be discussing the Julian Assange matter with US President Barack Obama, the word is that the Prime Minister will instead be discussing the matter with Secretary of State Hilary Clinton.

It may be a long plane journey from the Opal Office in Australia to Washington's Oval Office but hopefully it gave our PM time to contemplate her unimpressive political performance thus far.

Gillard has to undertake some serious reparation to restore her credibility at home and equally with supporters of The First Amendment and America's many supporters of Julian Assange and WikiLeaks. Not everyone is baying for Assange's blood. And let us not forget poor Bradley Manning.

Gillard's preposterous, inept and legally prejudicial remarks last year, condemning Assange's activities as 'illegal' will forever staple her to the marginalia of Australia's political history. It signalled to all Australia's sons and daughters that at the first sign of any 'trouble' we are immediately abandoned by our Prime Minister, and backed in this instance by her obsequious and flaccid Attorney-General, Robert McClelland.

Still, we should be getting used to it by now from our governments. Think Hicks. Think Habib. Think Van Nguyen. Think pensioners. Think Indigenous. Think disabled. Think refugees and asylum seekers. Think little kids who watch their family members drown. Think elderly. Think homeless. Think unemployed. Think mentally distressed. Think defence personnel. Think parliamentary super packages. You'd think that the results of the last federal election would have taught them that we the people have had the proverbial gutful. But they've already reverted to type.

It is time we learned from the children of the revolution.

Tess Lawrence

\* First published in *Independent Australia* www.independentaustralia.net and US-based *Truthout* www.truthout.org

## Contributors

### Seedy Bojang

Seedy Bojang is a journalist and writer from The Gambia. After the closure of independent newspapers in The Gambia, Seedy was briefly employed by the government-supported *Gambia* newspaper. His employment was terminated because he would not write articles supporting the government. Melbourne PEN assisted in getting him out of The Gambia through the ACORN (Cities of Refuge) program and he now lives near Copenhagen.

### Judith Raphael Buckrich

Dr Buckrich, born in Budapest, Hungary, was Chair of the International PEN Women Writers' Committee from 2003 to 2009, and is a Vice-President of the Melbourne Centre of PEN. An Honorary Research Fellow in Melbourne University's History Unit, she is the author of several significant urban histories and works of fiction, and is working on a memoir.

### Anne M Carson

Anne M Carson is a Melbourne writer, poet and visual artist, and a teacher of creative writing. Her poetry has been broadcast and published in Australia and overseas.

### berni m janssen

berni m janssen is a writer and performer who works collaboratively with diverse artists and communities in the development and presentation of text in multiple media. She is the web 'spinster' and convenor of the Asia and Pacific Writers Network and a member of the PEN Melbourne Committee.

### Toni Jordan

Toni Jordan's 2008 debut novel, *Addition*, was shortlisted for the Barbara Jefferis Award and longlisted for the Miles Franklin in 2009. *Addition* has been published in 16 countries worldwide. Her second novel, *Trust*, was published in 2010. Toni lives in Melbourne where she lectures in writing at RMIT University and has a column in *The Age*.

### Lucina Kathmann

Lucina Kathmann, novelist, short story writer, journalist and essayist in Spanish and English, she has been a vice-president of International PEN since 2002.

### Tess Lawrence

Tess Lawrence is an investigative journalist advocate, contributing editor at large for *Independent Australia*, and a contributor to US-based website Truthout. She is a citizen journalist specialising in ethical media services and crisis management and has been a longtime campaigner for Julian Assange and WikiLeaks. Tess is a former committee member of PEN Melbourne

### Kent E. MacCarter

Kent MacCarter studied writing at University of Chicago and University of Melbourne. An expatriate of various places in Minnesota, Montana and New Mexico, he is now a permanent resident of Melbourne, Australia. His first collection of poetry, *In the Hungry Middle of Here*, was published by Transit Lounge Press in 2009.

### Rosemary Plummer

Rosemary Plummer is a Warumungu woman of the Northern Territory. She is one of the emerging voices of Indigenous poets from the Barkly region whose poetry is in the IAD Press's *Voices from the Heart*. Rosemary is also co-author with fellow writer Jan Hill of *Two Cultures Meet*. In 2000, Rosemary received the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Award for a poem about her grandmother titled *Napanangka Has Gone Digging For Sand Frogs*, which was published in *Northerly*.

### Ann Shenfield

Ann Shenfield has worked as an animation filmmaker and author-illustrator. Her film work has received various awards including commendations for poetry in film. Her written poetry has also received prizes and commendations, including the Rosemary Dobson Poetry Award. Her book *You Can Get Only So Close On Google Earth* was published in 2010.

### Cynthia Troup

Cynthia Troup is a writer and editor based in Melbourne; she worked with Deb Verhoeven and others on the volume *Parlato in Italiano: The Heyday of Italian Cinema in Myrtleford in the 1960s*. Edited by John Taylor and Cynthia Troup (Myrtleford & District Historical Society, 2010), it was shortlisted for a 2010 Victorian Community History Award. Her most recent collaborative project is the libretto for a chamber opera titled *Dwelling Structure*, which will be premiered by Chamber Made Opera in May 2011.

### Deb Verhoeven

Deb Verhoeven is Chair and Professor of Media and Communication at Deakin University, Deputy Chair of the National Film and Sound Archive, President of the on-line film journal Senses of Cinema and honorary life member of Women in Film and Television. She is the author of the monograph, *Jane Campion* (Routledge, 2009). Verhoeven is currently co-authoring a book titled *The New Cinema History Guide* (Blackwell).

### Christopher Warren

Christopher Warren is the Federal Secretary of the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance, the union of people who inform and entertain Australia and New Zealand. A journalist, Chris is also CEO of the Walkley Foundation for Excellence in Journalism and a long-time trustee of the \$3 billion Media Super. He is immediate past president of the International Federation of Journalists.

### Arnold Zable

Arnold Zable is a writer, educator, and human rights advocate. His books include *Jewels and Ashes*, *The Fig Tree*, *Café Scheherazade*, *Scraps of Heaven*, and most recently, *Sea of Many Returns*. He is president of the Melbourne Centre of International PEN and has a doctorate from the School of Creative Arts, Melbourne University.



## Membership Application

- I agree with the PEN charter
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MEMBERSHIP OF PEN IS OPEN TO ALL QUALIFIED WRITERS, EDITORS AND TRANSLATORS WHO SUBSCRIBE TO THE AIMS OF THE INTERNATIONAL PEN CHARTER WITHOUT REGARD TO NATIONALITY, LANGUAGE, RACE, COLOUR OR RELIGION.

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## PEN International Charter

The PEN Charter is based on resolutions passed at its International Congresses.

PEN affirms that:

1. Literature knows no frontiers and must remain common currency among people in spite of political or international upheavals.
2. In all circumstances, and particularly in time of war, works of art, the patrimony of humanity at large, should be left untouched by national or political passion.
3. Members of PEN should at all times use what influence they have in favour of good understanding and mutual respect between nations; they pledge themselves to do their utmost to dispel race, class and national hatreds, and to champion the ideal of one humanity living in peace in one world.
4. PEN stands for the principle of unhampered transmission of thought within each nation and between all nations, and members pledge themselves to oppose any form of suppression of freedom of expression in the country and community to which they belong, as well as throughout the world wherever this is possible. PEN declares for a free press and opposes arbitrary censorship in time of peace. It believes that the necessary advance of the world towards a more highly organised political and economic order renders a free criticism of governments, administrations and institutions imperative. And since freedom implies voluntary restraint, members pledge themselves to oppose such evils of a free press as mendacious publication, deliberate falsehood and distortion of facts for political and personal ends.