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International PEN holds its 5th WIPC Conference

By Danson Kahyana

Barcelona –

International PEN held its 5th Writers in Prison Committee Conference from May 17-21, 2004. The main theme of the conference was "The Value of the Word".

In line with this theme, many submissions were made by PEN members like Carles Torner (Catalan PEN), Larry Siems (American PEN), Joan Smith (English PEN), Muge Sokman (Turkish PEN) and Isobel Harry (Canadian PEN), among others.

Many writers who had suffered repression in their countries, and whose freedom the Writers in Prison Committee had fought for, addressed the conference. These included Mr Kunle Adijbade (a Nigerian journalist who had been arrested by the Sani Abacha government on sedition charges), Ali Lmrabet (a Moroccan journalist who had suffered persecution for ridiculing the Moroccan monarchy) and Aaron Berhane, (an Eritrean journalist who escaped arrest and fled his country after the closure of his newspaper by the authorities).

The renowned novelist, Mr Salman Rushdie, who is now the president American PEN center, gave a key note address on his experiences as a writer who had suffered persecution. The appearance in 1988 of his novel, *The Satanic Verses*, stirred up a commotion in the radical Islamic world; a price was put on his head and he was forced to adopt stringent security measures.



Renowned novelist Salman Rushdie at the WIPC conference in Barcelona, Spain.

The conference ended with a fantastic public reading, where nine renowned poets performed their works, including Dr. Remi Raji, the General Secretary of Nigerian PEN.

