

THE
INTERNATIONAL
P.E.N.
CLUB
MEMBER

FAREWELL LETTER TO OUR WRITERS IN EXILE FROM ACTING PRESIDENT

Anna Frajlich

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Anna Frajlich

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The Center for Writers in Exile was created during World War II in London in order to establish a forum for writers cut off from their countries by Germany's invasion. During the Cold War the Centre served as an organization for writers who were exiled, or emigrated from countries under Communist rule. The exiled writers could not publish in the countries of their origin, their books published abroad were confiscated on the border, and these writers themselves were subjected to attacks for their convictions.

Our American PEN Branch of the Centre of Writers in Exile under the leadership of writers from different East European countries very vigorously participated in the defense of human rights and freedom from censorship in Eastern Europe and other dictatorial regimes.

Since 1976 Clara Gyorgyey has been the President of our Centre. Under her inspired leadership we anxiously observed the fight for freedom in Eastern Europe and vigorously participated in the actions of International PEN to further those efforts. Along with other PEN centers we condemned the suspension of Polish PEN, supported the heroic efforts of Latvian and Lithuanian writers, among others, and took part in every action aiding the cause of freedom in Eastern Europe.

We were vigilant and active. In 1989 we enthusiastically welcomed the return of independence and democracy to the countries of East Europe. Many of us for the first time in decades were able to visit our respective countries and publish our books, stories, poems and articles for the audience that could read our work in original, precisely that which was impossible when we were writers in exile. During the last 20 years many of our members have joined their national PEN Centers and other writers' associations. Even if we chose to remain in the United States we had ceased to be Exiles.

**Our NEXT MEETING is scheduled for DEC. 16, 2010, at 6:00 pm
at a new location: PEN American Center
588 Broadway, Suite 303 (third floor)
(between Houston and Prince Streets)
New York, NY 10012**

**All are welcome! The meeting will also be a book launch for our
"Anthology of PEN".**

During our last meeting under Clara Gyorgyey's leadership we decided to close this Center. It was decided that before closing we would publish an anthology in order to leave testimony to our creative effort. Our President, Clara Gyorgyey delegated the creation of Anthology to our Treasurer - Iryna Dybko Filipchak. All who responded to the call have their work represented in this memorable collection, which thanks to the great and admirable work of Iryna, came out this summer.

To our great shock, Clara Gyorgyey, our President for more than three decades, died in January of 2010. Thus the first part of the Anthology is dedicated to her memory.

We continued our work as a Center and our Center was represented at the PEN International Congress in Tokyo by Elizabeth Rajec and Elizabeth Csicsery-Ronay, who participated in the works of the Committees and made sure that Clara's contribution was commemorated.

Now that the work on the Anthology has been brought to a close, we are ready to proceed with the decision undertaken at our last meeting, namely, to close this particular chapter under the name of Writers-in-Exile.

We, Members of the Board, and myself the Acting President, appointed by Clara Gyorgyey, are aware that some members would like to continue some sort of association for those writers who remain abroad and who wish to associate. And this is perfectly fine. They may create a new chapter under some more appropriate name and assignment, enroll new membership and elect its own board.

However, the mission of our chapter of Writers in Exile chapter's has now been completed and precisely in memory of Clara Gyorgyey, we will carry out the last decision associated with her name as last elected President.

On behalf of all of us, let me thank those members who served as our delegates to various congresses and who worked on PEN committees. Special thanks go to those who served as our treasurers and took care of the Centre's finances: the late Varga Laszlo, Elizabeth Molnar Rajec, and presently Iryna Dybko Filipczak.

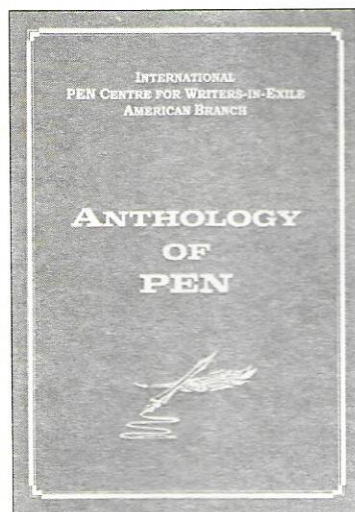
We also owe a debt of gratitude to our colleagues who served as Secretaries, Dorothea T. Weissman, Iryna Dybko Filipchak (from 1989 to 2006), and Paul Sohar (from 2007 to present), who was responsible for editing and mailing our Newsletter, as well as sending out hundreds of copies of our anthology.

With best wishes for your future success,

Anna Frajlich
Acting President

Elizabeth Molnar Rajec
Vice President

Iryna Dypko Filipchak
Treasurer



There are a few more copies of our **Anthology of PEN** remaining.

It's a beautiful publication all of us can be proud of, and it could make a perfect gift for the upcoming Holidays!

Send in your order early with a check to the Secretary; \$25.00 each postpaid.

Tokyo Congress: *PRESS RELEASE 29 September 2010*

**WORLD'S LEADING ADVOCATE FOR FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION
CONDEMNS IRAN,
TAKES FORMAL ACTION AT CHINESE EMBASSY IN TOKYO,
ELECTS FIRST ASIAN INTERNATIONAL SECRETARY**

More than 250 writers from several dozen countries, gathered in Tokyo for the 76th annual Congress of PEN International, expressed profound outrage at the sentencing yesterday of 35-year-old Iranian-Canadian blogger Hossein Derakhshan to 19.5 years in prison on charges that include 'propagating against the regime', 'insulting religion', spreading 'anti-revolutionary' propaganda and obscenity.

'This outrageous sentence of a writer for the expression and transmission of his ideas is grossly unjust,' said John Ralston Saul, President of PEN International. 'This is the new totalitarianism. Instead of banning books, they are attempting to control the Internet; what became a mechanism for freedom in its early days is now under attack around the world.'

News of the sentence came as delegates from 86 PEN Centres around the world concluded their weeklong meeting, during which they considered both the relentless, escalating threats to freedom of expression in many forms and the essential role that the literatures and languages of the world play in sustaining our common humanity.

At the Foreign Correspondents' Club in Tokyo, PEN International announced the delivery of a strongly worded statement to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Japanese capital. The statement expresses 'alarm', 'concern' and 'shock' over China's status as one of the world's most prolific jailers of writers and journalists, and decries the 'arbitrary' arrests they face; the use of 'administrative detention, including the infamous "Re-education Through Labour" system to jail dissident writers for up to 3 years without due process'; escalating censorship; and the increasing persecution of Independent Chinese PEN Centre (ICPC) members Shi Tao and, most recently, Liu Xiaobo.

Liu's case in particular was much discussed during the Congress. Currently serving a sentence of 11 years, he has come to symbolise China's systemic repression of its people's deep yearning for democratic freedoms to match the country's economic liberalism. He is one of more than 40 writers serving sentences in China (including the Tibet, Xinjiang-Uighur and Inner Mongolia autonomous regions).

Mexico was also a topic of much concern. A

state of undeclared war has festered there since 2006, in which more than 20,000 people – many of them journalists – have died as a result of the unchecked powers of drug cartels. 'In Mexico, words such as "kidnapping", "torture" and "summary execution" have become commonplace, heard daily,' said Saul, 'and all these crimes go unpunished.'

In Iran, more than 40 writers, journalists and bloggers in addition to Derakhshan have been detained or face charges. 'The extreme sentence handed to Derakhshan, in part for insults to Islam, is symptomatic of another great concern to PEN International,' said Marian Botsford Fraser, Chair of PEN's Writers in Prison Committee. 'The right to criticise religion is a right equal to the right to practise one's religion. When governments attempt to limit the rights of citizens, they are not seeking to protect faith or belief. They are seeking increased power over the citizenry.'

PEN International holds that legal restrictions on defamation would not only do little to foster mutual understanding and respect, but can also be used to stifle creative freedom as well as suppress minority views and religions.

Congress delegates also elected a new International Secretary, Takeaki Hori of Japan. Hori has sat on PEN International's Board since 2004, and is the first person from Asia to take up this critical post within in the NGO.

'This is a historic moment,' said Saul, 'and a statement of how international PEN International is. The vast majority of Centres are outside the West, which is a complete reversal from when the organisation was founded, and in its early years ... We're probably the oldest real NGO, but we're constantly re-inventing ourselves.'

Hori concurred. 'We have reached a stage where every Centre in every region now has a continuous connection to the mission of PEN International, not just in terms of new technology, but philosophically. PEN International is in the hands of our entire family. This is a symbolic transition to a truly globalised organisation.'

Appropriately, the Congress was held in Tokyo on the 75th anniversary of the Japan PEN Centre's founding. Hori, a member of Japan PEN for over

25 years, claims a remarkably diverse background. Known as a writer on environmental issues, he is also a professor of social anthropology, journalist, founder of an offshore fishery and former vice president of the US-Japan Foundation, among many other roles.

In other developments within PEN International, members Philo Ikonya of Kenya, Lee Gil-won of South Korea and Tarik Günersel of Turkey were

newly elected to the Board, and Haroon Siddiqui of Canada was re-elected for another three-year term.

PEN International celebrates literature and promotes freedom of expression. Founded in 1921, its global community of writers now spans more than 100 countries. PEN programmes, campaigns, events and publications connect writers and readers wherever they are in the world.



Our Delegate's Report from Tokyo PEN Congress, 2010

This year's PEN Congress in Tokyo from the 23rd to the 30th of September, 2010 was a fascinating feast of literature, poetry and prose devoted to the theme of the "Environment and Literature—the role of the Word". It was one of the best organized, beautifully presented, and welcoming of Congresses. The Japanese we met had a beautiful, graceful courtesy that made one feel truly welcome and revered. The receptions, I can say, with my vast experience with PEN meetings, were the best I've ever attended. The reception halls were elegant, there were so many beautiful kimonos, a flower of dress, the women were utterly charming, even the men were charming. The food was delicious and beautifully served. The champagne flowed as did the other drinks. Japanese PEN really outdid itself. It is a very large PEN, 2,000 members and it has money. And they spent lavishly. In addition to the sumptuous receptions, we were regaled with visits to Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples in the Post-Congress tour to Kyoto, and the lovely, contemplative tea ceremony. One has the feeling that the Japanese do everything with formal grace, refinement, and art. The members of Japanese PEN, even some famous writers, were exceedingly kind and accessible. They seemed eager for us to get to know their culture, which is on a very high level indeed.

One cavil was that the Congress was held in Tokyo, which is a huge soulless city, at least the district we were in, with towering high rises and business buildings. It is like a clean and safe Chicago. There was nothing particularly Japanese about this part of the big city. Too much of our Western materialist, consumer culture has been adopted. We saw more of old Japan in the later post-Congress trip to Kyoto. For one thing, Kyoto is much better preserved (I suspect it was not bombed like Tokyo). It is a lovely city of low rises and traditional Japanese houses. Nonetheless, at every reception we were shown

something of Japanese culture. At the first one, we were given a brief glimpse of Noh theatre. It was a powerful experience. Pure Zen, an exhibit of concentrated energy that was pure spirituality. Sometimes I think that, contrary to general conception, what is spiritual has great vitality. This was exemplified by a Buddhist priest, not Zen, but another sect of Buddhism, whom I met at the reception in Kyoto. He was dressed in a black and grey austere kimono. But far from being austere, he was full of life and humour. I asked him if he was allowed to drink. He said, yes. And he said he also had a family. He seemed to me one of the most vital people I have ever met. Yet he confided that he was 69, almost seventy. I thought that he was at most 50, and when I asked other people how old they thought he was, almost all said early 40's. Whatever practice he was following, it was doing him a great deal of good.

Two outstanding writers were featured, the Nobel-prize-winning Chinese writer Gao Xingjian and the marvelous Canadian writer Margaret Atwood, both of whom spoke eloquently linking literature and the environment, the theme of the Congress. It is interesting to observe how the environment has become increasingly important at PEN meetings. Years ago, it was not even mentioned. When I complained, the reply was that we were writers and not politicians. Yet writers have to write about something, so why can't they write about the environment and why can't we talk about it? Then the excellent Portuguese poet, Casimiro de Brito, gave an eloquent talk about the environment at a meeting in Bled some years ago. The following year Edvard Kovač led a round table at the Peace Committee meeting in Bled, the first such on this subject, and now an entire Congress was devoted to the environment. This mirrors the movement of the environment from being a marginal interest to the forefront of news and conscious-

ness. Just as well, as if we no longer have an environment, we no longer have humanity, either. As well, an anthology of poetry was published with poems devoted to nature and the environment. This was particularly fitting in the home of and *haiku* and *tanka* in which nature must figure as a rule.

The 27th of September was taken up with a meeting of the Writers for Peace Committee. It was quite a stormy meeting. Sometimes, I think that the WfPC is the war committee. We deal with conflict situations, the Serbs and Kosovars, the Turks and the Kurds, the Basques and the Spanish, the Tibetans and Uyghurs and Chinese, and last but not least the Israelis and Palestinians. So of course, there is a great deal of *Sturm und Drang*, as can be imagined at these meetings. But this is the only way to go through it to come to peace. The point of contention this time was our prospective meeting in Haifa in December. As can be imagined, this was the most controversial of all our areas of discussion. The Arab centers complained that they couldn't go or if they went and had their passports stamped, they couldn't return to their countries. Also even their lives could be put in danger from their own fundamentalist Islamists. Although Kovač replied that we did not expect anyone to risk their life, in the end, we were forced to give up sponsoring the meeting, but we could go as individuals. Nevertheless, this did not seem to discourage people, even more decided they wanted to go to Haifa than before. We re-elected Edvard Kovač of Slovenia as chairman of the Peace Committee, a position he will serve for three more years.

Japanese PEN placed poetry readings by PEN members in a prominent position. We were asked ahead of time to send one (!) poem that would be translated into Japanese and included in the anthology, whose theme was the Environment and Literature. There was a reading in the afternoon at Waseda University, then another at the Keio Plaza Hotel, the venue of the Congress. I read a poem that, though not a *Haiku*, was influenced by the simplicity of *Haiku*, that expressed in a few words the destruction of the environment and the consequences. There were a very large number of people reading. Many Japanese with their very beautiful, simple, but formal style. The African poets, on the other hand, were spontaneous and lively.

This is the place to point out that there were more Africans present than at any other Congress. There were also a number of writers from Central Asia, Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, there were Uyghur, a Tibetan. As well, a new regional network was formed, the Ural-Altai network which included Hungarian and Japanese. Japanese PEN was exceedingly generous in

paying their way. In fact, I think they said this was the highest number of centers participating in a Congress. The highest number of participants too. At the end of the Congress, we were told that around 6,000 people had attended the writers' talks and conferences. Unfortunately, unless it was at a general meeting that included all of us, I was too busy in the Peace Committee and the General Assembly to attend. A pity.

The General Assembly began on September 28. Key elections were held, one for Secretary-General, who does most of the hard work of PEN International. Of the two candidates, Kristin Schnider of German-Swiss PEN and Hori Takeaki, the Japanese won and will serve for the next three years. Eric Lax of West-Coast American PEN was voted by acclamation as Treasurer. An unprecedented 13 candidates ran for Board, of these, four people received the most votes: Philo Ikonya, Kenyan writer and activist, a warm dynamic and energetic person. Haroon Siddiqui, Indian but member of Canadian PEN, Gil-Won Lee, president of Korean PEN, and Tariq Gunersel of Turkish PEN were also elected to the Board. So it was quite a diverse group.

Eric Lax, the treasurer, talked about funding and finances and how it was getting more and more difficult to raise funds, because of the recession. Also PEN has a problem, because only 15% of its funding comes from dues, which is very low indeed.

Fortunately, Japanese PEN, one of the most generous of PEN centers, was able to subsidize 30 delegates to this Congress. That was why so many centers from Africa, Latin America, and Central Asia could come. Since there are so many new centers, it was important to decentralize. Regional and linguistic networks, such as the Ural-Altai network were springing up and taking on a dynamic role in PEN. Richer centers are helping to assist poorer ones. A good example is the Norwegian center which helped set up a new Afghan center which has attracted more than 200 writers since it was founded. The Dutch-speaking Belgian center is helping to found a Congolese center. Naturally, as writers, we complain a great deal about the downside of technology, but the good side is that technology has freed us from geographical restrictions.

There were as always a plethora of resolutions condemning the imprisonment and persecution of writers and violence against writers and journalists in all too many countries, some of the most notorious were Iran, Eritrea, Nepal where the continuing violence of Maoists targeted writers, Sri Lanka, Turkey, which although it has improved dramatically, continues, alas, to persecute the Kurdish language and Kurdish writers, Vietnam is another culprit. Russia was exhorted to end the persecution of the minority Fin-

no-Ugrian languages in Russia. And of course, the murderous campaign against journalists in Mexico by the drug cartels which are not being properly investigated or prosecuted. Two resolutions were passed against China, which is greatly in the news now. One demanded that the government free Uyghur writers imprisoned after the uprisings of 2008. China was exhorted to stop the persecution and imprisonment of writers, particularly Liu Xiaobo, former honorary president of the Independent Chinese center. This was such a high priority that a debate ensued during the Assembly about taking the resolution to the Chinese embassy. There ensued a somewhat comical altercation, because there was a sense that PEN didn't wish to exacerbate tensions already high because of recent events between China and the host country. In the end, the resolution was in fact presented to the Chinese embassy. This is the place to point out that, if anyone has any doubts about the efficacy of PEN, it is largely due to the pressure and influence of PEN that the dissident writer Liu Xiaobo was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace.

This helps greatly in putting the wind in our sails. The Peace Committee has set up a work group

including Independent Chinese, Uyghur, and Tibetan Centers to work on the "Chinese problem". China has greatly improved its economy; it has entered the world stage as a growing power commensurate with its enormous population. Yet with this power should come obligations that if it is to become part of the international community it needs to comply with essential human rights, such as freedom of expression, rights of minorities, the right of people to live in peace and safety, and have a modicum of democratic rights.

The next Congress will be held in Belgrade and Novy Sad in September of 2011 under the aegis of Serbian PEN. Croatians, Kosovars, Bosnians would be sending delegates of course, as well as Slovenes, Montenegrans, and the usual international delegates. This is a remarkable feat so soon after the murderous Balkan war of the 1990's, presenting an expressive example of how writers can move ahead of politicians in helping to make peace and bring about reconciliation.

Elizabeth Csicsery-Rónay

*Delegate of Writers in Exile (USA branch)
and Secretary of the Writers for Peace Committee
of PEN International*
