

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Canadian writers protest the detention of Liu Xiaobo

TORONTO: January 22, 2009—Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje, Nino Ricci and more than 40 members of PEN Canada, the writers' association, have signed a petition on behalf of prominent Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo. In a statement co-signed by over 300 major writers, such as Salman Rushdie, Wole Soyinka, Ma Jian and J. M. Coetzee, International PEN has called on the Chinese government to grant the "immediate and unconditional release of Liu Xiaobo and all those currently detained in the People's Republic of China for the peaceful expression of their opinions."

Liu Xiaobo is currently being held under a form of pre-trial arrest following his detention two days before the launch of Charter 08, a document calling for far-reaching political reforms and the inclusion of human rights guarantees in China's constitution. The Charter was published online on December 10, 2008 to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It was originally signed by 300 citizens from all walks of life – writers, legal scholars, economists and scientists. Since then, the Chinese authorities have shut down dozens of websites that refer to the Charter and harassed more than 100 of the original signatories. Despite this, more than 7,000 Chinese have added their names to the list.

"The government's drastic over-reaction to this document is a powerful reminder of why political reforms are so urgently needed inside China," said Isobel Harry, Executive Director of PEN Canada. "Liu and his colleagues have shown that censorship and intimidation cannot arrest China's drift towards democracy."

Liu Xiaobo is a former President and current Board member of the Independent Chinese PEN Centre. He first received support from PEN 20 years ago, as one of the "Black Hands of Beijing", a group of writers and intellectuals arrested for their participation in the Tiananmen Square protests. Since then, Liu has spent a total of five years in prison, including a three year sentence passed in 1996. He has also suffered frequent short arrests, harassment and censorship.

Liu Xiaobo is currently being held under Residential Surveillance at an undisclosed location in Beijing. No charges against him have as yet been made known.

International PEN's petition can be found online at:

http://www.pencanada.ca/media/International_PEN_statement-Liu_Xiaobo.pdf

Note to Editors:

About PEN Canada: PEN Canada is a member of International PEN, which has over 15,000 members in 144 Centres from 102 countries across the globe. The freedom to express ideas—without fear of attack, arrest or other persecution—has always been at the heart of International PEN's work.

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