



## **PEN Canada's position on the Galloway travel ban**

*Toronto, 5 April 2009* – The Government of Canada recently refused British MP George Galloway entry to Canada in order “to protect Canadians from people who fund, support, or engage in terrorism.” Such a decision cannot have been taken lightly and ought to be supported by clear evidence of Mr. Galloway’s involvement in such activities. Until such evidence is produced, however, Mr. Galloway’s fundraising for the people of Gaza, and his donation of aid and money to a duly elected government hardly constitute sufficient grounds for the government to keep him out of the country. PEN Canada believes that Minister of Immigration Jason Kenney should either provide further details of Mr. Galloway’s transgressions, or let him enter the country.

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms unequivocally states that everyone is entitled to freedom of “thought, belief, opinion and expression.” This freedom is essential to every democratic society and must be supported fully and without any form of censorship. Democracies guarantee freedom of access to a wide range of opinions and trust their citizens to determine the merits of such opinions for themselves. Open societies do not “protect” their citizens from the free exchange of ideas and information.

Mr. Galloway’s right to hold opinions which the government of Canada finds distasteful or wrongheaded is exactly the sort of speech which must be defended. The right to free speech is not contingent on a speaker’s opinions, however unpopular or controversial these may be, and government action undertaken on the basis of unsubstantiated claims of national security should never be allowed to trump the right to freedom of expression.