



25 YEARS *for* FREEDOM *of* EXPRESSION

PEN Canada Honours Turkish/Armenian Editor Hrant Dink as The Empty Chair at IFOA XXX

Toronto, October 14, 2009—PEN Canada has chosen Hrant Dink, the influential, outspoken and well-loved editor, assassinated in Istanbul in January 2007, as The Empty Chair for the 30th International Festival of Authors (IFOA XXX) at Harbourfront in Toronto, October 21st to 31st.

This is the fifteenth year of the tradition of The Empty Chair at the International Festival of Authors, whereby PEN Canada and the festival honour one writer who symbolizes the many writers in the world who are not able to travel freely and to read from their works at literary festivals around the world. (The first Empty Chair in 1994 was the Nigerian writer, Ken Saro Wiwa, who was tragically executed one year later, in defiance of worldwide outrage.)

Hrant Dink, editor of the Armenian language *Agos* magazine., was killed outside his office in Istanbul by an assassin on January 19, 2007. Dink was one of the few persons to be convicted under Article 301 of the Penal Code, accused of “insulting Turkishness” for his writings on the Armenian genocide. In October 2005 he was given a six month suspended sentence for a 2004 article entitled “The Armenian Identity”. The trial against those who orchestrated the killing of Hrant Dink continues; the 11th trial hearing is scheduled to be held on October 12, 2009.

Nobel Laureate Orhan Pamuk (who is appearing at IFOA XXX) has said of Hrant Dink’s murder: "In a sense, we are all responsible for his death. However, at the very forefront of this responsibility are those who still defend article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code. Those who campaigned against him, those who portrayed this sibling of ours as an enemy of Turkey, those who painted him as a target, they are the most responsible in this. And then, in the end, we are all responsible."

Dink’s murder sparked mass marches with protestors carrying banners saying “We are all Armenians”, “We are all Hrant Dink” and “301 Murderer”. It was the beginning of an international campaign demanding revision or repeal of Article 301, which many believe marked Dink out as a target for ultra-nationalists. That campaign continues, and IFOA XXX attendees will be asked to sign a petition demanding that Article 301 be abolished. PEN Canada will use the petition to lobby both the government of Turkey and the Canadian government.

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BACKGROUND: Following Dink's murder it was revealed that he had informed and warned the authorities about the plans to kill him but was not taken seriously. A number of other writers and journalists were allegedly put on extremist "death lists" and placed under police protection.

In March 2007 it was reported that 30 people had been interrogated in connection with Dink's murder, 20 of whom were subsequently brought to trial that opened in July 2007 and is still ongoing. A separate investigation was opened into 8 police accused of "dereliction of duty" following claims that they had been warned several times that Dink was in danger. One of them in particular is accused of failing to pass on information of a plot to kill Dink. In July 2008, the Turkish Parliamentary Human Rights Commission reported that there was negligence and lack of coordination on the part of the security services that led to a failure to prevent the murder.

In June 2009, the **European Court on Human Rights (ECHR)** presented a number of questions to the Turkish authorities saying that it is expecting the government to respond in November. It has received five applications related to the murder related to violations of the rights to life, free expression, fair trial, and to be free from discrimination. These include Dink's own application to the ECHR, made just two weeks before his death, against the six months suspended sentence under Article 301. Also being heard is a complaint about the lack of prosecution against policemen who took "souvenir" photographs of Dink's killer, Ogün Samast, on his arrest and posted them on the internet.

At the tenth and most recent trial hearing held at the Istanbul 14th Heavy Penal Court on 6 July, proceedings were marred by a comment made by defendant Ogün Samast who said in court that he had "Only five more years...." The Dink family lawyers protested, stating that "*Whoever has made him believe that he only has five more years, has threatened the Dink family.*" They called on the judge to take action.

Article 301: Article 301 is still in place, and around 25 writers and journalists are on trial under it—among over 70 in total; there are many more non-writers on trial under Article 301, charged with "insult" to the Turkish state and institutions in their writings. Article 301 is incompatible with international standards safeguarding freedom of expression. PEN Canada joins with writers around the world in demanding that Article 301 be abolished and that the trials against writers and journalists be ended.

PEN Canada is the Canadian centre of International PEN, the association of writers with over 15,000 members in 144 centres in 102 countries. PEN promotes friendship and intellectual co-operation among writers and campaigns for freedom of expression everywhere. **For more information:** www.pencanada.ca