

PEN CANADA

for FREEDOM of EXPRESSION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

John Ralston Saul Elected President of International PEN

October 21, 2009, Toronto – Today, October 21st, the International PEN Assembly of Delegates of International PEN, meeting in Linz, Austria, elected John Ralston Saul of Canada as International President.

He succeeds Jiri Grusa, one of the most important dissident Czech writers, who has held the post for six years. Past presidents have included Arthur Miller, Mario Vargas Llosa and Alberto Moravia.

John is the first Canadian in the 88-year history of International PEN to be elected president.

John Ralston Saul is a celebrated Canadian novelist and essayist and former President of PEN Canada. He has been awarded, among others, Chile's Pablo Neruda medal, Italy's Premio Letterario Internazionale and the Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres de France.

"International PEN is the world's most important and oldest freedom of speech and literary organisation. Almost 1,000 writers who are in prison or are in danger around the world look to us for help. We have to invent new ways of turning back the rise of authoritarian controls," said Saul.

"Threats to freedom of speech are expanding in new directions, especially with the rise of populism in the post-9/11 world.

"In addition, hundreds of minority and indigenous languages and cultures are in danger of extinction. This is the ultimate denial of freedom of speech."

Ellen Seligman, President of PEN Canada, noted that "The news this morning from Austria is very exciting indeed. The election of John Ralston Saul to the Presidency of International PEN is a great day for PEN, a great day for Canada. His commitment and vision will have great effect to the cause of defending freedom of expression. The work of PEN Canada, one of the most active centres of International PEN's 144, has always been held in high regard internationally. John Ralston Saul becomes the first Canadian President of International PEN. Another former PEN Canada President, Marian Botsford Fraser, was confirmed in these recent elections as Chair of the Writers in Prison Committee for International PEN, again becoming the first Canadian to hold this position. In addition, in 2007, former PEN Canada President Margaret Atwood was made an honorary Vice President of International PEN and journalist Haroon Siddiqui is the only current Canadian member of the Board of International PEN."

Founded in 1921 to promote literature, International PEN has 144 Centres in 102 countries around the globe.

For more information or to schedule an interview contact Kendra Ward at PEN Canada. Email: kendralward@gmail.com; cell: 647-235-0946.

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