



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Remembering Mexico's fallen writers -- PEN Canada launches Day of the Dead campaign

November 2, 2011 – Toronto – PEN Canada is launching a campaign on Mexico's Day of the Dead, to remember Mexican writers and print journalists who have been killed or disappeared in the course of their work. During the campaign PEN centres all around the world will call on the Mexican authorities to bring to justice those responsible for these crimes and to end the culture of impunity that exists for those who murder, attack and harass writers.

In the last five years, 35 journalists have been murdered and eight have gone missing; this year alone, nine journalists have been killed, four of whom were women. Most of the dead were involved in investigating corruption or reporting on organised crime, and the level of violence against writers and reporters has soared since 2006, when President Calderón began a militarized campaign against the drug cartels.

As **Marian Botsford Fraser, Chair of the Writers in Prison Committee of PEN International, said:** "Mexico is one of the most dangerous places in the world in which to practise journalism."

The campaign will both commemorate the writers and celebrate Mexico's vibrant culture. Award-winning Mexican writers **José Emilo Pacheco** (see below) and **Homero Aridjis** have written poems especially for the Day of the Dead campaign. These will be published alongside editorials and interviews, which will expose the violence Mexican writers have suffered, and the threats they still face.

President of PEN International, John Ralston Saul said: "The situation in Mexico is an ongoing tragedy. But it is also a struggle for free expression which can be won and, with campaigns like that launched on the Day of the Dead, we will help to win it."

In June 2011, PEN Canada and the International Human Rights Program at the Faculty of Law, University of Toronto, produced a timely and provocative report on the situation in Mexico:

[*Corruption, Impunity, Silence*](#) (also available in [Spanish](#)). The report exposes the Mexican government's repeated failure to protect the human rights of journalists, its complicity in rights violations against them, and the web of Mexican laws that limit freedom of expression and effectively gag journalists who seek to expose government corruption.

The report makes numerous recommendations to the Mexican government and emphasizes the need for other governments to place human rights protection of Mexican media workers on their foreign policy agenda.

As part of the Day of the Dead campaign, PEN Canada will make a series of presentations about Mexico's longstanding culture of impunity at local schools and university campuses. Other PEN centres will take part in traditional activities, such as building altars decorated with the symbolic colours of purple (for pain), white (for hope) and pink (for celebration). These will be displayed alongside photographs of the dead at public readings, demonstrations and talks

On Nov. 1 students at Martingrove Collegiate Institute, Toronto, held a Day of the Dead event in the school library. Standing in a darkened room, next to an altar decorated with brightly coloured cloth, skulls and framed photographs of the fallen journalists, students read poems in Spanish and English. Outside the library, students signed a petition calling on the Canadian government to press the government of Mexico for credible steps towards ending impunity.

To see what PEN centres around the world are doing as part of this campaign, please visit www.pen-international.org

*This atrocious month has finally passed
And left us so many dead
That even the air breathes death
And death is drunk in the water.*

*I can't resist the wound of so much death.
Mexico cannot be the plural cemetery,
The enormous common grave
Where our hopes lie exhausted.*

*We already drown the future
In the abyss that opens each day.*

José Emilio Pacheco, 'The Altar of the Dead'

###

Notes to editors:

PEN International celebrates literature and promotes freedom of expression. Founded in 1921, our global community of writers now comprises 144 Centres spanning more than 100 countries. Our programmes, campaigns, events and publications connect writers and readers for global solidarity and cooperation. PEN International is a non-political organization and holds consultative status at the United Nations and UNESCO.

For more information:

Brendan de Caires: 416 703 8448 ext 21 | bdecaires@pencanada.ca