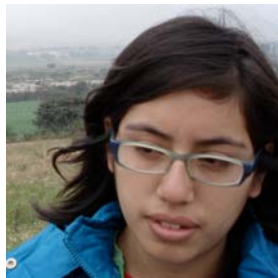




International PEN

Writers in Prison Committee

15 November 2008 – Day of the Imprisoned Writer



Peru

Melissa Rocío Patiño Hinostriza, Poet and student

Melissa Rocío Patiño Hinostriza, a 20-year-old poet and university student, is on trial for terrorism, based on her alleged involvement with a leftwing political organization, Bolivarian Continental Coordinator (Coordinadora Continental Bolivariana – CCB), which the Peruvian authorities claim is linked to terrorist groups. Patiño denies any political affiliations and to date no concrete evidence has been produced to back up the charges. She was detained from 29 February to 8 May 2008, when she was released pending trial. She potentially faces 20 years in prison if convicted.

Melissa Patiño (20), poet, member of the ‘Círculo del sur’ (Southern Circle) poetry group in Lima and runs a poetry programme on radio and cultural activities with young people. She was arrested along with six other individuals in Tumbes, on the border with Ecuador, on 29 February 2008. The seven were returning by bus from Quito, where they had attended the second congress of the CCB from 24 to 28 February, which was reportedly held with the knowledge and consent of the Ecuadorian authorities. They were subsequently charged with ‘Affiliation and Collaboration with Terrorism’, apparently on the basis of their attendance at the CCB meeting. Initially detained in Tumbes and the Counterterrorism Division (División Contra el Terrorismo – DINCOTE), on 15 March Patiño was transferred to Santa Monica maximum security prison in Chorrillos, Lima, where she was held until 8 May. She was reportedly not provided with access to medical assistance during her detention.

The Peruvian government alleges that the Peruvian chapter of CCB has links with Peruvian Marxist rebel group Movimiento Revolucionario Túpac Amaru (MRTA) and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) guerrilla group in Colombia. It also reportedly accused CCB members of planning to sabotage the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meetings scheduled to be held in Peru in 2008. Two of the six individuals who were detained along with Patiño are said to be former MRTA members; one has served a prison sentence for belonging to the MRTA and since his release has reportedly been organizing workshops and events at the university where Patiño studies (Universidad Mayor de San Marcos, Lima). However, Patiño's presence in the bus carrying former MRTA members appears to have been circumstantial. She denies that she belongs to or has ever had any involvement in any political groups. She reportedly attended the CCB congress after a colleague at the radio station where she works passed the invitation on to her as he could not himself attend, and her main motivation for attending was the opportunity to travel to Ecuador.

According to her lawyer, the accusations of terrorism against Patiño have been made on the basis of her alleged membership of the Peruvian chapter of the CCB, her attendance of the CCB congress in Ecuador and her participation in a march at the end of conference. During the march, she is said to have partially covered her face and shouted anti-imperialist and pro-socialism slogans, and to have been linked to graffiti criticizing Alan García, the Peruvian president. None of these activities can be said to amount to terrorist activities.

On 8 May, after almost two and a half months' incarceration, Patiño was released on bail and allowed to return home pending trial. Peru's antiterrorist prosecutor, Julio Galindo, appealed against the decision to release Patiño, however his appeal was rejected in early October, meaning that Patiño will remain free on bail for the duration of her trial. The trial is in the preliminary stages.

What you can do

Write to the Peruvian authorities, calling on them either to provide evidence to back up the charges of terrorism against Melissa Patiño and to ensure she receives a free and fair trial, or alternatively to drop all charges against her.

Minister of Justice

Dra. Rosario Fernández Figueroa

Ministra de Justicia

Ministerio de Justicia, Scipión LLona N° 350, Miraflores, Lima, Peru

Fax: + 51 1 422 3577

Email: informate@minjus.gob.pe

Salutation: Señora Ministra/Dear Minister

Please send also appeals to diplomatic representatives of Peru in your country. A list of some Peruvian embassies abroad can be found at: <http://www.embassiesabroad.com/embassies-of/Peru>

Please send copies of any replies that you receive to:

Writers in Prison Committee, PEN Canada, 24 Ryerson Avenue, Suite 301,
Toronto ON, M5T 2P3,

or by email to queries@pencanada.ca

Sample of writing

The following were written by Melissa Patiño during her imprisonment, in March 2008 (the WiPC is grateful to Catalina Parra and Ronald Christ for their translation).

Day Four

My new life has brought me to beating in the form of an embryo or a world. I am interconnected with every human being's embryo, I saw all the embryos' hearts. I felt them beat to the rhythm of my method, and I have had to enter into crisis because I didn't know what else to do.

My new existence lent me its sturdy shoulder and showed me its flabby torso. It consoled me, showing me its face and in that face the most inflamed hearts and in them thousands of sweating, distinct faces. And in them mine, so different from my former life, leaning on the shoulder of my new one.

My new life seated me before it, named me honorary guardian of the beat. Do I deserve that? How can my tiny beat beat in order to keep others safe? Keep up beat's rhythm and its show of passion? Keep up the regular beat and the cardiac symptoms of guilt? Who's guilty? "Love others as you love yourself." I closed my eyes and saw the world like an embryo at the point of aborting.

Day Five

The changes my new life leads me into are always a surprise. Always so flirtatious, like a girl of twenty who is guilty of keeping the beat. Always so wise, like a girl of twenty days imprisonment, running so as to not believe anything.

My new life is preparing me for something big, I know it. She tries to shake me free of fears and the wall's wise advice. Recalls me to obligatory amnesia in order to submit. My new life has aged me quickly, because it has wearied me. Will I be able to rest after day five?

I can't feel grief alongside my new life, although I continue in crisis, the tears are to cure the inflammation of my cheeks.

Today my newest life has taken charge of the fainting from a melody that kissed my brow and it has lain down with me to count beats. During this night time I will review a few hearts before going to sleep.

Day Six

I awoke today with my face lit up by dust/powder. It's a day that promises entirely new air. My new life tore off the sheets in one pull, shook my face, and touched my body in preparation. I went running to fetch the breakfast she ordered at the prison's reception desk: coffee, papaya juice, and scrambled eggs.

We'll go to visit your father, she told me, and my eyes broke: it's been a long time that I haven't known how to find him. It's been a long time since my father forgot my eyes, broken now and dirty. How are we going to be able to find him? He is waiting for us, today is visitors day.

(Translation © 2008 Lumen Books/Helen Lane Editions)

The Spanish original of these texts was published in the Spring 2008 edition of PEN International magazine – see
<http://www.internationalpen.org.uk/internationalpen/files/dmfile/penintvol58no1online.pdf>

Further samples of Melissa Patiño's work are available on request (Spanish only) - please contact Tamsin Mitchell at tamsin.mitchell@internationalpen.org.uk