



International PEN

Writers in Prison Committee

8 March 2007 – International Women's Day

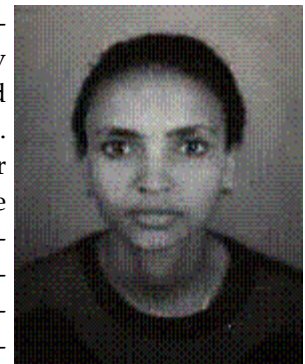
On 7 October 2006, author and journalist **Anna Politkovskaya**, was shot dead by an assassin at her home in Moscow. In January this year, Uzbek, journalist and human rights activist, **Umida Niyazova** was arrested and is still in prison awaiting trial. **Serkalem Fasil**, an Ethiopian journalist, is in detention under appalling conditions. She gave birth to a son in prison in June. In Vietnam, **Tran Khai Thanh Thuy** lives under constant harassment and threat for her writings. These are just some of the over 60 women writers and journalists who have come under attack for the practice of their right to freedom of expression in the past year. On 8 March 2007, International Women's Day, International PEN, the world association of writers, will commemorate those women who have come under attack for the practice of their professions.

The assassination of **Politkovskaya**, an outspoken and courageous writer whose writings on human rights abuses by Russian forces in Chechnya had led her to be arrested, harassed, and subject to a suspected poisoning attempt, resulted in an international outcry. Her death is among those of thirteen journalists who have died in apparent "contract killings" since President Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000. An investigation into her death is under way alongside fears that the true authors of her murder will never be brought to justice.



Another woman who had reported on human rights abuses, Uzbek journalist and activist, **Umida Niyazova** (left), is now in prison awaiting trial. Arrested on 22 January, Niyazova is being held under a three-month pre-trial detention order for smuggling "subversive" literature into Uzbekistan and illegally crossing the border. (Her passport had been seized by Uzbek officials during an earlier arrest in December.) It is clear that her imprisonment is linked to her reporting on issues including the May 2005 Andijan massacre. Those who have seen Niyazova in prison suggest that she is in deep distress and misses her children.

In June 2006, Ethiopian, journalist **Serkalem Fasil** (right), who has been imprisoned since November 2005, gave birth to a son in a police hospital. Amnesty International reports that the child was born prematurely in dire conditions and that a doctor's recommendation that the child be given incubation was refused. The child is now being cared for by his grandparents. Fasil is married to another journalist, Eskinder Nega, who is also held in Katili prison, and that the couple are provided limited access to each other. Fasil and Nega were among 15 journalists arrested in late 2005 following articles critical of the May 2005 parliamentary elections. They are accused of treason, a charge that carries the death penalty. In recent months there have been disturbing reports that a number of journalists have died in custody.





Harassment and intimidation of writers in Vietnam has long been of concern to PEN. Among them is **Tran Khai Than Thuy** (left), an author and essayist who was arrested briefly in September 2006 for articles that she had posted on the internet. She was again briefly detained a few weeks later for publishing further essays. She is editor of the dissident magazine *To Quoc (Fatherland)*. In October she was subjected to a "People's Court" in Hanoi where police gathered 300 people to denounce and humiliate her, and her home had been attacked by mobs calling her a traitor and a prostitute. Police refused to provide protection. She is now living under virtual house arrest. She is among this year's Hellman Hammett Award winners.

Criminal defamation laws are often used to silence those who criticize authority. In November 2006, PEN launched a campaign to highlight its concerns that these laws treat defamation as a criminal, rather than a civil, offence, and argues that the term "insult" is too vague to have any legal standing as a charge and should thus be scrapped from penal codes entirely. Among the featured cases is that of Mexican writer **Lydia Cacho Ribeiro**, who had a year-long struggle with the courts before being acquitted in January 2007 of charges of defaming a local businessman whom she accused of having connections with another man being prosecuted for child prostitution. Other women writers and journalists found themselves before the courts for libel and insult in **Algeria, Morocco** and the **Philippines**.

Insult laws in **Turkey** brought some of the country's most noted writers, journalists and academics to the courts. Among them was **Elif Shafak**, an internationally-renowned author accused for comments made by characters in her novel, and **Ipek Çalislari**, tried for insulting the memory of Kemal Atatürk in her biography of his first wife. Both were acquitted in late 2006, only to find their lives placed under acute danger following the assassination of the Armenian Turkish editor **Hrant Dink** in January 2007. Police protection has, belatedly, been offered to the some 20 writers whose names subsequently appeared on extreme nationalist "death lists". Death threats, usually from unknown persons in the form of telephone calls, were also made against women reporters in countries including **Serbia, Colombia, Peru, Iran** and **Brazil**.

Women at the forefront of the struggle for human rights and freedom of expression, like their male counterparts, all too often find themselves suffering reprisals from those who do not like what they have to say. Imprisonment, threats and even murder are the tools that are used to suppress these critical voices. International Women's Day, 8 March 2007, is a moment for International PEN members world-wide to celebrate these courageous women writers and journalists.

Focus Appeals

Appeals may be sent on the focus cases below. Please also send a copy of your appeal to the representative of the state concerned in your own country.

Uzbekistan, Umida Niyazova

Expressing concern that Umida Niyazova is held in violation of her right to freedom of expression and calling for her immediate and unconditional release.

Islam A. Karimov
President of the Republic of Uzbekistan
Rezidentysia prezidenta
Ul. Uzbekistaniskaia 43

Tashkent
Uzbekistan
Fax: +011 998 71 139 5325

Ethiopia, Serkalem Fasil

Protesting the detention of Serkalem Fasil along with that of other Ethiopian writers and journalists believed to be held in violation of their right to freedom of expression, and calling for their release.

Prime Minister
Meles Zenawi
Office of the Prime Minister
PO Box 1031
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Vietnam, Tran Khai Than Thuy

Calling for an end to the harassment and restrictions placed against Trah Khai Than Thuy.

His Excellency Nguyen Minh Triet
President Socialist Republic of Vietnam
C/O Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Hanoi, Socialist Republic of Vietnam