

PEN Canada news release November 14, 2007

PEN Canada DAY OF THE IMPRISONED WRITER, NOVEMBER 15: More than forty journalists and writers killed in the past year

Toronto, November 14, 2007: **November 15 is the Day of the Imprisoned Writer, an annual acknowledgement by International PEN of the plight of individual writers imprisoned for speaking out and of the unconscionable suppression by many governments worldwide of the human right to freedom of expression. PEN Canada announces today the following actions:**

1. We join with journalist organizations around the world in a Day of Action in Support of Pakistan Journalists. The situation for journalists in Pakistan has seriously deteriorated under emergency measures taken by President Pervez Musharraf to suspend democratic institutions including orders to silence journalists and media workers and to restrict the work of media in the country. Access to domestic and international news media has been curtailed, and several foreign journalists have been expelled.

We also condemn President Perves Musharraf for actions taken against many citizens of Pakistan who are being arrested and imprisoned simply for demonstrating for democracy.

[Day of Action](#)

[PEN Canada statement \(PDF\)](#)

2. PEN Canada launches The Americas Brief. In September, 2008, the 74th Congress of International PEN will take place in Bogota, Colombia. As one of the oldest and most active PEN centres in the Americas, we will join with colleagues in other PEN centres in building a comprehensive report on freedom of expression issues in the Americas, to be presented at the Congress. The PEN Canada campaign will concentrate on Cuba, Colombia and Mexico.

As a first step in that campaign, we are focusing on the case of the Cuban journalist **José Gabriel RAMÓN CASTILLO**, arrested in the 2003 crackdown on dissident journalists, and serving a 20-year sentence.

[The Castillo Case \(PDF\)](#)

3. PEN Canada salutes the bravery and indomitable spirit of the Burmese comedian and poet Zargana who was among the many arrested in the recent crackdown by the Myanmar regime against pro-democracy demonstrators. Zargana was arrested on September 26 and released in early October. He has been an honorary member of PEN Canada for many years, as he is frequently among the first to be arrested.

[Zargana profile and poem \(PDF\)](#)

BACKGROUND:

The Day of the Imprisoned Writer: For many years, International PEN has declared November 15 the Day of the Imprisoned Writer. Its worldwide membership (145 centres in 104 countries) raises public awareness of the plight of their colleagues, writes protest appeals, stages events and uses their combined force as writers to effect change.

In any given year, International PEN's Writers in Prison Committee (WiPC) monitors close to 1,000 attacks against writers, journalists, poets, publishers and editors world wide. These range from persistent harassment and threats to long prison sentences and killings. Eighty-six years after PEN was founded in 1921, and 47 since 1960, when it formed the WiPC to tackle the suppression of the right to write, the need for monitoring, protest and action is as great as ever.

This day is also a moment to commemorate writers and journalists killed since the previous Day of the Imprisoned Writer. **Between November 2006 and today, PEN has reported on 42 such murders in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Colombia, Iraq, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Palestine, Philippines, Russia, Turkey and Venezuela.** Among them was **Hrant Dink**, a Turkish Armenian editor who was himself featured on the Day of the Imprisoned Writer in November, 2006 when he was on trial on charges of insult to "Turkishness". He was assassinated two months later. His killer and a number of others implicated in his murder are now on trial.

**For more information on current PEN Canada campaigns: www.pencanada.ca
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