

# PEN CANADA

for FREEDOM of EXPRESSION

## Turkish journalist Hrant Dink gunned down; murder underscores severity of threats to free expression in country

*Toronto, 19 January 2007* – PEN Canada has reacted with horror at news of the murder of respected journalist **Hrant Dink**.

Dink, an Armenian-Turkish newspaper editor, was shot in the head earlier today outside the Istanbul office of his *Agos* newspaper. He was assassinated by a gunman or gunmen who fled the scene.

“This murder comes as a shock to PEN Canada, as threats to free expression in Turkey in recent years had been legislative and judicial,” said Writers in Prison Committee Chair Alan Cumyn. “However, Hrant Dink’s killing tragically underscores the risks that writers and editors run in a country where comment on politically sensitive topics can have even fatal results.”

Shortly before his death, Dink, 52, had complained of death threats he was receiving. “My computer is laden with lines filled with angry threats,” Dink wrote in a 10 January article for *Agos*.

Dink, on whose behalf PEN Canada had advocated in the past, received a sixth-month suspended prison term in October 2005 for “insulting Turkishness”, for an article he wrote during that year about the massacre of Armenians by Turks during World War I. The charges were laid under the notorious Article 301 of the country’s penal code, which has frequently been used to stifle free expression in Turkey.

The 2006 Nobel Laureate for Literature and Honorary member of PEN Canada, **Orhan Pamuk**, also faced charges of “insulting Turkishness” that were subsequently dropped in January 2006. He was put on trial after his remarks to a Swiss newspaper that “30,000 Kurds and one million Armenians were killed in these lands, and nobody but me dares talk about it”.

Nationalists who strongly oppose Turkey’s bid to join the European Union have been outraged by assertions that the killings of the Armenians constituted genocide.

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan condemned the murder as an attack against the “Turkish nation’s togetherness and peace and Turkey’s stability.”

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Cumyn said he hoped the Turkish authorities would carry out a thorough investigation leading to the conviction of those behind the murder so that a climate of impunity does not prevail in the case.

“In too many countries, writers and journalists pay the ultimate price for peacefully expressing thoughts and opinions, and no one is brought to justice for their murders,” Cumyn said.

“At times like these, one thinks of **Anna Politkovskaya** of Russia, murdered last October, and **Zahra Kazemi**, killed in Iran in 2003. Every time a crime like this goes unsolved, it makes it more likely that more writers will be killed.”

#### **About PEN Canada**

PEN Canada is a centre of International PEN that campaigns on behalf of writers around the world persecuted for the expression of their thoughts. In Canada, it supports the right to free expression as enshrined in Section 2(b) of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

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