

PEN CANADA

for FREEDOM of EXPRESSION

PEN Canada partners with Toronto Public Library with reading event during Freedom to Read Week

Toronto, 9 January 2007 – A star-studded line-up of writers and musicians will highlight Freedom to Read Week events during an evening gathering on 23 February.

Titled “Inventory: Writers Tracking Conflict and War”, award-winning and nominated Canadian writers **David Bezmozgis**, **Dionne Brand**, **Bernice Eisenstein**, **Camilla Gibb**, **Rawi Hage** and **Ann-Marie MacDonald** will join PEN Canada writer in exile **Senthil Ratnasabapathy** and Canadian folk legend **Bruce Cockburn** and rapper **Shad**. **Carol Off**, host of CBC Radio’s “As It Happens”, will serve as host.

“Freedom to read means a great deal to people around the world, especially in times of conflict and war,” said PEN Canada events and outreach co-ordinator Anjula Gogia. “This is why PEN Canada has asked these writers and musicians from Canada and beyond to explore what war means to them.”

“Inventory”, which is part of the Toronto Public Library’s month-long celebration of reading called Keep Toronto Reading, will mark a ten-year partnership between PEN Canada and the Toronto Public Library to promote awareness of free expression during Freedom to Read Week. Toronto Public Library is a co-sponsor of the event.

Event Information:

Title: Inventory: Writers Tracking Conflict and War
Date: Friday February 23, 2007, at 7:30pm sharp
Where: Toronto Reference Library: Atrium, 789 Yonge Street
Cost: \$10 - \$20 sliding scale. Tickets available at the door and in advance the Toronto Women’s Bookstore (73 Harbord St)

For more information, please contact Anjula Gogia at PEN Canada, tel 416 703 8448 x23 or at agogia@pencanada.ca. Web site: www.pencanada.ca.

About Freedom to Read Week

Freedom to Read Week is an annual event that encourages Canadians to think about and reaffirm their commitment to intellectual freedom, which is guaranteed to them under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Freedom to Read Week is organized by the Freedom of Expression Committee of the Book and Periodical Council.

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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.

About the Toronto Public Library

The Toronto Public Library is North America's busiest public library system. Every week, over 325,000 people visit its 99 branches and borrow more than half a million items. To learn more about Toronto Public Library, visit www.torontopubliclibrary.ca or call Answerline at 416-393-7131. Keep Toronto Reading is the Toronto Public Library's month-long celebration of the joy of reading. Throughout February, an exciting line-up of programs, events and activities will enlighten, engage and entice. Full program details on www.torontopubliclibrary.ca.

Biographies:

David Bezmozgis is a writer and filmmaker. The author of *Natasha and Other Stories*, his work has also appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, *The Walrus*, *The New York Times Magazine* and anthologized in *The Best American Short Stories 2005, 2006*. In 2005, he was the recipient of the City of Toronto Book Award.

Dionne Brand is a poet and novelist living in Toronto. Brand's most recent novel, *What We All Long For*, was published to great acclaim in Canada and Italy in 2005, and was awarded the 2006 Toronto Book Award. Brand was the recipient of the 2006 Harbourfront Festival Prize.

Bernice Eisenstein was born in 1949, shortly after her parents immigrated to Canada. Her illustrations have appeared in a variety of Canadian magazines and periodicals, and with regularity in the country's national newspaper, *The Globe and Mail*. Her graphic memoir *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* was published by McClelland and Stewart in 2006.

Camilla Gibb is the author of three novels (*Mouthing the Words*, *Petty Details of So-and-So's Life* and *Sweetness in the Belly*), numerous short stories, articles and reviews, winner of the Trillium Book Award in 2006, a Giller Prize nominee in 2005, winner of the City of Toronto Book Award in 2000, and the recipient of the CBC Canadian Literary Award for short fiction in 2001.

Rawi Hage was born in Beirut, Lebanon, and lived through nine years of the Lebanese civil war. He immigrated to Canada in 1992. He is a writer, visual artist and curator. His writing has appeared in numerous journals, and his visual art has been shown in galleries and museums around the world. Hage lives in Montreal. His first novel, *De Niro's Game* (House of Anansi Press), was a finalist for the 2006 Governor General's Literary Award and finalist for the 2006 Scotiabank Giller Prize.

Ann-Marie MacDonald is an author, playwright and actor. *Fall on Your Knees* was MacDonald's first novel. It has been published in twenty-one countries and eighteen languages. It was honoured with the Commonwealth Prize, the Canadian Authors Association Award and became an international bestseller. In 2002, it became an Oprah Book Club selection. Likewise an international bestseller, MacDonald's second novel, *The Way the Crow Flies* was five-and-a-half-years in the making. In summer 2005, MacDonald's new play, "Belle Moral: A Natural History", premiered at The Shaw Festival.

Senthil Ratnasabapathy started his career as a journalist amid falling bombs and targeted and indiscriminate killings in northern Sri Lanka in the mid-eighties. Since then he has written for an international news agency as well as major Asian media. He has written from a number of countries, from Austria and Eastern Europe to Brazil, and his articles have appeared across the world. His essay was published in *Speaking in Tongues: PEN Canada Writers in Exile*, published by Banff Centre and PEN Canada. He lived and worked in Austria before moving to Canada. He currently works for OMNI Television.

Musicians:

Bruce Cockburn is a Canadian folk and rock legend. His career includes 26 albums, numerous international awards, including the Canadian Music Hall of Fame and the Tenco Award for Lifetime Achievement in Italy, 20 gold and platinum records in Canada, and countless concert performances since he released his first solo work in 1970.

Shad (Shadrach Kabango) is a bright, up-and-coming emcee from the unlikely city of London, Ontario. Shad's debut, "When This is Over" has already garnered rave reviews for its honest and clever lyrics and its distinct musical aesthetic from such well-respected publications as *NOW* magazine, *Exclaim*, *Eye Weekly*, *Pound* and *The Globe and Mail*. Hailing from Kenya with Rwandan parentage, his engaging and dynamic performances showcase an energetic live personality, entertaining freestyle skills, and the unique ability to play guitar and rap simultaneously.

Host:

Carol Off has witnessed and reported on many of the world's conflicts, from the fall of the former Yugoslavia to the US-led "war on terror." She has won numerous awards for her CBC television documentaries in Africa, Asia and Europe. She lives in Toronto and is the author of *Bitter Chocolate: Investigating the Dark Side of the World's Most Seductive Sweet*. She is currently the host of "As it Happens" on CBC-1.