

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information contact:

Larry Siems, PEN American Center, (212) 334-1660 ext. 105, lsiems@pen.org

Marian Botsford Fraser, PEN Canada, (416) 938-4204, mbf@pencanada.ca

Yu Zhang, Independent Chinese PEN Center, +46-8-50022792, wipc@penchinese.net

**PEN Gives Voice to Silenced Writers in China on Eve of the Olympics
Writers Vow Jailed Colleagues Will Not Be Forgotten**

New York, Toronto, Stockholm, August 8, 2008— In New York last night, celebrated PEN members gathered to read banned and censored work by writers in China, including new and never-before translated writings by Tsering Woeser, Yang Tongyan, and other leading dissident writers and testimonials and letters from jailed writers and their families.

“We are here to make sure that the world does not forget, in all the Olympic fervor, that there are 45 of our colleagues in Chinese prisons on this day,” said Francine Prose, president of PEN American Center, “We want our colleagues and their families to know that they are not forgotten today and will not be forgotten when the Olympics are over.”

Bringing Down the Great Firewall of China: Silenced Writers Speak on the Eve of the Olympics was the culminating event of PEN’s eight-month long “We Are Ready for Freedom of Expression” campaign. The campaign, led by three centers of International PEN (PEN Canada, PEN American Center and the Independent Chinese PEN Center), challenged the Chinese government to release all writers and journalists currently imprisoned in China, and to guarantee freedom of the press before, during, and after the Olympic Games.

“On the eve of the Beijing Olympics, the promise that China made seven years ago to improve human rights is unfulfilled,” said Dr. Liu Xiaobo, board member of the Independent Chinese PEN Center. “There are still controls on speech, still frequent imprisonments of writers for their writings, and still the fear that every bush and tree is an enemy.”

“For these Olympics, there is neither ‘One World’ nor ‘One Dream,’ just One Dictatorship, as usual,” Dr. Liu added.

Although the start of the Olympics formally marks the end of the campaign, the record of arrest, imprisonment and harassment stands as an indelible record of China’s broken promises. It will be the measure of what happens to freedom of expression for the people of China long after the Olympics are over and the scrutiny of the world is diverted.

“The health of a society is determined by the absolute freedom it gives its journalists and creative artists,” said PEN member Edward Albee. “There can be no civilization without this freedom.”

Albee, Russell Banks, Philip Gourevitch, Jessica Hagedorn, Hari Kunzru, Rick Moody, Martha Southgate, PEN American Center President Francine Prose, Tibetan student Chime Dolma, and Independent Chinese PEN Center members Jianglin Li and Pokong Chen read from works and

statements of nine writers who are imprisoned or threatened, and spoke to a full house at the Tishman Auditorium at The New School.

On December 10, 2007, PEN American Center, PEN Canada, and the Independent Chinese PEN Center were following the cases of 40 writers and journalists imprisoned in China. Today, on the opening day of the Olympics, after numerous additional detentions and a few releases, PEN is following the cases of 52 writers, 45 of whom are still in prison.

PEN American Center, PEN Canada, and the Independent Chinese PEN Center are among the 145 worldwide centers of International PEN, an organization that works to promote friendship and intellectual cooperation among writers everywhere, to fight for freedom of expression, and represent the conscience of world literature. For more information on the campaign and a complete list of writers, please visit www.pen.org/china2008, www.pencanada.ca, and www.chinesepen.org.

###