

NOTE: PEN Canada welcomes the release of our honorary member, the veteran journalist and pro-democracy activist **Win Tin**, 79, imprisoned for over 19 years, one of the longest serving prisoners on PEN's records. Win Tin was one of 9,002 prisoners reportedly amnestied by the Myanmar military junta on September 23, 2008, as a 'goodwill gesture'. Win Tin stated that he would continue to wear his prison uniform and that he will carry on campaigning for democracy in Myanmar. He reported being in good health despite recent reports of illness.

AFGHANISTAN: Heavy sentences for publishers

The Writers in Prison Committee of PEN Canada strongly protests the 20-year prison sentence handed down to journalist Ahmed Ghous Zalmi, and the 5-year sentence against publisher Mohammad Ateef Noori, for publishing a translation of the Koran. International PEN considers their conviction to be in breach of Article 19 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees the right to freedom of expression, and calls for their immediate and unconditional release.

BACKGROUND: Journalist Ahmed Ghous Zalmi was sentenced to twenty years in prison alongside Mullah Qari Mushtaq, leader of the Tamim-e-Ansar Mosque, in Kabul on September 11, 2008 under Article 130 of the Afghan Constitution for 'publishing the Koran in a Dari translation'. Publisher Mohammad Ateef Noori was reportedly given a five-year sentence. Dari is a Farsi dialect spoken in Afghanistan, and Article 130 renders Sharia law applicable to the case. It is said that the case stemmed from the failure to print the Arabic original of the Koran alongside the translation, as reportedly required by Islamic law in Afghanistan, and for alleged errors and misunderstandings in the translation.

The translation was by an Iranian living in the United States, and is publicly available on the Internet: <http://www.quran-farsi.net/Quran/FarsiMenu01.htm> Zalmi claims that a copy of the translation was brought to the Tamim-e-Ansar Mosque, Kabul, by an unknown individual in September 2007, and was very well received by those present at the gathering. He was asked to use his position as a well-known journalist and head of the publication department of the Attorney General's office to find a way to publish more copies of the translation. After obtaining Mullah Qari Mushtaq's approval, he found a publisher. However, following the publication of the translation, fundamentalist groups, parliamentarians and clerics demanded an 'exemplary punishment' for those involved in the publication. All three men are currently held at a detention centre in Kabul, and are appealing their conviction. For more analysis of the case click here: http://www.iwpr.net/?p=arr&s=f&o=346942&apc_state=henh

To review RAN FAQs: www.pencanada.ca/media/RAN_FAQS.pdf

Appeal Letter:

His Excellency Hamid Karzai
President of the Islamic State of Afghanistan
Gul Khana Palace
Presidential Palace
Kabul
Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.
Email: president@afghanistangov.org

Your Excellency:

As a member of PEN Canada, the Canadian centre of International PEN, the writers' organization with 145 centres in more than 100 countries worldwide, I am writing to protest the recent detentions and sentencing of Ahmed Ghous Zalmi, Mullah Qari Mushtaq and Mohammad Ateef Noori.

I join my colleagues around the world in asking you please to personally intervene to secure the release of the three men, immediately and unconditionally, according to Article 19 of the United Nations Universal Declaration on Civil and Political Rights.

Sincerely,

[your name and address here]

Please send copies of your appeal to the following:

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