

## PEN CANADA'S WRITERS IN EXILE NETWORK

**The Writers in Exile Network is a program of PEN Canada's Writers in Exile Committee to establish placement opportunities for exiled, immigrant and refugee writers at Canadian universities, colleges, libraries and learning centres.**

### Background

PEN Canada works within Canada and internationally to promote freedom of expression and aid writers persecuted or exiled for the peaceful expression of their ideas. PEN Canada is a centre of International PEN, the worldwide writers' association founded in 1921. At the congress of International PEN held in Macedonia in 2000, Canada was elected Chair of International PEN's Writers in Exile Network. This leadership role constitutes a challenge for PEN Canada to improve the circumstances and professional prospects of writers living in exile.

In March 2004, PEN Canada's Writers in Exile Committee hosted the **first International PEN Conference on Exile in Ottawa**. Invited guests from PEN centres in Norway, Germany, USA and Spain spoke to ninety delegates from Canadian academic institutions about the work of their centres to help exiled writers and journalists. The conference resulted in the offer of future placement opportunities from most of the institutions present.

PEN Canada began approaching several institutions to forge relationships and to identify appropriate placements for our growing list of exiled writers living in Canada. Seeking to expand upon the success of the **PEN Canada/Massey College Writer-in-Exile program** at the University of Toronto, we made contact with public schools, libraries and several universities. As a result, we have now established placements within leading institutions such as **the Banff Centre in Alberta, Trent University, Carleton University, Laurentian University, University of Toronto, York University and George Brown College in Ontario, Acadia University in Wolfville, Nova Scotia and University of King's College, Halifax.**

**The Canada Council for the Arts** announced in June 2005 its support for PEN Canada's Writers in Exile Network by pledging two grants of \$25,000 each to facilitate the entry of two exiled writers into academic residencies.

### Writers in Exile

Writers championed by PEN Canada face many kinds of risks. They are caught in wars, imprisoned, intimidated by governments or gangs, working in exile, or living as refugees. However, risks to writers do not end when they escape their homelands, leave refugee centres, or even when they are fortunate enough to arrive in Canada. The uprooting often jeopardizes their careers, written works and family life.

PEN Canada is establishing partnerships with Canada's leading institutions of higher learning to assist writers whose professional and cultural contributions have been imperiled by the need to leave their countries of origin.

PEN Canada's **Writers in Exile Network** works with host institutions to match "at risk" and exiled writers with host institutions' existing needs, or with positions created especially for PEN's Writers in Exile. The result is newly re-professionalized skills for the Canadian marketplace, new networks and a renewed confidence for the writers.

### **Goals of the Writers in Exile Network**

The goals of this initiative are to:

- create an ongoing system that matches placement opportunities with Writers in Exile;
- help establish a professional track record in Canada for individual Writers in Exile;
- expose faculty, students and the wider academic community to the talents, written works and personal stories of international Writers in Exile;
- encourage discussions and exploration of freedom of expression, world literature, cultural identity, and the refugee and immigration experience;
- help participants find translation and publishing opportunities and make contacts with Canadian writers, editors, and educators;
- generate publicity, event and fundraising opportunities as a result of the program for participating writers, publishers, organizations and the host institutions.

### **PEN Canada/Massey College Model**

The example of PEN Canada's initiative with the University of Toronto illustrates the Writers in Exile Network's potential for programmatic growth and institutional advancement. In 1994, the University of Toronto's Massey College and PEN Canada established a "Writer-in-Exile" residency. It has since evolved into the University-wide Scholars at Risk (SAR) program, and has been integrated into the Scholars at Risk Network based at New York University. Included in the Fundraising Campaign for the University of Toronto, the program has raised close to \$1 million in endowed funds, some of which have been matched by the University itself. PEN Canada continues to provide the University of Toronto with formal selection recommendations of exiled writers. PEN Canada has proven this model of institutional partnership can work, thrive and evolve.

### **How the Network Works**

#### **A) Institutions**

Based on the Massey model, the Writers in Exile Network currently being developed expands the range and location of placements for Writers in Exile in Canada. These writers will include authors, essayists, poets, journalists, playwrights, publishers, translators, editors and screenwriters. Each institution's program is a unique creation, suited to its own needs, opportunities and capacities. The placements may take the form of teaching or writing residencies, translation and publication projects, cultural and community outreach programs, creative writing seminars, screenwriting workshops, reading and lecture series, student bursaries and scholarships and journalism or publishing internships

Each participating institution determines the size, type and location of its Writers in Exile program. A stipend is usually offered, as are accommodation and meals. Schools of journalism, humanities, world and comparative literature programs, international and cultural studies departments, libraries, newspapers and drama schools are just a few possible locations for these placements.

There are generally two types of placements for Writers in Exile:

- 1) **Short-Term Placements** – these could be several weeks or up to six months in duration. This type of placement would be ideal for writers with good prospects for quickly settling into a professional writing life in Canada. Such placements can be quickly developed with institutions as they require a small time-commitment and candidates can be matched to existing short-term program needs, such as summer writing workshops, lectures, intercultural and arts events, or special-interest seminars.
- 2) **Longer-Term Placements** – these opportunities would be one to two years in length, best suited to writers who have immigrated permanently to Canada. In such cases, the writers may benefit from the establishment of a writer-in-residence program, a teaching or study fellowship, or acceptance into an accredited academic program with a tuition waiver, for example.

## **B) PEN Canada**

PEN Canada is working with participating institutions, foundations, and government bodies to create the infrastructure needed to sustain the Writers in Exile Network, and continue its expansion.

The Writers in Exile Network – and its online catalogue of writers – will be maintained by PEN Canada. Candidates for inclusion in the Network may be recommended by literary or refugee and settlement organizations, the International PEN Writers in Exile Network (now chaired by PEN Canada), the Government of Canada and the United Nations, among others.

The Writers in Exile Network, and its Web-based catalogue of exiled writers, will provide an institutional placement model for the 140 International PEN centres and for universities around the world.

Initial work on PEN Canada's Writers in Exile Network was funded through a grant from The Maytree Foundation. Ongoing assistance is funded by Maytree and the International Development Research Centre.

## **Contact Us**

If your department or institution is interested in providing placement for a Writer in Exile, hosting a related event, or discussing the possibility of joining the Writers in Exile Network, please contact:

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