



International PEN celebrates 50th anniversary of Writers in Prison Committee with year-long campaign

LONDON, 4 February, 2010—International PEN announced today the launch of a year-long campaign in celebration of the Writers in Prison Committee’s 50th anniversary.

The campaign—**Because Writers Speak Their Minds**—marks 50 years of defending freedom of expression around the world.

“International PEN was created out of the scars of World War I to bring societies back together through their literatures,” said **President John Ralston Saul**. “Constant violence against writers quickly forced us to realize that free speech and literature are one and the same thing. PEN is the foremost and oldest freedom of expression organization in the world and since 1960 the Writers in Prison Committee has set the standard around the world for defending not just the rights of writers, but the free speech of everyone.”

What began as a committee of three individuals in 1960 is now a Committee of more than 70 PEN centres worldwide. The annual case list now consistently contains the names of almost 900 writers, editors, journalists and internet writers.

The campaign celebrates the work over fifty years with **fifty emblematic cases** of the Committee, including prominent historic writers like Josef Brodsky and Vaclav Havel, more recent cases (Anna Politkovskaya, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Salman Rushdie) and current cases like those of Lydia Cacho and Liu Xiaobo. PEN centres around the world will participate with events and campaigning on current cases. The International PEN festival of world literature, **Free the Word!** (London, 14-18 April) will mark the anniversary with several events.

“We’ll also look to the future, to see how the WiPC must evolve and adapt to meet new challenges,” said **WiPC Chair, Marian Botsford Fraser**. “The 50th anniversary is an opportunity to honour (and in some cases remember) writers on whose behalf we have written letters, lobbied governments, made great noises in public places and quiet agitations in diplomatic channels. But it is also the springboard for ongoing work in the defence of freedom of expression.”

The name of the campaign, **Because Writers Speak Their Minds**, is taken from a speech at a PEN Congress in Rio, in 1960, formally proposing a Writers in Prison Committee.

The first 50th anniversary mini-campaign concerns Iran, and will be launched with a coalition of other freedom of expression organizations, in mid-February. There will be ongoing work on behalf of Chinese dissident, Liu Xiaobo, the only one of the emblematic 50 cases currently serving a prison sentence.

Originally founded in 1921 to promote literature, today International PEN has over 140 Centres in 100 countries across the globe. We believe that writers can play a crucial role in changing and developing civil society through the promotion of literature, international campaigning on issues such as freedom of expression and translation, and challenging and breaking down barriers and access to literature through publishing and distribution at international, regional and national levels.

For more information: **Because Writers Speak Their Minds:** www.internationalpen.org.uk

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