

## PRESIDENT'S LETTER



Dear PEN Member and Supporter,

PEN is like most writers I know: passionate, principled, stubborn, and willing to speak out. PEN is the voice, and the conscience, of writers everywhere. More than 140 centres operate on six continents, with PEN Canada considered among the most active, and effective. People look to us for leadership.

As the new president, I am mindful of that legacy, and responsibility. I am also aware that times have been rapidly changing. At PEN Canada we are undergoing our own 21<sup>st</sup>-century transformation, with greater attention now being paid to our (pending) redesigned website, and how Facebook, video, blogs, and tweets can help our work. It is a brave and unsettling new world of advocacy, support, campaigning, information sharing, and simply communicating between like-minded authors and defenders of the written word, and we plan to be on the cutting edge.

Which isn't to say we won't still be writing old-fashioned letters (and emails) on behalf of imprisoned authors, faxing public statements to the media, taking stands on free speech issues here in Canada, making phone calls to politicians and embassies, and inviting on-stage thinkers and talkers the likes of Bruce Mau, Michael Ignatieff, Ramin Jahanbegloo, Stephen Lewis, and Romeo Dallaire.

We'll be doing it all, strategies old and new, time-honored and just-invented, to play a role in public debate in Canada on the most fundamental of matters for writers and citizens equally: our obligation to speak up, to say what we think.

That is the broad-strokes ambition for the upcoming year. On a more human level, I'd like to introduce the people who are going to be working on behalf of the PEN Canada membership. Our small but capable office in downtown Toronto houses our programs coordinator, **Brendan de Caires**, and our administrator, **Kasey Coholan**.

On our board are eighteen prominent authors, editors, administrators, lawyers, and human rights activists based in Toronto, Ottawa, Edmonton, and Peterborough. Taken together, **Randy Boyagoda, Janne Duncan, Frances Connelly, Mary Jo Leddy, Kerry Pither, Philip Slayton, Miki Andrejevic, Diana Kuprel, Sara Angel, Mark Medley, Rebecca Toyne, Jared Bland, Ian Brown, Andrew Cohen, Sarah Elton, Bruce Walsh, and Ellen Seligman** represent a stellar crew. Don't worry about expecting much from us; we'll be expecting no less from ourselves.

Finally, I should introduce myself as well. I write books, publish journalism, and work occasionally for radio and television. I am, in short, someone who exercises his right to free speech every day, without much worry of being silenced, imprisoned, or killed. That makes me one lucky author. It has also compelled my participation in PEN Canada for almost twenty years.

The writer who can speak is obliged to do so for the one who has been silenced; the author with the freedom must insist that the basic right be upheld elsewhere. We are all in this together. We all write with one PEN.

**Charlie Foran,**  
**President, PEN Canada**