



Press release

**International PEN Day of the Imprisoned Writer
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Since November 2008, thirty-five print and online journalists have been murdered," said Marian Botsford Fraser, Chair of the Writers in Prison Committee **"All over the world, writers and journalists and bloggers are suffering for practicing their right to speak out on issues that matter."**

On 15 November 2009, International PEN's membership of writers world wide will commemorate their colleagues world wide who are imprisoned, attacked and even killed. In any given year PEN is monitoring around 1,000 cases of attacks on writers, journalists and publishers. Of these around 200 are in prison, some serving sentences of over 20 years. Others are suffering unfair trials, harassment and threats.

Each year PEN focuses on five of these writers, one from each world region. This year they are:

- **Cameroon – Lapiro de Mbanga** - a singer-song writer in prison since April 2008 for his lyrics and criticism of the government; [Cameroon](#)
- **Iran – Maziar Bahari** - an editor imprisoned then released on bail for his part in the June democracy demonstrations; [Iran](#)
- **China – Liu Xiaobo** –a literary critic and activist arrested in December last year and still detained without trial; [China](#)
- **Russia – Natalia Estemirova** – a journalist and human rights defender brutally murdered in Chechnya in July; [Russia](#) and
- **Mexico - Miguel Ángel Gutiérrez Ávila** – an anthropologist, author and indigenous rights activist murdered over a year ago. [Mexico](#)

PEN is also focussing on **33 other print journalists killed** since November 2008. Seven of the killings were in Russia, six in Mexico, and four each in India and Pakistan. [Killings](#)

During the days surrounding 15 November, PEN members around the world will send protests to governments, issue petitions, write articles, and stage events. Panel debates, readings, musical performances and other PEN Centre activities will be staged in Berlin, Lugano, Zurich, Geneva, Barcelona, Agramunt (Catalunya), Potenza (Italy), Auckland, Glasgow, Oslo, Stockholm, London, Nairobi, Los Angeles, Accra, Sydney and elsewhere.

PEN members' support and campaigns for their colleagues in trouble has enormous impact, not only in the numbers released – over 30% of detainees are freed each year – but also for ensuring that issue of freedom of expression is high on the public agenda. The impact of this global support and solidarity between writers provides is immeasurable.

Next year, 2010, marks the 50th anniversary of the Writers in Prison Committee. We will be inviting all to join us in celebrating this remarkable organisation throughout the coming year.

For more go to www.internationalpen.org.uk

About International PEN and its Writers in Prison Committee

Originally founded in 1921 to promote literature, today International PEN has 145 Centres in 104 countries across the globe. It recognises that literature is essential to understanding and engaging with other worlds; if you can't hear the voice of another culture how can you understand it?

Our primary goal is to engage with, and empower, societies and communities across cultures and languages, through reading and writing. We believe that writers can play a crucial role in changing and developing civil society. We do this through the promotion of literature, international campaigning on issues such as translation and freedom of expression and improving access to literature at international, regional and national levels.

Our membership is open to all published writers who subscribe to the PEN Charter regardless of nationality, language, race, colour or religion. International PEN is a non-political organisation and has special consultative status at UNESCO and the United Nations.

The Writers in Prison Committee of International PEN was set up in 1960 as a result of mounting concern about attempts to silence critical voices around the world and an office of volunteers was set up at the PEN head office in London to gather information and to alert the PEN membership to take action. The WiPC is now staffed by a team of experts who monitor around 1,000 attacks on writers, journalists, editors, poets, publishers and others in any given year. These include long prison terms, harassment, threats, and even murder.

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