

WRITERS FOR PEACE COMMITTEE MEETING

Tuesday, 27 th of September 2022	11:00 – 16:30 CET	Uppsala University Sweden
Meeting lead by	Tanja Tuma, interim Chair of the WfPC	
Objectives	Status updates, information sharing, decision-making, problem-solving and next steps	
Note taker	Sara K. Zver, editor and coordinator of the WfPC	

Welcome words by Interim Chair

Tanja Tuma, interim Chair of the WfPC and president of PEN Slovenia opened the meeting. She presented herself, Germán Rojas (chair elect of the WfPC and president of PEN Chile), Aurélia Dondo (Europe Programme Coordinator), Sara K. Zver (editor and coordinator of the WfPC). She informed the participants that the committee has a [new website](#) where all latest news, decisions, statements and other information can be found. The website is already accessible in English and French. Spanish translation will be added in the weeks to come. The [WfPC Newsletter](#) can also be found on the website.

Empty chairs

Maximillia Muninzwa (PEN Kenya) introduced the first empty chair:

AHMED DOUMA – EGYPT

Ahmed Douma is an Egyptian poet and a prominent figure of the Egyptian Uprising that overthrew the Mubarak regime in 2011. He has been arbitrarily detained since December 2013. He faced several charges that Egyptian human rights organisations considered trumped-up and came in retaliation for his critical views of the authorities. He was later convicted and sentenced to three years imprisonment followed by three years of parole. In 2015, he was handed a 25-year sentence and 17 million EGP fines (with others) following a grossly unfair trial concerning his participation in peaceful protests before his arrest. In 2019, he was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment and 6 million EGP at appeal following an unfair trial.

Over his long years in prison, Douma kept writing about his experiences, dreams, and aspirations in his poetry. He published his poetry collection “Soutak Talee” (Your voice is Heard) in 2012 via Dewan publishing house. In his collection, he shared his revolutionary poetry and his experiences with different youth and reformist movements in Egypt. Authorities banned his recently published poetry collection “Curly” in 2021. Douma documented a story of oppression through his poems and was keen to mention the dates and locations in which he wrote these poems in prison.

His health condition has been significantly deteriorating due to poor detention conditions, including keeping him in solitary confinement for over eight years, devastatingly impacting his mental health. Douma also suffers from severe joint, nerve and blood issues.

Polina Sadovskaya (PEN America) introduced the second empty chair.

JOURNALISTS KILLED WHILE COVERING THE WAR – UKRAINE

On 24 February 2022, the Russian Federation launched a full-scale military invasion of Ukraine, triggering a human rights and humanitarian crisis on an unimaginable scale. The free flow of independent and accurate news and information is essential in conflict situations. PEN International



is deeply concerned about the safety of journalists and media workers in Ukraine, with reports of them being targeted, kidnapped, attacked, and killed. At least 37 Ukrainian and foreign journalists and media workers have been killed during the war; eight of them have lost their lives while carrying out their professional duties: Yevhen Sakun, Brent Renaud, Oleksandra Kuvshynova, Pierre Zakrzewski, Oksana Baulina, Maks Levin, Mantas Kvedaravičius, and Frédéric Leclerc-Imhoff. Journalists are considered civilians under international humanitarian law. An attack to kill, wound or abduct a journalist is a war crime. PEN International utterly condemns the threats to the lives and safety of journalists resulting from the invasion and calls for those responsible to be brought to justice. PEN International further condemns the violence unleashed by Russian forces against Ukraine and urges the Russian Federation to immediately end the war in Ukraine.

Welcome words by Chair-elect

Germán Rojas (chair elect of the WfPC and president of PEN Chile) expressed his happiness of having been elected as Chair of the Writers for Peace Committee. This joy is also paired with the sense of commitment that the new position demands of him. His first commitment is that from now on we will look forward in order to face the great challenges that humanity has in front of it in these difficult times of open war, confrontation, mistrust, exacerbation of nationalisms, of underdevelopment, poverty or hunger in almost every corner of the world. The second commitment is his promise of opening the doors and windows of the committee to the participation of all PEN Centres in the daily life of the committee. Centres belong to the WfPC just for the mere fact of being members of PEN International. Speaking of PEN International, his third commitment is to put the committee in line with the principles of the PEN Charter following the rules and regulations widely known and accepted by all members Centres when we joined PEN International. In this framework his fourth commitment is to work as close as possible with the other 3 standing committees (Women Writers, Writers in Prison and Linguistic Rights). His fifth commitment is to structure a leadership where all regions will be present: Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Near East and Northern Africa. His sixth commitment is to open the road to the creation of as many “country action groups” as required to be more deeply involved in the reality faced by countries where peace is at stake. His seventh commitment is to work focusing on priorities that are very clear today. In the first place: Ukraine. We must raise our voice to stop that war. In Europe we have to express our concern also for Bosnia & Herzegovina and be aware of the raise of extremist right movements forming governments that represent a menace to democracy. And we also must be close to Belarus, Turkey and Julian Assange. In Africa we must monitor closely what is going on in Cameroon, Rwanda, Uganda and Zimbabwe. The same is valid for Afghanistan, China, Myanmar and Sri Lanka in Asia and the Pacific, and Iran, Palestine and Egypt in the Middle East and Northern Africa. In Latin America and the Caribbean, we have to express our solidarity with Cuba, Nicaragua and Honduras, and raise our voice in Mexico, Brazil and Peru. And we must also support the struggle of the Kurdish people that covers more than a region. The fact of naming some countries it doesn't imply that we should not be aware of other country situations that can raise in every corner of the world.

By using the myth of Sisyphus as a metaphor, he said that writers should never give up the utopia of making peace prevail throughout the world, knowing that we will have to start our task again and again. He encouraged the participants not to lose idealism.

Keynote addresses

Andrea Lešić (Bosnian PEN) explained the situation in her country. Bosnia gained the independence in 1992 and the war followed immediately. Aggression was done by Serbia, partially also by Croatia, on the top of that there was also a civil war. The country was left divided in 2 entities (Federation and Republika Srpska). She explained that the country is currently not functioning. The causes of



war are still present and the nationalist movements of all three ethnicities are still predominant. A good, but sad example is the city of Mostar. Interviews with high school students were done in that city and a young girl said that “the city is divided between people who live on only one side of the city and those that live on both sides”. The same applies to the entire country. There are people who are willing to connect and those who are just happy to swallow the nationalist propaganda of the ethnicity they belong to.

Andrey Kurkov (PEN Ukraine) explained that the entire country has suffered significant losses and literature is not excluded. The intellectuals are targeted. Many of them are missing or were killed in action or executed. The intellectuals are creating and forming the identity of the entire nation and Russians are targeting that identity. Ukraine doesn't exist in Putin's head. Andrey Kurkov is a Russian speaking Ukrainian. He is now convinced that the only official language of Ukraine should be Ukrainian.

Centre reports

Maximillia Muninzwa (PEN Kenya) explained that she is happy PEN Kenya is returning to the rightful place and shares optimism for the future.

Mosud Mannan (PEN Bangladesh) shared good news from their country. Economically they are doing well, they have good GDP per capita. They had to face some ups and downs, but they have democracy. Women are well represented, putting them on the top of the world in that perspective. They are the peace loving and peace keeping nation with several Nobel prize laureates. A lot of people are living abroad (10 million) and 4 women with Bangladesh ancestry are in the UK parliament. The publication of books is on the rise and the future should be bright. Like all countries around the world, they are facing some problems. One of them is the Myanmar population of Rohingyas, but they are getting help from other countries and different organisations.

Antoine Spire (PEN France) presented the activities of PEN France, which among other things included their support for South American poets and Ukrainian PEN center. They translated every Ukrainian PEN newsletter into French and share it around the francophone world. They are also active in protection of Uyghur writers and organized a reading for Salman Rushdie.

Berivan Dosky (Kurdish PEN) explained that they have been fighting for their lives, their language and their culture for a very long time. The Kurds had to deal with ISIS, Iran and the Turkish regime is constantly attacking their language, culture and they are also attacking them physically. There are 456 Kurdish writers in Turkish prisons, language is banned, they can't use it in Turkey. The attacks are even cross-borders. The Kurdish issue should be the Kurdish solution in one state. They are now the centre of Iran's revolution, Mahsa Amini was Kurdish. It is very important for the Kurds to receive all the available support. PEN International should also adopt new resolutions, they should not be forgotten and left behind.

Germán Rojas (chair elect of the WfPC and president of PEN Chile) explained that PEN Chile has increased its work through a more active involvement of its WfPC. They have already organised 4 public roundtables on peace, a poetry contest, a video with 14 Chilean poets in support of Ukraine, among other initiatives.

Bruno Mercier (Suisse Romand Centre) explained that his centre is dedicated to the help and support of those who need it. They are helping and supporting a writer from Albania, a Russian author that opposed the Russian regime. They also help a writer from Bangladesh who was being threatened for being an atheist. The centre is also sheltering two Kurdish writers. They work closely with ICORN (Bern being the Swiss ICORN city, they are trying to establish another one).



Armen Ohanyan (PEN Armenia) explained that they are a young post-soviet democracy. They are facing many problems with their neighbouring countries, e.g. Azerbaijan, and the genocide by the Turkish army between 1915 and 1917. The Russian influence and the Russian threat are both omnipresent, so the situation is not great. They do however have hope for the future. He also explained that Armenia has a huge diaspora with more Armenians living abroad than home.

Approval of the minutes of the Bled meeting 2022

Tanja Tuma (interim chair WfPC, president of PEN Slovenia) asked the participants to approve the minutes of the Bled meeting 2022.

Result of the vote:

YES: 14 votes

NO: 1 vote

Abstention: 7

The meeting minutes of Bled meeting 2022 are approved.

Statutes of Writers for Peace Committee

Tanja Tuma (interim chair WfPC, president of PEN Slovenia) explained that many old statutes exist, and some are even lost. She tried really hard to find them, but was unsuccessful. This causes a lot of confusion and needs to be corrected. She proposed that the WfPC should abolish its current statute and work in accordance with the Rules and regulations of the Constitution of PEN International. **Regula Venske** (member of the PEN International Board and PEN Germany) agreed, since the old and outdated rules may slow down the activities of the committee. **Sylvestre Clancier** (PEN France) explained that he shares a good history and many fond memories with the members of Slovene PEN involved with the WfPC. He thinks that there was a reason for a specific statute. The French centre will abstain from voting on this, because of this history, but they do understand the need for change and they understand that universal rules for everyone is a beneficial improvement. **Regula Venske** (member of the PEN International Board and PEN Germany) agreed, that we should make the changes while respecting history. **Bruno Mercier** (Suisse Romand Centre) wishes to continue with the Bled meetings in the future, because of the tradition. He suggests that international documents include the Bled meeting as yearly constant. **Antoine Spire** (PEN France) agreed. **Andrea Lešić** (PEN Bosnia) welcomed this idea, as old statutes caused a lot of confusion in the last Bled meeting.

Tanja Tuma asked the participants to vote on “abolishing the old rules and respecting only the rules and regulation of the Constitution of PEN International in the future of the WfPC”.

YES: 14 votes

NO: 0 votes

ABSTAIN: 6



Tanja Tuma (interim chair WfPC, president of PEN Slovenia) asked the participants to vote, if Bled meeting should continue and if that should be included in the new documents defining the activities of PEN international.

YES: 16 votes

NO: 0 votes

ABSTAIN: 3

At the end of the voting **Burhan Sönmez** (president of PEN International, member of Kurdish PEN) explained that the things are modernizing and PEN International as well as all PEN committees should do the same. He informed the participants that attorneys will come in the end of the week at the congress and improve the documents defining the activities of PEN International. They don't want any loopholes; they want to have the Constitution and the Rules and regulations in order.

Lunch break

Interim Chair Report (November 2021 – September 2022)

Tanja Tuma (interim chair WfPC, president of PEN Slovenia) explained her activities as interim chair. She explained that a lot has been accomplished during Emmanuel Pierrat's leadership (Suisse Romand Centre) Important statements and appeals have been adopted: [WfPC Continues to Call for Peace in Northern Ethiopia and Surrounding Regions](#), two days before the Russian attack on Ukraine the WfPC issued the [Call For An End To The Intimidation of Ukraine](#), followed by the [Second Statement on War in Ukraine of PEN International](#), [Statement on the unrest in Kazakhstan](#), [Statement on conflict in the disputed territory of Artsakh/Ngorno-Karabakh](#). Sergio Roic (Swiss Italian & Reto-Romansh PEN Centre) made a series of television interviews with various PEN members. Those "Hustling for peace" interviews can be found on this [link](#). The past chair and Slovene PEN center also suggested the creation of the Balkan working group, chaired by Simon Mundy (PEN Wales CYMRU). The group connected the representatives of Balkan countries, Bulgaria and Greece. Tienchi Liao Martin (Chinese Independent PEN) shared a lot of important information about the situation in Asia, primarily China. For details please consult her article [A Summary of Freedom of Press and Human Rights Situation in Asia](#).

Tanja Tuma (interim chair WfPC, president of PEN Slovenia) informed the participants of the meeting that the Bled meeting 2022 booklet exists in the pdf format. The booklet contains the articles, essays and poems written by the participants of the Bled meeting in English, French in Slovenian (the official languages of the meeting).¹ She told the participants that during the Bled meeting WfPC held the general assembly and Slovene PEN together with the committee organised discussion in the form of round tables. This year we had 4 main topics (*PEN stands with Ukraine, Failing Global Ethics: The Writer's Response, Bosnia and all the "Bosnias" in the world, The five horsemen of the Apocalypse: covid, hate speech, violent protests, global warming, and the decline of democracy*).

¹ The booklet is available [on this link](#).



Since the Bled meeting, the WfPC created the Advisory board with representatives from different continents. On the 7th of July, the committee organised a brainstorming meeting with the goal of connecting people and get new ideas for the future. On the 7th of September, the committee organised social media training during which the participants learned the advantages of social media and the correct use of it.

Interim chair report vote:

YES: 16 votes

NO: 1 vote

Abstain: 1

Updates from members of the Advisory Board

Before the updates from the members of the Advisory board, **Burhan Sönmez** (president of PEN International, member of Kurdish PEN) quickly informed the participants that the Women's Writers Committee is preparing a resolution about the present situation in Iran.

Maximillia Muninzwa (PEN Kenya) said that her report from the first part of the meeting might have been a bit premature, as Kenya is facing some challenges in the political sphere. Their newly elected president attacked the media first, because some media outlets didn't present him in the light, he thought fit. So, there are some challenges ahead of them.

Centre reports (part 2)

Kim Yong-Jae (Korean PEN) informed the participants that South Koreans are a peace-loving nation. The Korean peninsula is divided between the North and the South with frequent tensions, so the peace is really vital to them. He also invited the participants who share their vision, are interested in Korean culture and literature to Korea. He hopes that through our collective activities, peace will prevail.

Luis de la Paz (Cuban PEN in exile) informed the participants that Cubans are facing many problems and challenges. The Castro revolution is over and a new one is on its way. This will now be the revolution of young people. The Cubans in exile are doing their best to help people in Cuba. They need all our support and we all need to make sure that Cuba and Cubans are not forgotten.

Boban Batrićević (PEN Montenegro) informed the participants that his PEN centre is doing its best to respect and implement the PEN Charter. The Russian attack on Ukraine exposed the threats that the rest of the Europe is dealing with. American diplomatic documents sometimes talk about the Russian influence in Montenegro. Even though Montenegro has a good predisposition of joining the EU, one cannot deny the strong influence of Serbia and Russia in many local political figures. Their current prime minister Dritan Abazović has close relationship with the Serbian president. Milorad Popović, Montenegrin writer, was publicly threatened by their prime minister in parliament.² He furthermore accused the PEN centre of nationalism and fascism. This was not the first time that prime minister Abazović has publicly targeted members of the Montenegrin PEN Centre, having repeatedly smeared prominent Montenegrin writer and member of the Montenegrin PEN Centre, Andrej Nikolaidis. We are witnessing the persecution of intellectuals in Montenegro. The

² WfPC shared the letter of support made by Slovene PEN. The letter is available on [this link](#).



department for Montenegrin language also lost a part of their funding. The corrupt political figures are trying to assimilate Montenegro to Serbia.

Yauhen Sapach (Belorussian PEN) explained that for the Belarusians, the peace is vital. They are a peaceful nation; their revolution and their protests were peaceful. However, they are dealing with an extremely repressive regime. Many prominent Belorussian authors have expressed themselves against the war, many have relocated. There are many writers, journalists and activists in prison. Belarusians currently don't have independent cultural activities as they are all under the regime. It's all government regulated. People that work in the cultural sector are not necessarily supporters, but they do need jobs to survive. Sometimes however the regime creates such intolerable working conditions that some people don't have any other option, but to resign. Their Ministry of culture even has a black list of people that can't be employed in the cultural sector. Another big issue they are dealing with is the censorship.

Tanja Tuma (interim chair WfPC, president of PEN Slovenia) again underlined that we have to keep in mind that not all Belorussians and Russians are the supporters of their regimes and its actions against peaceful nations, therefore we should not discriminate them.

Draft Resolution on Iran

Tanja Tuma (interim chair WfPC, president of PEN Slovenia) was given the draft Statement on the Iranian revolution and read it aloud. The statement was drafted by the women's committee.

Participants all agreed that the committee should support the statement.

Ukraine

Participants were given the printouts of the Resolution on Ukraine. **Andrey Kurkov** (PEN Ukraine) said that the resolutions is well written and strong. Some details need to be updated (such as numbers of refugees and arrests).

Tanja Tuma (interim chair WfPC, president of PEN Slovenia) asked him what can the committee do in term of real, indirect help to Ukraine and Ukrainian people. **Andrey Kurkov** (PEN Ukraine) said that they would be happy to host people in Kyiv. The train connections are good. They would also get in touch with Crimean Tatars. Everyone willing to come and help should reach out and together we will find a way to make it happen. This would be partially a solidarity meeting, but also a working one.

Several people in the room were willing to participate. Those people were members of PEN centres from Finland, Germany, Austria, Cuba in exile, Sweden, France, England, Slovenia and Montenegro.

Vote on the Resolution on Ukraine:

YES: 17 votes

NO: 0 votes

ABSTAIN: 0



Free discussion

Tanja Tuma (interim chair WfPC, president of PEN Slovenia) encouraged the participants to think about possible topics to be discussed in the Bled meeting 2023.³ **Andrea Lešić** suggested “Construction of hope and conditions for peace”. **Daniel Gorman** (English PEN) also suggested to speak about multiculturalism.

Tanja Tuma (interim chair WfPC, president of PEN Slovenia) talked about the idea of the creation of a Manifesto for education and children’s literature. **Yauhen Sapach** (Belorussian PEN) underlined that we should not forget about the power of propaganda in children’s book. He explained that history books in Belarus are changing, adapting to the regime’s desires. **Daniel Gorman** (English PEN) talked about the ban on books that is currently happening in the USA and also in the UK. **Andrea Lešić** (PEN Bosnia) talked about the indoctrination of children that are exposed to government adapted textbooks (especially history) in schools. In Bosnia the same story is presented in 3 different ways by the 3 different ethnicities residing in Bosnia. Historians are trying to correct this by describing propaganda-free history (Declaration against the destruction of history). **Tsutomu Ide** (PEN Japan) underlined the importance of children’s literature. We shouldn’t focus only on educational books, but all types of literature for children. They should be free in their exploration and we should encourage them along the way. He informed that a children’s book committee was created in PEN Japan. **Boban Batričević** (PEN Montenegro) explained that their pro-Russian political figures in the Ministry of culture fired 200 educators on their first day in the office. They even had the audacity to say that children can learn more about history in the Orthodox churches, because priests know better than teachers. **Antoine Spire** (PEN France) said that children need to understand that literature teaches us life. Literature explains that the reality is complex and it helps us understand it.

Tanja Tuma concluded the meeting with the invitation to the WWC poetry reading curated by Judyth Hill.

The meeting ended.

If you have questions or comments regarding the minutes, please contact PENwritersforpeace@penslovenia-zdruzenje.si

³ Participants are invited to submit their ideas by sending an email to PENwritersforpeace@penslovenia-zdruzenje.si

