

To: SA PEN Members

E-Newsletter No. 2/2013 – 8/02/2013



**THE SOUTH AFRICAN CENTRE OF
PEN INTERNATIONAL**

A World Association of Writers

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CONTENTS:

- December letter from John Ralston Saul, International President, to the PEN membership
- Memoir courses, run by Dawn Garisch. **Cape Town 25/02/13. Cape St. Francis 06/03/13**
- Welcome to new members
- Austrian PEN Project Against Violence on Women. **Deadline = prior to 08/03/13**
- Congratulations to Robin Malan
- Gail Dendy's interview on SAfm's *People of Note*
- South African Arts Journalism Awards. **Deadline = 08/03/13**
- Mail & Guardian's flagship 200 Young South Africans
- International Data Privacy Day - 28th January - who is reading your e-mails?
- Call for Submissions: *Loop #2*. **Deadline = 18/03/13**
- Oxfam Novib/PEN Award
- Forthcoming events
- Members' Publications

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December letter from John Ralston Saul, International President, to the PEN membership

15th January 2013

Dear PEN members, Dear friends,

As many of you know, the entire Board of Directors of PEN Turkey is now under investigation for having insulted the Turkish Republic, as laid out in Article 301. Of course, there are already some 70 writers in prison in Turkey and many others caught up in the tentacles of the often unfair legal system. The vast majority of them are Kurds or those who have written in

support of Kurds. And then I look at the events in Iran, Syria and China – to name only three. There have been no lack of indignities visited on free expression around the world over the last month.

But there is something particularly disturbing about this incident in Turkey, a country which eagerly

describes itself as a democracy. And it comes in the form of the dispassionate and procedural opening of an investigation of the entire Board; of eight well known writers who have been elected by so many other writers.

This touches some of us very personally. We know them. They are friends. We were with them in Ankara and Istanbul in November.

Apparently the investigation has been in the works since June when the Board spoke up in defence of the composer Fazıl Say.

Of course, Turkey is a rich and complex civilization. Of course there are many good things to be said about that civilization. But such cultural and historic richness only makes this affront to free expression worse. The country suffers from a deeply flawed legal system and an often unjust application of the law.

The obvious point is that no law should exist to limit criticism of a citizen's own country. This is particularly obvious in a democracy. The citizens – not the government – are the guarantors of the legitimacy of the state. States remain healthy to the extent that citizens can speak up and criticize even the most basic of natural assumptions. The authorities have no innate right to define the loyalty or the patriotism of the citizenry. In a democracy the authorities are the servants of the citizenry not the bosses.

Look at how the state undermines its own legitimacy through such a law. Here are the 48 words issued by the PEN Turkey Board in defence of a fellow artist:

“As the Turkey Centre of the international writers

association PEN, we strongly condemn and meet with consternation the [news] that our esteemed composer and pianist Fazıl Say has been called up to court. The international community has been put on alert in the face of fascist developments in Turkey”.

Suppose we were to accept that such a law should exist. Are these outrageous words? Are they not fairly normal phrases of protest? There is no international democratic standard by which words such as these could be used to justify for unleashing the legal system on any individual or group. In this particular case we are talking about eight writers, well known, indeed rewarded in Turkey and in other countries for their contributions and their talents.

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All of this raises a related point. People periodically ask me whether I think we at PEN are making progress. I suppose they mean: will authorities around the world stop arresting and bothering writers? History is pretty clear on this. They will not stop. They can't help themselves.

And PEN, as one of the voices of history, will go on working to reduce this stupidity. We will go on finding the right words and actions to condemn them for their weakness and working to get writers freed. Weakness? Yes, the weakness of grown men and women, with concrete power in their hands, who are frightened of language because words escape their tools of authority. Frightened. Thin skinned. Vainglorious. Or simply vain. They cannot bear the sounds of free

expression and therefore of creativity and imagination.

What of the question – Is PEN making progress? The answer is that we are working – all of us – to drag free expression and therefore creativity itself, out of the corners and shadows into which those with concrete power have always tried to shove it. We have our Writers in Prison Committee methods. Our Rapid Action Networks’. We have reinvented our missions. We have our growing education programs in many parts of Africa. Our support for languages at risk increasingly organized around The Girona Manifesto. Our Impunity campaigns in Latin America. Now there is our digital work with the Gyeongju Declaration of September. Our publishing work in difficult areas with the Publishers Circle. Our discussions around peace. Our Free the Word events. And so on. And so on. We are constantly building new tools to help us drag free speech into critical areas.

When I think of this personally, the answer is precise: we are working to

place literature and free expression at the centre of our civilizations. These are not little pressures to be produced as a distraction once political and military and economic problems are solved.

What we work for is not comfort. It is muscular, uncomfortable, transparent free expression and the opening up of the imagination through literature. This is what creates the energy to solve political and economic problems. The very fact that some 800 writers are in prison, while virtually no politicians, officers or businessmen are, is an eloquent demonstration of the power creativity holds when it comes to solving problems.

Please, all of you, take this affront to our colleagues in PEN Turkey as an affront to what we all stand for. Write about it in your own countries. Write to the Turkish authorities.

With best wishes,
John Ralston Saul

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Memoir courses, run by Dawn Garisch

Dawn will be running courses in Cape Town (25th February to 1st March) and Cape St. Francis (6th to 10th March). For more information please email dawn.garisch@gmail.com.

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A warm **welcome to new members**: Rahla Xenopoulous, Joonji Mdyogolo and Samantha Page.



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Austrian PEN Project Against Violence on Women

Dear Colleagues,
Austrian PEN invites you all to contribute to our literary project against violence on women. All necessary details you may find in English, French, German and Spanish on our homepage: www.penclub.at

Contributions in all languages are possible, no translation necessary!

With best wishes,
Helmuth A. Niederle
President Austrian PEN
19th January 2013

TIME TO SAY: NO!

On 9th October 2012 the 14-year old Pakistani blogger Malala Yousafzai was shot on her way back home from school. She was attacked by Taliban-terrorists, because of her activism on womens´rights. She had written in her blog that girls living in Swat-valley are permanently hindered from attending school.

We cannot be silent.

You may ask why this attack matters to **PEN**? As well as the fact that we are against any form of violence, we see this cowardly assault as an attack on Freedom of Expression. Without writing and reading there would be no books, no poets, essayists and novelists and these are the people that **PEN** represents. Without literacy freedom of expression is challenged.

The right to education is a universal human right. It is a basic right which fosters and guarantees democracy founded on constitutional legality. This is independent of and not based on or limited by gender.

We have to take a firm stand and say ‘**NO!**’ to those who question the right to education or who want to abolish it partly or completely.

Please write a poem, a short story or a letter of protest in the language you literary use. We would like to record this protest in as many languages as possible and publish it on **8th March 2013**, International Women’s Day, when we shall present the worldwide concert of literary voices.

Please send your contributions to: info@penclub.at

All authors agree that contributed texts can be used wholly or in part for this **PEN Austria** campaign.

Philo Ikonya, Board Member, PEN International
Helmuth A. Niederle, President PEN Austria

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Congratulations to Robin Malan – his children’s book *Sonny Jim and his Sister* has been selected from the Western Cape Education Department’s approved list to be transcribed in Braille, printed in large-print and read into audio format on cd, to be supplied free to the libraries of visually impaired schools in South Africa. Also, his teen novel *My Funny Brother* has been named one of the Bookchat Books of the Year 2012.

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Missed **Gail Dendy’s interview on SAfm’s People of Note** back in December? Go to the following link to hear the podcast:

<http://www.classicfm.co.za/podcasts/people-of-note/2012/16-december-2012-sunday-gail-dendy/view>

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South African Arts Journalism Awards

The National Arts Festival, Grahamstown and Business and Arts South Africa (BASA) are pleased to call for entries to the South African Arts Journalism Awards, which will be presented for the first time in 2013.

The awards will identify excellence, expertise and creativity. In doing so, they will promote the practice of arts and cultural journalism, strengthen its national profile and celebrate its importance, range, diversity, fluidity and vitality. Gold and Silver awards will be made in the following categories:

- *Reviewing* - Reviews of theatre, music, visual/plastic arts, dance, literature, film, comedy or any other arts and culture phenomenon.
- *Features* - These may include interviews and profiles, behind-the-scenes stories, arts-related investigative journalism or other forms of arts and culture reportage in any medium.
- *Opinion pieces* - Comment, analysis and provocation – in any medium – relating to specific artistic disciplines, the arts sector more broadly or arts-related policy and business stories.

Winners will be announced during the course of this year’s National Arts Festival and a range of cash prizes will be awarded. Additionally, one journalist will be awarded the opportunity to travel to the vibrant Amsterdam Fringe in September, from where they will report on South African productions being presented at that Festival as part of the World Fringe Alliance showcase.

Competition rules and other important information can be found on the Festival’s website at www.nationalartsfestival.co.za. **The deadline for entries is Friday, 8th March 2013**

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Mail & Guardian’s flagship 200 Young South Africans

New member Joonji Mdyogolo asks:

“Do you know any bright young people in the literary world? I am working on the *Mail & Guardian’s* flagship 200 Young South Africans project, a supplement which profiles the up and coming generation (See last year’s <http://ysa2012.mg.co.za>). I am looking for suggestions and nominations in these categories: Arts and culture, Media and Film and Science and Technology.”

The nominees have to be 35 and under (a little over if they are doing truly exceptional work). They do not have to be South Africans or born here. They do, however, have to reside in South Africa and must be committed to staying in South Africa in the foreseeable future.

You may submit your nomination by going to the link: <http://mg.co.za/article/2012-01-16-nominate-your-top-young-south-african> or by emailing Joonji directly at joonjimdyogolo@gmail.com with their details (name, age, contact details) and a few lines on why they are exceptional or what they do.

There are officially 10 categories, the other eight are: Science and Technology, Business and Law, Civil Society, Education, Environment, Health, Politics and Government, Sport. You may nominate people for these categories as well.

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International Data Privacy Day - 28th January - who is reading your e-mails?

Go to: http://www.ifex.org/international/2013/01/30/data_privacy/

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Call for Submissions: Loop #2

Dear Poet,

We are now accepting poems for Issue 2 of *Loop*. *Loop* is an annual e-chapbook produced by Tearoom Books.

You may submit as many poems as you wish. **The closing date for submissions is 18th March 2013.** Poems should be sent to: tearoombooks@gmail.com

We hope that you will choose to contribute.

~ Tearoom Books

(Tearoom Books is a micro press based in Durban, South Africa and Stockholm, Sweden. It aims to publish pamphlets of contemporary poetry, fiction, non-fiction and humour. <http://tearoombooks.blogspot.com/>)

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On Thursday, 17th January the **Oxfam Novib/PEN Award** was awarded to five writers in recognition of their continued work in the face of persecution. This year the recipients were the Syrian writer and journalist Samar Yazbek, the Cameroonian writer and co-founder of the Cameroon Writers Association Enoh Meyomesse, the Iranian activist, journalist and deputy director of the Defenders of Human Rights Centre (DHRC) Nargess Mohammadi, the Congolese journalist Deo Namujimbo, the Turkish academic and writer Busra Ersanli. To read more go to: <http://pen-international.org/newsitems/samar-yazbek-enoh-meyomesse-nargess-mohammadi-deo-namujimbo-and-busra-ersanli-receive-the-oxfam-novibpen-free-expression-award>

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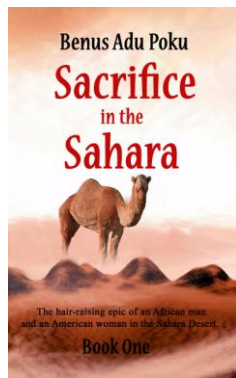
Forthcoming events

- ❖ **International Mother Tongue Language Day** – 21st February 2013.
- ❖ **Woordfees** – 1st to 10th March 2013, Stellenbosch. www.woordfees.co.za
- ❖ **Knysna Literary Festival** – 19th to 24th March 2013. www.knysnaliteraryfestival.co.za
- ❖ **Mandela Bay Book Fair** - 15th to 17th March 2013, Port Elizabeth
- ❖ **Time of the Writer International Writers Festival** – 18th to 23rd March 2013, Durban. www.cca.ukzn.ac.za

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Members' Publications

Sacrifice in the Sahara (Book One) by Benus Adu Poku



This is Book One of a trilogy with the same title. This hair-raising epic is a *magnum opus* by Benus Adu Poku, Editors' Choice Award-Winning and Critical Acclaim Author. Boison is a young African man compelled by socio-economic hardships in his country to flee to Europe for a better life through illegal and unconventional routes in the Sahara desert. There he comes upon Hilda, the American woman. What is this daring and dazzling woman up to in the inhospitable Sahara? Even in the midst of affliction, can her beauty and elegance and charisma exert any meaningful influence on the African man to digress from his original dream? All too soon, there is going to be a gruesome encounter..... The front cover of the book was designed by Vanessa Finaughty.

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All information regarding awards/competitions, residencies, festivals, etc., included in this newsletter is passed on to you as a service to SA PEN members. Any questions regarding entry rules, entry processes, festival programmes, etc., should be forwarded direct to the relevant organisers. SA PEN attempts to establish that the information received is genuine before passing this on to our members, but we cannot be held responsible should that not be the case. 