

PEN South Africa newsletter / Issue 24, 2018 / 2018 End of Year Message from PEN SA President, Nadia Davids; Farewell to Nick Mulgrew; calls for submissions; new members, and more!

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2018 End of Year Message from PEN SA President, Nadia Davids

Dear Friends,

2018 was a challenging, exhilarating, sometimes disheartening and often inspiring year for PEN South Africa. Those who work for and within the realm of freedom of expression have been deeply troubled and frightened both by the global assault on language and truth and by the - sometimes fatal - **violence against journalists**. While the reading, engaging, knowing and advocating has often been difficult, all of us at PEN SA have been awed by the profound courage and principled resilience with which writers, artists, journalists and activists around the world have continued to write and think us through and out of darkness.

PEN SA has, during this year, orientated itself towards working both locally and globally to defend freedom of expression, promote literacy, support South African writers, stand in solidarity with beleaguered journalists and artists, build networks of support across our continent, actively recruit new members and crucially, to begin to unpack our organisation's sometimes problematic past. Much of what we do is voluntary; our sole permanent staff consists of our Center Co-ordinator, Khanya Mncwabe and a Communications Manager who, together, do the work of dozens.

And while we are not a resource-rich organisation, we have a robust, engaged, participatory membership who take seriously and passionately the work we do and the issues we face. As a board, we are always grateful to members who weigh in on difficult issues; while we may not always agree, critique offered invites us to sharpen our arguments and support shown gives us the will to keep going.

Below are some highlights from our work over the last year; from manifestos and major book launches to awareness raising events for writers in prison, from statements about the arrest of activists, to supporting investigations into book price-fixing, from re-imagining our website and logo to recruiting new board members who will work to forge a new path for PEN SA.

We've had, on reflection, a busy and productive 2018.

Major Statements

In February 2018 we noted with alarm that some of the responses to the film, *Inxeba* were violent and threatening; in response, we issued a statement in support of the film and the filmmakers and placed an article in the **Mail and Guardian**. In March PEN SA launched locally the **PEN International Women's Manifesto**. In April, we created a **timeline of the events and articles related to the Artworks issue at UCT**. We condemned the **killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi** and the **re-arrest of Stella Nyanzi** and **welcomed the investigation into alleged book price fixing by SA publishers**. In November we **supported the petition against the Copyright Amendment Bill**.

Major Events

We've continued to showcase and support our **members' many literary successes**. In July 2018, we hosted the **Cape Town launch of the Prison Letters of Nelson Mandela** in partnership with Penguin Random House South Africa, The Mandela Rhodes Foundation and The Fugard Theatre. For our annual **Day of the Imprisoned Writer** in November, we partnered once again with the **ICA**. The excellent attendance at both events is an indication of how deeply South Africans treasure the relationship between freedom and writing.

New Logo and Advocacy Work

2018 also heralded the adoption of a **new PEN SA logo and slogan**: the image is evocative of the nib of a fountain pen, a human figure, and the central "Y" band of the South African flag. The new slogan, "Free Writing", constitutes PEN SA's mission as an imperative – to free writing and writers – as well as the ideal it stands for in South Africa and beyond; that writing should be a liberating and empowering act.

PEN SA's new identity re-affirms our advocacy work, which this year included adding our voice to that of sister PEN Centres from elsewhere in Africa to **petition the Pan African Parliament to spearhead the decriminalisation of defamation in Africa**. We are also collaborating with an Oxford University-based research project **Writers and Free Expression (WFE) Project** which includes an examination of the PEN SA

archive. This is a complex, ongoing undertaking that requires us to engage with the full spectrum of our organisation's history.

And finally, we've recruited two new outstanding board members; **Sisonke Msimang** and **Pierre de Vos**. In addition, **Yewande Omotoso** has taken up the role of PEN SA Executive Vice President. I'd like to thank also all our serving board members; they give so generously of their time, expertise and energies. Collectively crafting statements that are nuanced and informed around complex issues requires thought, rigour and care and it is work that is often done in a snatched hour in an already busy day. I am grateful to the board for always finding a way to prioritise these conversations.

There is so much more to explore and discover on our **website**, in our **newsletters** and on a more sustained basis as a **member of PEN SA**. Do have a look!

Wishing you all a peaceful, happy festive season and a joyful 2019.

Nadia Davids

President, PEN South Africa



Farewell to PEN SA's Nick Mulgrew

It is with great sadness that we say goodbye to our immensely gifted and wonderfully dedicated Communications Director, Nick Mulgrew.

Nick has been with PEN SA for just over a year but he's made an extraordinary and lasting contribution to our organisation. His initial job title was 'Newsletter Editor' but his wonderful enthusiasm, wide-ranging skills and fine-grained attention to detail, in combination with his vast knowledge of, and deep commitment to, South African literature immediately meant his remit was much broader and deeper. Nick is a writer, an editor and a publisher: his love of the written word made him the ideal person to work for an organisation that works to protect and support writers.

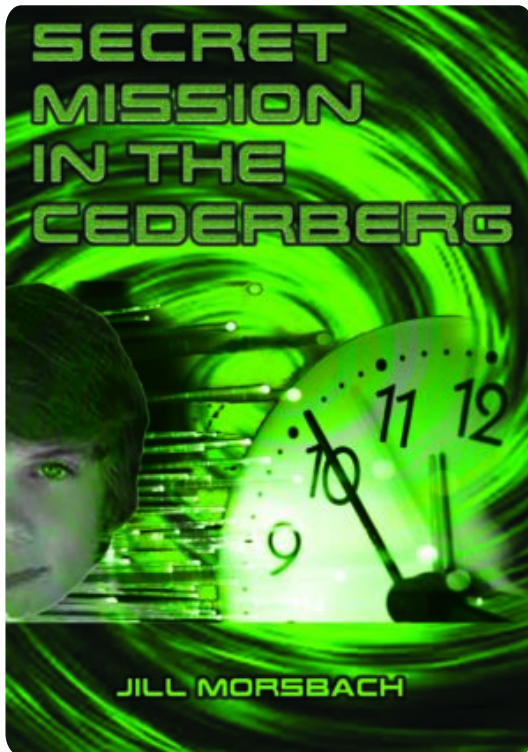
In the short time that Nick was with us he produced **23 outstanding newsletters** and **1000+ tweets**. He re-designed our logo, revamped our website structure, re-wrote our invitation letters, **authored an excellent piece** for the Mail and Guardian on *Inxeba* and worked with Khanya Mncwabe to put together an extremely detailed and comprehensive **timeline of the UCT Artworks** issue. He produced the publicity materials for our launch of the *Prison Letters of Nelson Mandela* at the Fugard Theatre and for our **annual Day of the Imprisoned Writer** at ICA (he also helped oversee the planning and execution of both events).

Nick has brought a sense of passionate commitment to his work with PEN SA; he's helped us to re-imagine and re-invigorate our organisation's public engagement, he's been resolute about wading into complex political terrain and he's been a terrific, thoughtful and generous colleague. He leaves impossibly big shoes to fill and he'll be much missed but we know he will be excellent at any and everything he turns his attention to.

Go well Nick, and thank you so much for everything!

Nadia and Khanya

MEMBERS' NEW TITLES



New and upcoming releases from PEN SA members include three new novels by Jill Morsbach: *African Paradise* for adult readers, *Flight* for teenagers and *Secret Mission in the Cederberg* for

CALLS FOR SUBMISSIONS

NEW! [Apply Now: International Writing Program Women's Creative Mentorship](#) (January 1, 2019)

[Poets: Submit Your Original Manuscript for uHlanga's 2019 Open Submissions Call](#) (Deadline 28 February 2019; opens 1 February 2019)

[Click here to view all calls for submissions](#)

WELCOME

Welcome to new PEN SA Professional Members, Johann van Loggerenberg and Ambre Nicholson.

young readers.

Please send us your new releases

to newslettereditor@pensouthafrica.co.za.

Send us your news

Had a book published recently? Attended or participated in a festival? Won an award? Achieved a personal milestone of note? We welcome any news of your activities for future issues of the PEN SA newsletter. Please let us know if your email changes so we can update our mailing list.

Please email your contributions
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