

## PEN Canada concerned at book-burning and censorship at the University of Mumbai

October 20, 2010 – Toronto – As a literary organization that works to protect freedom of expression and to oppose all forms of censorship, PEN Canada is deeply concerned at the removal of Rohinton Mistry’s novel *Such a Long Journey* from the English literature syllabus at the University of Mumbai.

Vice-Chancellor Rajan Welukar’s decision to remove the novel from the second year reading list of the Bachelor of Arts program, under an emergency provision, without holding a review with members of the Department of Language, Linguistics and Literature, or with members of the Faculty of Arts, raises troubling questions. It is a further cause for concern that the ban was apparently rushed through to appease members of the Shiv Sena party, following a book-burning protest organized by Aditya Thackeray, the new leader of Yuva Sena, the party’s youth wing.

Published twenty years ago, *Such a Long Journey* has a distinguished history. It received the 1991 Governor General’s Literary Award for Fiction in Canada, the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best Book, the W.H. Smith / Books in Canada First Novel Award and was shortlisted for the Booker Prize. It was first placed on the English Literature syllabus at the University of Mumbai four years ago. Until Mr. Thackeray criticized the novel’s “foul language against many things that we, in Mumbai, hold close to our hearts” most reviewers had emphasized the book’s “loving humour” towards the citizens of Mumbai, and its “sharp affectionate sketches of Indian family life.”

Book-burnings should have no place in a modern democracy, neither should peremptory censorship of the sort that has been used to remove *Such a Long Journey* from the English syllabus at the University of Mumbai. PEN Canada urges the board of the University to revisit Vice Chancellor Welukar’s decision, to reinstate the novel as a part of the required reading for second year Literature students, until a full academic review of its merits and supposed shortcomings has been completed, and to reaffirm the University of Mumbai’s commitment to academic freedom and its resistance to censorship and political pressure.

-30-

Honorary Patron  
John Ralston Saul  
President  
Ellen Seligman  
Vice-President  
Charles Foran  
Treasurer  
Frances Connelly  
Chair, Writers in Exile Committee  
Mary Jo Leddy  
Chair, National Affairs Committee  
Andrew Cohen  
Chair, Outreach (Western Canada)  
Miki Andrejevic  
Chair, Legal Affairs  
Clayton Ruby  
Chair, Membership  
Sarah Elton  
Editor, Newsletter and Annual Report  
Diana Kuprel  
Chair, Communications  
Jared Bland

Members-at-large  
Martha Butterfield  
Susan Coyne  
Anna Porter  
Bruce Walsh

Administrator  
Katie Addleman  
Coordinator, Programs  
Brendan de Caires

Advisory Board  
David Cronenberg  
Rohinton Mistry  
Ramin Jahanbegloo  
Naomi Klein

Past Presidents  
Margaret Atwood  
Reza Baraheni  
Eugene Benson  
Marian Botsford Fraser  
June Callwood  
Louise Denny  
Timothy Findley  
Graeme Gibson  
Alison Gordon  
Katherine Govier  
Ron Graham  
Ann Ireland  
Sandra Martin  
Nelofer Pazira  
Nino Ricci