

## **Contents**

1	Letter from the Editor
2	President's Message
6	Executive Director's Message
8	Alaa Abd El-Fattah letter
10	Writers in Exile Committee Report
12	Narges Mohammadi letter
14	Writers in Peril Report
16	Jimmy Lai letter
18	Canadian and Legal Affairs Committee Report
20	New Honorary Member letter
22	Honorary Members
28	Events Committee Report
30	Public Events Report and Prizes
38	Members, Donors, Patrons and Partners

## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

I hope this letter finds you well.

Letters have always been a means to create connection, to reach beyond ourselves, particularly before the internet and phones existed. For much of humanity, letter writing was the means for communicating with others at a distance. A letter asking about the well-being of the addressees wouldn't be answered for weeks, sometimes months. Most of us have lost this waiting, this longing, as our technology has developed, but for some, like imprisoned writers, letter writing is still an important way of finding and maintaining connection with people on the outside. Because so much of PEN Canada's work is helping exiled and/or imprisoned writers, letter writing has maintained its relevance and importance for PEN.

In this report, you'll find a letter from Madeleine Thien to Jimmy Lai, an imprisoned writer and newspaper publisher in Hong Kong whom she has never met, and yet feels kinship with. Other writers who have included letters in this report, like Mostafa Al-A'sar and Maryam Shafipour, are exiled writers now living in Canada—they chose to write letters to writers still imprisoned in their home countries of Egypt and Iran, to remind those writers that people on the outside are fighting for them and keeping the hope of their safety and release alive.

"I hope this finds you well," the theme of this year's annual report, seeks to find connection in all sorts of ways, through PEN's mission of fighting censorship, helping free persecuted writers from prison, assisting exiled writers who live in Canada, and promoting literature. The work of PEN Canada continues and it's never been more important, as more and more writers are censored globally for standing up for what they believe. These letters are the perfect accompaniment to the reports, which showcase the continuing important work that's already being done at PEN Canada, work that needs to continue being supported, so that it can grow and create more change. These times continue to be hard, but if there's something we can take from the letters in this report, it is to continue to hope that things can change, and that hope must be active. Let's support imprisoned writers, let's be a little more active in our communities, a little braver, and a little more oriented towards justice.

In solidarity,

*Eli Tareq El Bechelany-Lynch*

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

*Grace Westcott*

This is my last missive as president of PEN Canada. My four years at the helm end in June, when the membership elects a new president. I leave as we stand together with our sister centre, PEN Québec, on the cusp of one hundred years as the Canadian centre of PEN International in 2026. It is a momentous milestone.

It has been the privilege of a lifetime serving as PEN Canada's 23rd president, the latest in a roster of champions of Can Lit and free expression that I am proud to be counted among. Canada is a country of immense writing and publishing talent. Nurturing it is a challenge to which the country and PEN Canada have always risen; it has been our great good fortune to do so in a climate of freedom.

Defending free expression is a never-ending project. We have always striven to speak out where voices have been repressed in Canada, whether by government bodies or by members of civil society. We have sought to raise up the voices of exiled writers who come to live among us, while speaking out in defence of imprisoned writers around the world.

We recognize that freedom of expression is a stern discipline, difficult both to practice and to defend. It demands a great deal of each of us personally, to stand up for the right of others to express ideas with which we may profoundly disagree. That's the nub of it, the acid test of our convictions. We stand for the freedom to read and write, without regard to the views expressed. We know that, unless there is free expression for all, there is free expression for none. We know that diversity of viewpoint and strenuous public debate is to all our benefits, and key to a vibrant and free country. It's what we believe in.

Now, with the rise of authoritarianism in democracies around the world – most alarmingly in the US – we as Canadians are moved to step up to defend the values of our democracy, of which freedom of expression is perhaps the most fundamental, essential to all the rest.

In the last few months, we've been seeing something new arise in our national image: the Assertive Canadian.

As we all know, the last two lines of our national anthem are "Oh Canada, we stand on guard for thee." We repeat it twice, for emphasis. We have glibly made this promise since first warbling the words in our grade school assemblies as kids, or at our citizenship ceremonies as new Canadians. Now, global events have hit home, and call on us with a newfound sense of immediacy, to guard what matters most to us.

PEN is ready. As I hand the baton to a new president, and as the centennial anniversary of the Canadian centre of PEN International approaches, PEN Canada has the leadership, the will, the resources; a trained, knowledgeable, and dedicated staff; and the support of firm friends and members, like you, to lead a campaign to assert the values that we have stood for, for almost one hundred years.

I want to thank all my colleagues on the board of PEN Canada, past and present, who have, over the past four years, given countless hours, forthright honesty, and much deliberate thought to the work of PEN. Our debates have made PEN stronger. I'd like to recognize the members of our Advisory Council, who have given me the benefit of their counsel when I have grappled with difficult issues. I want to thank our staff, Brendan de Caires, Theresa Johnson, and Eilish Waller, for their talent, commitment and hard work in promoting the mission of PEN. And lastly, I would like to thank the many longtime friends, members, and supporters of PEN, in many cases relationships enduring over decades, whose readiness to engage in PEN's work, loyalty and love of PEN and what it stands for, have been a continuing gift to our organization, and a source of deep inspiration to me. Thank you.

IN THE LAST FEW  
MONTHS, WE'VE  
BEEN SEEING  
SOMETHING NEW  
ARISE IN OUR  
NATIONAL IMAGE:  
THE ASSERTIVE  
CANADIAN.

# UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

A.l

## ARTICLE 19



Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

# EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

*Brendan de Caires*

“Make that make sense!” Justin Trudeau’s anguished comment on Trump’s tariffs could serve equally well for much of last year. A sundowning American president refusing to step aside until he had humiliated himself in a televised debate, his replacement installed without primaries, his successor, a racist felon, returning to office eager to vandalize the country’s legal system, government, economy, and international alliances. None of it made sense.

Biden defended Ukraine tenaciously but his chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan abandoned its civil society, and left thousands of writers and journalists to a vengeful Taliban. Shamefully, he fist-bumped the Saudi prince who directed the murder and dismemberment of a Washington Post columnist. Worse yet, he credulously repeated disinformation about beheaded babies, dithered over ceasefires, and readily approved billions in weapons sales for the obliteration of Gaza. The unconscionably brutal military campaign that the US has funded there has now killed tens of thousands of civilians, including 176 journalists and media workers according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. (By March 2024 the acronym WCNSF – Wounded Child, No Surviving Family was reportedly applicable to 17,000 Palestinian children.) As Omar El Akkad has written, in one of the few honest moral reckonings with this lunatic carnage: “One Day, Everyone Will Have Always Been Against This.”

Trump’s early moves against judges, universities, and the media suggest that few of America’s vaunted freedoms will survive his second term unscathed. His administration has begun to purge “woke” vocabulary from federal documents, rooting out such lexical miscreants as “accessible,” “Black,” “climate crisis,” “Gulf of Mexico,” “immigrants,” “transgender,” and “women.” This Orwellian aperitif was swiftly followed by a full menu of Kafkaesque indelicacies: masked men abducting student protestors, legally questionable deportations, an apparent suspension of habeas corpus, the exclusion of unsympathetic media from the White House, and North Korea-style cabinet meetings with fawning minions competitively praising the Great Leader.



The downspiral of American democracy will embolden illiberal attitudes in Canada. PEN must resist these, whether they arrive in the form of book challenges, disinformation, coercion towards ideological conformity, or the many provocations of disinhibited prejudice. None of these problems are new. Eighty years ago, Theodor Adorno presciently warned that the “conversion of all questions of truth into questions of power not only suppresses truth [but attacks] the very heart of the distinction between true and false.” In simpler terms, one might say that the gap between power and truth should always be kept at least as wide as the Gulf of Mexico.

Against this backdrop, the writers that PEN Canada supports seem more significant than ever. Our 2024 One Humanity Award went to the uncommonly brave Hong Kong publisher Jimmy Lai, a man who has defied China’s oppressive National Security Law despite facing what may amount to a life sentence for doing so. Our Ken Filkow Prize for defending free expression in Canada went to Toronto Star ombud Shree Paradkar for her “active and committed support of young journalists of colour”, and for her fearless commentary on politically divisive issues despite “constant criticism and harassment.”

Our Marie-Ange Garrigue Prize, for helping a foreign writer, jointly acknowledged Journalists for Human Rights (JHR) for their urgent “evacuation, relocation, and resettlement of over 500 at-risk journalists” after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, and Robina Aryubwal, a women’s rights activist and former Afghan refugee, who managed key parts of that process. Our RBC/PEN Canada New Voices competition received more than 560 submissions; Nancy Huggett’s *Revelation* won, a poetry collection that our jurors praised for its “interplay of illness and healing, making and breaking (strokes that create paintings and explode brains), and in the delicate engagement with the religion theme implied in the title.” Our awards ceremony was also graced with three arresting monologues that paid tribute to women protesters in Iran, written by Fereshteh Molavi and performed by Banafsheh Taherian.

---

I have been blessed with talented colleagues throughout my time at PEN, never more so than with our Director of Operations, Theresa Johnson, and our Communications Coordinator, Eilish Waller. My heartfelt thanks to both for their commitment to the mission, diligence, patience, and good cheer. Sincere thanks to Grace Westcott, our outgoing president, who has led the centre through a difficult period, done her utmost to manage deep differences of opinion among the board with tact and civility, and transformed our governance and communications. She has worked tirelessly behind the scenes to improve all aspects of PEN’s operations, and volunteered herself for innumerable tasks that keep the office running efficiently. For this, and for her unflagging support, the entire staff owe her a debt of gratitude.

# DEAR ALAA,



# I HOPE THIS LETTER FINDS YOU UNDEFEATED.

**Alaa Abd El-Fattah** is a British-Egyptian writer and activist, and author of *You Have Not Yet Been Defeated*. In September 2024 he completed a 5-year politically-motivated prison sentence, yet authorities refused to release him. He remains held in Wadi el-Natrun Prison.

I hope this message finds you well.

That's how letters usually begin—with good wishes. But I know you're not well, locked away in that bleak cell. In fact, this letter may never even reach you. Forgive us for how little we can do.

Mahmoud Darwish once wrote: *"We do what prisoners do, And what the jobless do: We raise hope!"*

Raising hope—what a difficult thing. And yet, it's often all we have to stop ourselves from collapsing under the weight of madness and meaninglessness. I know how much you've endured—physically, mentally, and in your unwavering resistance. No words can console you, and no one can claim to truly understand what you feel. Only the wounded know the pain of a wound.

Just a few months ago, Bashar al-Assad's regime fell. Can you believe it? The butcher fled, like a panicked mouse fleeing its predator. The man they once called "eternal" is gone. That so-called eternity has collapsed, leaving behind a nation in pain, thousands of victims, the dead, the disappeared, the imprisoned. But he fell. Syria is free, and the prisons have opened. Some of the disappeared even came back, people we had all assumed were lost forever.

The only constant in life is change, relentless and unstoppable, even when everything seems still. I'm writing to you now from exile in Canada. Just a few years ago, I was with you in prison, passing through some of the same cells that have become chapters in your long and painful journey: the Cairo pretrial detention center Tora Tahqiq, Anbar Alzera'a Prison, the Farm Prison Al-Mazra'a Prison. I never imagined I'd end up here, and I still don't know how all the years and days slipped by—through the prison walls and into exile. But in the end, I found freedom. True, it's freedom in exile, far from my homeland, my family, my friends—but it's freedom all the same.

And I believe, my friend, that your freedom is coming, inevitably, and soon. Not because I'm naive or trying to console you, but because it's how life works. Darwish wrote:

*"O you with the bleeding eyes and hands, This night will pass.*

*The holding cell will not last, Nor the chains of iron.*

*Nero died, but Rome lived on—Fighting through her eyes.*

*One grain of wheat may die, But it will fill the valley with grain."*

Dear Alaa, you are still standing—you have not been defeated.

I truly hope this letter reaches you and finds you in strength. We are all waiting for you. We are waiting for the day your freedom arrives—and I believe it's near.

With love,

*Mostafa Al-A'sar*

Mostafa Al-A'sar is a human rights journalist from Egypt, where he was imprisoned for over three years. He lives in Toronto.

# WRITERS IN EXILE COMMITTEE REPORT

*Gezahegn Mekonnen Demissie, Chair*

***Reclaiming the Voice:  
Writers in Exile and the Global Struggle  
for Free Expression***

In a world where free expression is increasingly under threat, the importance of community, solidarity, and literary resistance has never been more vital. The annual report of PEN Canada's Writers in Exile program is a powerful reminder that the written word—despite censorship, persecution, and displacement—cannot be silenced.

As Chair of this resilient collective, it is an honour to reflect on the significance of our assembly—a gathering that is both celebratory and sobering. We come together not only to acknowledge our journeys as exiled writers but also to confront the urgent realities that continue to threaten freedom of speech across the globe.

Many of us arrived in Canada seeking refuge from regimes that criminalize thought and suppress creativity. Yet even here, where constitutional freedoms are protected, we see troubling signs: books being banned, dissenting voices sidelined, and digital surveillance tightening its grip on public discourse. These are not isolated incidents but symptoms of a broader global effort to control narratives and distort truth.

In defiance of this suppression, we write. In exile, we have not only found new homes but renewed purpose. Events like the Voices of Freedom reading series—ongoing for the past three years in Toronto's east end—are more than literary showcases; they are acts of resistance. They send a clear message: exile cannot erase identity. Forced silence cannot drown out truth. And language—no matter how dispersed across borders—can still unite, heal, and empower.

# LITERATURE IS NOT MERELY WORDS ON A PAGE; IT IS THE LIVING TESTIMONY OF THOSE WHO DARE TO SPEAK. IT REFLECTS THE RISKS TAKEN TO BRING TRUTH TO LIGHT AND THE COMMUNITIES FORMED TO PROTECT AND PRESERVE THAT TRUTH.

During the past three years, this gathering, held at the welcoming Hirut Jazz Cafe, stood as a beacon of resilience and hope. The generosity of community spaces like Hirut, and the steadfast support of individuals such as Tibebe and Hirut themselves, embody the grassroots solidarity that sustains exiled artists. Their commitment, alongside the tireless efforts of PEN Canada's team—including senior mentors, volunteer leaders, and especially Theresa and Eilish—reminds us that our voices matter, and that we are never truly alone.

Literature is not merely words on a page; it is the living testimony of those who dare to speak. It reflects the risks taken to bring truth to light and the communities formed to protect and preserve that truth. As we continue our reading series, share our experiences, and listen deeply to one another, we are doing more than storytelling—we are asserting our right to exist, to speak, and to be heard.

In this spirit, let us keep writing, supporting one another, and defending the principles of free expression wherever they are threatened. Let our gatherings reaffirm the truth: while regimes may exile writers, they can never exile the truth.

As we look to the future, may our pens remain unbroken, our voices be ever louder, and our stories be forever woven into the fabric of freedom. Under the umbrella of PEN, we strive to carry forward the values of free expression and democratic society. We also call on the broader culture and society to listen—to recognize in us the living witnesses of what undemocratic systems can do to both individuals and nations.



# DEAR NARGES,



## I HOPE THIS LETTER FINDS YOU IN GOOD SPIRITS.

**Narges Mohammadi** is an Iranian journalist, human rights defender, Nobel Laureate, and author of *White Torture*. In December 2024, while serving a 16-year sentence, she was temporarily released from Evin Prison on medical grounds. PEN is concerned that she will be reimprisoned.

Writing this letter is a difficult and beautiful experience. Difficult, because words fall short in the face of the greatness of your heart and your will. And beautiful, because each word feels like a bridge between two hearts that have been beating together for freedom, dignity, and love for years.

Your passionate spirit has created a wave of solidarity—a tide of brave, conscious women whose joined hearts form a roaring flood that tears through injustice and oppression.

Many people often ask me, how has Narges endured such hardship for all these years? How can she bear being away from her children for so long?

So I share a story you once shared with me of a woman you met in Zanjan Prison, when you were exiled there as punishment.

You told me that that woman embraced you as soon as you arrived, knew your name, and told you that her brother had spoken of your courage. She had been on death row for 11 years, living every night with the nightmare of the noose. And she told you, “You are the only glimmer of hope I have that one day I will walk out of this prison and see the sky again.”

And she was not alone, Narges. Throughout the years, you have encountered so many innocent souls whose hope for a better life was tied to your struggle.

But I do not claim you are an angel. I have no intention of sanctifying you.

You are, in the truest sense of the word, a human being, with a heart that beats for others, who believes in the worth of every person, and in the strength and will hidden within each of us to defeat the impossible.

Your power comes from your ability to love. This is why people connect with you.

No one else can bring people together from different beliefs, backgrounds, and identities, and unite their hearts beneath one banner, as you do, gathering them in solidarity against darkness and injustice.

Perhaps this is why tyrants fear you.

Your fight for human rights, despite the immense sacrifices, reflects a deeper beauty—the beauty that comes from dedicating oneself to a greater cause. You have taught us that true beauty lies in helping others, in making the world a better place for everyone, even if it means sacrificing personal joy. Your life is a testament to the power of giving, to creating a beauty that is shared by all.

You have redefined dignity, grace, and humanity. After years of oppression and imprisonment, you still offer unconditional, boundless love.

And as you once said: “We have so much work ahead. Our real work begins when the walls of these prisons fall. When at last, we can share love, freely and fully, with our fellow human beings.”

I am endlessly proud of you and I am grateful to call you my friend.

I truly believe in the power of the solidarity between us.

With love,



Maryam Shafipour  
is a human rights  
activist from Iran,  
where she was  
imprisoned for two  
years. She lives in  
Canada.

# WRITERS IN PERIL REPORT

This report is being prepared 60 days into a hunger strike by Egyptian pro-democracy activist Alaa Abd El-Fattah. Since the beginning of March, he has consumed nothing except herbal tea, black coffee, and rehydration salts. This desperate act has been undertaken in order to secure access to a lawyer and the right to receive consular visits (he is a British national). On May 1, PEN International president Burhan Sönmez raised concerns about Alaa's deteriorating health and noted that he and his mother, Laila – already hospitalized for her own ongoing hunger strike on Alaa's behalf – were “putting their lives at risk to secure his fundamental right to freedom and human dignity.”

Two years ago, Alaa's sister, Sanaa Seif, accepted our One Humanity Award on Alaa's behalf. In a moving account published in the *Guardian*, she remembers visiting him in November 2022 after he was forced to end a 200-day partial hunger strike – one that nearly secured his release – shortly before his forty-first birthday.

“He described a near-death experience: after days of no water and months of no food, he'd been incredibly unwell. He'd collapsed in the bathroom. Waking up on the floor, he was put on drips. Then, out of nowhere, he was hearing music – for the first time in three years. Pink Floyd's *Comfortably Numb*. An officer had played the song in the hope of bringing him round. He talked to us about our family. His son. Our pregnant sister. He was very emotional. At the end, we were briefly allowed to hug – our first embrace in three years. I felt how frail he was. As I held him, something softened in my mind. Pushed to the brink, I'd become so focused on my strategy to get him out that I'd forgotten Alaa's humanity. In that moment, all I could feel was gratitude that he was alive.”

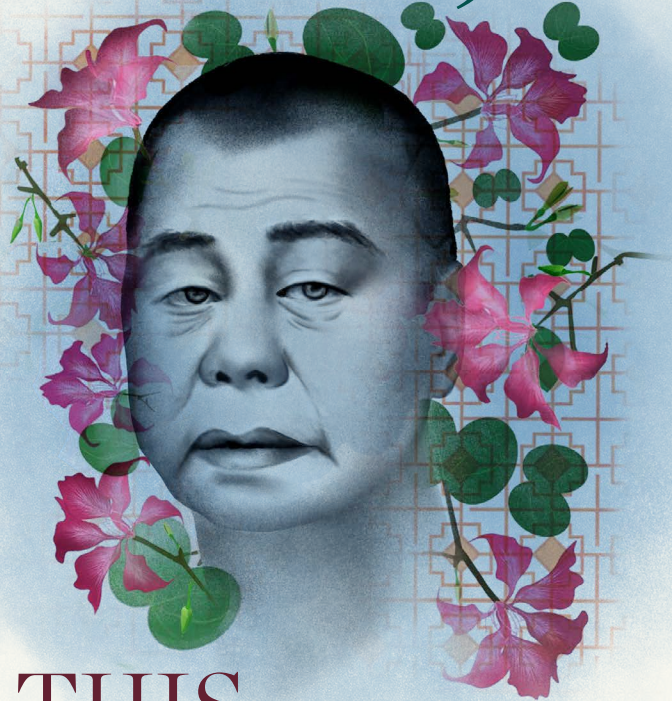


OUR CENTRE  
HAS MORE  
THAN DOUBLED  
RELIEF  
PAYMENTS TO  
ENDANGERED  
WRITERS  
THROUGH  
ITS OWN  
EMERGENCY  
FUND.

Sanaa's gratitude is worth remembering. A necessary reminder that the writers we honour elsewhere in this report are not simply iconic dissidents. They are someone's beloved sibling, parent, spouse or child. Our advocacy for Jimmy Lai, Narges Mohammadi, and Alaa should never lose sight of the dreadful toll their incarceration and persecution has exacted on their families.

At an annual retreat in February 2025, PEN Canada's board agreed to a substantial increase in emergency grants for imperilled writers. Since then, we have made a substantial initial contribution to the PEN Emergency Fund (PEF) which helps dozens of writers every year. Set up in 1971 in the Netherlands by the anti-fascist writer and journalist A. den Doolaard, the PEF collaborates closely with PEN International to fast-track the processing of emergency applications and issue cash grants, sometimes within a single day. Additionally, our centre has more than doubled relief payments to endangered writers through its own emergency fund and via collaboration with a sister centre which helped disburse payments to five Iranian writers. We intend to make further increases for this vital work in the year ahead.

# DEAR JIMMY,



## I HOPE THIS LETTER FINDS YOU IN GOOD HEALTH.

**Jimmy Lai** is a pro-democracy campaigner, writer, and founder of the now-shuttered Apple Daily newspaper. In December 2024, after being held in solitary confinement for four years, his trial resumed in Hong Kong. If convicted, he faces a potential life sentence.

Although both of our families are from Guangdong province, you and I could not be more different. You have the entrepreneurial spirit my parents would have applauded though they themselves always struggled to make ends meet. You made a fortune in textiles and retail stores, then launched one of Hong Kong's most powerful media companies. I, on the other hand, read a great deal of history, teach literature, and write fiction; I break into a cold sweat every time I enter a bank.

And yet we are joined because we hold freedom of expression as our right. You insist that peaceful protest is a necessity, that those who fight for justice should never act in vengeance, nor cede their moral authority. I, too, believe this: I believe the world we want starts at this moment, that we create it with every act, every decision.

I grieve that the Chinese government is making you a symbol of their power — of the brutality awaiting those who dare to exercise freedoms which once belonged to all Hong Kongers under the Basic Law.

This situation is all the more devastating because our world is shattering. We live in a moment when violations against the free press are everywhere in horrific abundance; when trust in traditional media has collapsed; when, in the midst of a climate emergency, climate activists are pursued with the full force of the law; when dissent is criminalised; when governments in Canada, the United States, and elsewhere have demonstrated, in word and deed, that they will minimize horror and turn a blind eye to the killing of journalists — indeed, to the barring of the world's press from Gaza, where 70 percent of verified victims are women and children, where famine is imminent or already present, where Israeli media reports that ethnic cleansing of Palestinians is taking place — all the while asserting that they uphold international law and human rights.

We are all caught in a net, knowing that those who supply weapons, extract resources, and make money from permanent war continue to instrumentalize political movements for their own interests. Yet, despite this broken world, your courage remains.

In interviews, you mention the solace you have found in your faith. Here, again, we differ; but I am reminded of my father who, until the end of his life, carried a card which requested that, should a stranger find him, they should summon a priest to cleanse his spirit and prepare him to meet his beloved, his father, his protector. Religious faith gave my father strength to face the heartaches of his life in the aftermath of war and brutality. It was a source of the love which he nourished — even in the most difficult times.

I recognise this quality in you, magnified, and I want to tell you that your courage is a light. It shows us a dignity which is sacred and belongs to all. May you receive the justice you have fought so hard to safeguard for others: may you be free.

In solidarity and with love,



Madeleine Thien  
is the author of  
four books, most  
recently *The  
Book of Records*.  
*She lives in  
Montreal.*

# CANADIAN AND LEGAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE REPORT

*Lori Sterling, Chair*

## ***The Committee has focused on the following this past quarter:***

PEN has published a series of statements about writers at risk. In particular, it sent letters protesting (1) the use of law enforcement to criminalize political speech in the case of Montreal-based activist and author, Yves Engler, who was arrested and charged with harassment and indecent communication for his responses to the social media posts of pro-Israel influencer Dahlia Kurtz; and (2) the cancellation of Rachel Gilmore's segment on CTV on fact checking during the election campaign due to political pressure.

**Mia Jain, a student at the U of T Faculty of Law, will be our summer intern.** She will be researching limits on free expression in China and will report to both Lori and Brendan.

PEN Canada also issued a statement with PEN America and PEN Québec on the importance of a free flow of expression across borders, and calling for an exemption from tariffs (see "PEN Canada, PEN America, and PEN Québec joined today in a united call for books and literature to flow freely across our shared border," April 1, 2025).

The CLA Committee will participate in the broader PEN Canada campaign for free expression in the face of rising authoritarianism, to begin later this year including assisting with the campaign narrative and signature events.

**Due to prorogation of Parliament early in 2025, there was no government work done on specific legislative bills, including Bill C-63, the Online Harms Bill, with which PEN Canada has been critically engaged.** The Bill did not figure prominently in the election campaign. Should the Bill be part of the upcoming legislative agenda, PEN will continue commenting on internet regulation to protect minors and to stop the online harassment of writers in exile in Canada.

**Last but certainly not least, the Committee has welcomed new members,** namely, existing board member, Bruce Walsh, and new board member, Ira Wells. We look forward to working with them.

Words and ideas are not owned by nations and states; the closing of borders is a harbinger for the closing of minds. In this context, ideas and information must be allowed to travel freely, a potential antidote to ignorance and chauvinism. Our writers must not be silenced, either — whether through direct censorship, intimidation, the chilling effect of political tensions, or the creation of economic barriers.”

*Extract from joint statement by PEN America,  
PEN Canada and PEN Québec, April 1, 2025*



# NEW HONORARY MEMBER

MARÍA  
CRISTINA  
GARRIDO  
RODRÍGUEZ



Cuban poet and activist María Cristina Garrido Rodríguez is currently imprisoned on a seven-year prison sentence imposed after she was convicted in 2022 of “public disorder,” “contempt,” and “resistance,” for participating in peaceful protests. With this annual report, PEN Canada announces her as its newest Honorary Member.

In November 2023, Garrido sent an audio message from jail to the PEN community talking about censorship in Cuba and the power of art:

*Translated from Spanish*

I send a warm greeting to all my friends in the free world and to the guild of poets and artists in general.

I am recording this brief audio message from a political prison so that I can, in some way, be present with you to commemorate the Day of the Imprisoned Writer – a day to remember those who hold the responsive, beautiful word as a luminary and a banner in the confines of a cell.

Unfortunately, even after so much history, after identifying the methods of domination, many of us remain stagnant in ignorance and selfishness, incapable of humane conduct and reasoning. They become dehumanized dictators, full of hatred and obsession for those of us who use the free wings of art and poetry to express, in our own words, what we need.

In my country, Cuban socialism has declared itself the enemy of individual freedoms and it suppresses the talents of creators when it subjects them to the restrictive rules of communism. Much of Cuban art on the island is imprisoned behind the bars of ideological censorship. The lack of free will is a threat to the productivity of the individual, and prevents its sustainable and healthy development.

But art will always be an unstoppable harvest; a bounty that feeds those who thirst for love, for romanticism – those who seek fulfillment in words and feelings, and not through criticism. The yielding flesh can be imprisoned but not the spirit; the tense hands, but not the inspiration.

To all the imprisoned writers of the world, I hope that all my admiration and exhortation will enable you to continue creating, in the amalgam of words and silences, your own world of letters and refuges.

I take this opportunity to call for freedom in Cuba and for all the political prisoners that the Castro-Canal regime keeps in jail, unjustly.

A large, dark teal letter 'H' that serves as a decorative element for the 'HONORARY' section of the list.

# HONORARY MEMBERS

## **CUBA**

MARÍA CRISTINA GARRIDO RODRÍGUEZ

## **ERITREA**

SAID ABDELKADER

EMANUEL ASRAT

TEMESKEN GHEBREYESUS

MATTEWOS HABTEAB

DAWIT HABTEMICHAEL

MEDHANIE HAILE

DAWIT ISAAK

YUSUF MOHAMED ALI

SEYOUM TSEHAYE

FESSHAYE YOHANNES

## **EGYPT**

ALAA ABD EL-FATTAH

## **HONG KONG**

JIMMY LAI

## **IRAN**

NARGES MOHAMMADI

A large, dark teal letter 'M' that serves as a decorative element for the 'MEMBERS' section of the list.



Every year, PEN Canada adds a threatened writer or journalist whose case has been monitored by PEN International to its roster of Honorary Members.

We lobby governments, organize petitions and send letters to campaign for the release of these writers, or call for investigations in the cases of torture, forced disappearances and killings. The Honorary Member program aims to sustain hope and provide personal support to these writers — and to achieve their unconditional release.

Over its lifetime, PEN Canada has adopted over 100 Honorary Members. In 2024, Jimmy Lai became an Honorary Member, and with this annual report, María Cristina Garrido Rodríguez is announced as our newest Honorary Member.

## CUBA

Cuban poet and activist **María Cristina Garrido Rodríguez** is serving a seven-year prison sentence imposed after being convicted in March 2022 of “public disorder,” “contempt,” and “resistance.” She was arrested with her sister Angélica Garrido in July 2021 after participating in peaceful protests.

Garrido is held in poor conditions in detention, including solitary confinement, lack of food and water, and inadequate sanitation. She has also been beaten. Together with her sister Angélica, she went on hunger strike for five days in September 2022 in protest at their continued detention.

Her sister, released in July 2024, stated that the authorities promised Garrido a transfer to a camp with exit permits that would enable her to see her children, but this concession was eventually denied. María Cristina is the only female inmate from the 11-J movement still imprisoned; the rest have been moved to a camp or paroled.

Garrido was born in Quivicán, Mayaquebé in 1982. She is the author of *Examen de tiempo* (*Time Examination*), published in 2022. Her most recent book *Voz cautiva: poemas escritos desde la cárcel* (*Captive Voice: poems written from prison*), published in 2023, recounts some of the challenges faced during her incarceration, including ill-treatment, isolation, surveillance, and depression.

## ERITREA

In September 2001, Eritrean President Afeworki forced the country's independent newspapers to close and 13 journalists were arrested. Those who remain alive, 22 years later, are now the longest-detained journalists in the world.

The following Eritrean journalists were named honorary members of PEN Canada: **Said Abdelkader** (writer, editor of *Admas*), **Yusuf Mohamed Ali** (editor-in-chief of *Tsigenay*), **Emanuel Asrat** (editor of *Zemen*), **Temesken Ghebreyesus** (reporter for *Keste Debena*), **Mattewos Habteab** (editor-in-chief of *Meqaleh*), **Dawit Habtemichael** (reporter for *Meqaleh*), **Medhanie Haile** (editor-in-chief of *Keste Debena*), **Dawit Isaak** (writer and co-owner of *Setit*), **Seyoum Tsehay** (TV and radio journalist; weekly columnist for *Setit*), and **Fesshay** “Joshua” **Yohannes** (playwright, poet; publisher of *Setit*).

In 2007, reports indicated that Ali, Abdelkader, Haile and Yohannes died in custody due to harsh conditions, lack of medical attention, and reported torture. Habteab, Habtemichael, Ghebreyesus and Yohannes have not been heard from and are presumed dead.

In 2021, PEN International and the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights were part of an international coalition of human rights groups that called for Magnitsky sanctions against the Eritrean officials responsible for the journalists' imprisonment.

In 2024, Dawit Isaak, who holds dual Eritrean-Swedish citizenship, was given the Edelstam Prize *in absentia*. His daughter, Betlehem Isaak, continues to campaign for his freedom.

## EGYPT

**Alaa Abd El-Fattah** is an Egyptian software developer, writer, blogger and pro-democracy activist who gained international prominence during the 2011 revolution that ousted President Hosni Mubarak.

Alaa has been arrested and detained multiple times. Most recently, in 2013 he was arrested and charged for organizing a political protest without a permit. He was released on bail in March 2014, but three months later was sentenced, in absentia, to 15 years in jail for violating Egypt's Protest Law. In December 2021, Alaa was sentenced to an additional five years in prison on charges of "broadcasting false news" related to a social media post.

While in prison, a collection of Alaa's work, *You Have Not Yet Been Defeated* (2021), was published by Fitzcarraldo Editions.

In 2022, following a successful appeal by his family to the British government to grant him UK citizenship, Alaa began to ask the Egyptian government to speak to British officials. He was then transferred to Wadi El-Natrun Prison, where he was tortured and beaten by prison officials.

On September 29, 2024, Alaa completed his five-year sentence, but Egyptian authorities continue to detain him arbitrarily by refusing to recognize the more than two years he had spent in pretrial detention, thereby pushing his release date to January 2027. That day, his mother – academic and human rights activist, Dr. Laila Soueif – started an open-ended hunger strike to protest his imprisonment. She has since lost 40 percent of her body weight and has been hospitalized at least twice.

In March 2025, Alaa joined his mother in her hunger strike, causing him bouts of vomiting and abdominal pain. PEN is fearful for his and his mother's lives.

Alaa received PEN Canada's One Humanity Award in 2023, when his sister, Sanaa Seif, flew to Canada and accepted the award on his behalf. Alaa was named the 2024 Writer of Courage by PEN Pinter Prize 2024 winner Arundhati Roy.

## HONG KONG

A writer, publisher and activist with UK citizenship, **Jimmy Lai** has been held in solitary confinement since December 2020 following his initial brief detention in August 2020 on multiple charges for his journalism and pro-democracy activism.

Since his arrest, Lai has served sentences relating to four convictions of unauthorized assembly; these expired in September 2022. In December 2022, Lai was sentenced to a further five years and nine months' imprisonment.

On December 18, 2023, a new trial commenced on two charges under the National Security Law (NSL) of "conspiracy to collude with foreign forces," with the prosecution claiming that these "crimes" were committed through writings published by Apple Daily and in posts on his Twitter account. In addition to the NSL charges, Lai faces a separate count of 'conspiracy to produce seditious publications' under Hong Kong's colonial-era sedition law, with the prosecution citing 161 editions of Apple Daily as "examples of seditious publications[...] with a view to polluting the minds of the impressionable ones." Lai has pleaded not guilty to all charges.

In September 2024, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found Lai's ongoing detention to be arbitrary and called for his immediate release. On November 20, 2024, Lai testified and by the end of the year, the trial was ongoing. If convicted, he faces a potential life sentence. His son, Sebastien Lai, continues to campaign for his freedom.

In October 2024, Jimmy Lai received the PEN Canada One Humanity Award in absentia.

# RELEASED DECEMBER 2024

## NARGES MOHAMMADI

### IRAN

**Narges Mohammadi** is a prominent journalist, human rights defender, and Nobel Laureate who has been repeatedly targeted by the Iranian authorities since 2009. Over the last two decades, she has faced repeated legal harassment for her work, including several criminal convictions and travel bans.

Her most recent conviction, in 2015, sentenced her to 16 years in prison for spreading propaganda against the system, gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security, and membership in an illegal organization whose aim is to harm national security.

Mohammadi suffers from a neurological disorder that can result in seizures, temporary partial paralysis, and pulmonary embolism. Concerns for her health intensified following reports that she suffered several seizures in August and October 2015.

In June 2024, Narges received an additional year on top of her current 16-year sentence. In December 2024, she was temporarily released from Evin Prison on medical grounds, but there are concerns that she will be reimprisoned to continue serving her sentence.

She is the mother of two children and the wife of prominent journalist and activist Taghi Rahmani, who himself has spent a total of 17 years in prison. In 2023, Mohammadi published *White Torture*, a two-volume book that details the mistreatment of prisoners in Iran.

# EVENTS COMMITTEE REPORT

*Anouchka Freybe, Chair*

Throughout the year, PEN Canada organizes a diverse array of literary events that raise money and awareness for freedom of expression. If you have a suggestion for an event, or if you would like to host or volunteer, please contact PEN's Director of Operations, Theresa Johnson.

PEN Canada's events committee's guiding principle is to engage and inform. The past year of programming maintained momentum through community partnership, and we continue to lean into every opportunity to uplift the work of talented writers, researchers, poets and authors. PEN Canada's mission—to defend freedom of expression as a basic human right—is made more relevant through collaboration between individuals and organizations who parse current human rights issues with creative skill and content depth.

The 2024-25 schedule expanded upon our campaign pillars — Intellectual Freedom (Book Banning), Digital Transnational Repression, and Disinformation and Online Harms. Our programs serve a literary or informational purpose (although at times both), and are presented in multiple formats: in-person, hybrid, or online. PEN Canada would like to acknowledge the support of and collaboration with the following organizations: the Centre for Free Expression at Toronto Metropolitan University (CFE), the Toronto International Festival of Authors (TIFA), CBC Ideas, University of Toronto, the Forum for Caribbean Writers and Readers, Another Story Bookshop, and HotDocs, for an incredible year of program development.

WE ARE STRENGTHENED BY  
OUR PARTNERSHIPS, AND THE  
EVENTS THAT GALVANIZE  
DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES  
AROUND OUR COMMON  
GOALS AND VALUES.

*Here are a few highlights to give a sense of the breadth of our exciting and important programming:*

- The Graeme Gibson Talk continues to be a highlight of our fall literary events calendar, developed in conjunction with TIFA and CBC Ideas. In its fourth year, this year's subjects, climate change and environmental losses, were investigated by non-fiction author John Vaillant and climate-change expert Catherine Abreu, and moderated by Nahlah Ayed.
- The Writers in Exile program continues to be an active hub in Toronto, profiling the work of its members and the impact of their stories through a series of readings, and in the process has galvanized a growing support network.
- A newly formatted **PEN Canada Awards** ceremony was held in October, with Charlie Foran as the master of ceremonies. The evening celebrated the winners of PEN's four annual awards and drew attention to imperiled writers across the world.
- PEN Canada co-sponsored 11 of the CFE's Virtual Forums and In Conversation Series in 2024-25. The events continue to be free of charge, and create regular engagement around difficult conversations.

We are strengthened by our partnerships, and the events that galvanize different perspectives around our common goals and values. In the coming year, PEN Canada would like to deepen its presence across the country with regional literary and informational events that resonate with local communities. We are also acutely aware of the many outstanding opportunities to connect with Canadians across the country through engagement at the local level.

# PUBLIC EVENTS REPORT AND PRIZES 2024/25



## LITERARY EVENTS

### **Geographies of the Imagination**

*Wednesday April 10, 2024*

A poetry night with Christine Wu (2023 New Voices Award winner), Britta Badour, and Darby Minott Bradford. Held at Another Story Bookshop in Toronto, and presented in partnership with the Atwater Poetry Project.

### **Poetic Voices, In Bud and In Bloom**

*Thursday, April 11, 2024*

Poetry readings by Christine Wu, Darby Minott Bradford, and Emily Tristan Jones. Held at the Atwater Library in Montreal, and presented in partnership with the Atwater Poetry Project and Atwater Writers Exhibition.

### **MacLennan Lecture | Book challenges and their impact on Canadian communities**

*Thursday April 25, 2024*

A roundtable on book challenges in the Canadian context and the power of community action. Presented by the Friends of the McGill Library, the panelists included Michelle Arbuckle (Ontario Library Association), Brendan de Caires (PEN Canada), and Robin Stevenson (author), with moderator Joseph Hafner.

### **Graeme Gibson Talk | Burning Questions: Confronting the Challenges of our Global Climate Crisis**

*Saturday September 21, 2024*

Bestselling non-fiction writer John Vaillant spoke with Catherine Abreu, one of Canada's most influential thinkers on global climate policy, on the burning questions and challenges facing our fast-warming world.

A marquee event at the Toronto International Festival of Authors, Margaret Atwood introduced the event and the conversation was moderated by Nahlah Ayed. Their conversation is available as a podcast from CBC Radio's IDEAS.

### **PEN Canada Awards Night**

*October 16, 2024*

Held at 401 Richmond St West, this ceremony celebrated PEN's four annual awards and drew attention to imperilled writers across the world.

Four award winners took to the stage to accept their awards, while the fifth received theirs remotely, via a speech from his son, Sebastien Lai. Jimmy Lai, a publisher and pro-democracy activist, remains detained in Hong Kong as his trial continues. An empty chair was placed on stage to honour him.

Each award was followed by a dramatic monologue reading, performed by Banafsheh Taherian, reflecting on the Women, Life, Freedom movement in Iran. Charlie Foran was the master of ceremonies.

### **An Evening with Author Zalika**

**Reid-Benta**

*Thursday, February 27, 2025*

Zalika Reid-Benta discussed her debut novel *River Mumma* and award-winning short story collection *Frying Plantain*. Held at New College in Toronto, this was a collaboration between New College, Victoria College, the Centre of Caribbean Studies, Women and Gender Studies Institute, and PEN Canada.

### **An Evening with Marie-Célie Agnant**

*Thursday, March 20, 2025*

Poet, novelist and former teacher Marie-Célie Agnant discussed her life's work, offering readings in French and English. Held at D.G. Ivey Library in Toronto, this was a collaboration between the Forum for Caribbean Writers and PEN Canada.

## WRITERS IN EXILE EVENTS

### Voices of Freedom

The Voices of Freedom reading series is a quarterly event, filling every seat in the Hirut Cafe in Toronto. These events are organized by – and feature members of – the PEN Canada Writers in Exile community.

*November 24, 2024:* Shams Erfan (Afghanistan), Lidiia Karpenko (Ukraine), and Dilan Qadir (Iraq-Kurdistan).

*March 30, 2025:* Tala Motazedi (Iran), Andersson Boscán (Ecuador), and Raffi Minas (Syria).

### Author appearances for *The Uncaged Voice: Stories by Writers in Exile*

*April 13-14, 2024:* Arabic Canadian Book Fair, in Mississauga

*June 18, 2024:* Author Readings and Book Signing, in Newmarket

*September 28-29, 2024:* Word on the Street, in Toronto

### Workshops

*January 11, 2025:* writing workshop with Patrick Crean

## CRITICAL CONVERSATION ON FREE EXPRESSION

The following events were In Conversation panels, an online series presented by the Centre for Free Expression (CFE) which is co-sponsored by PEN Canada.

### AI Goes to War

*Wednesday, May 22, 2024*

Artificial Intelligence use in warfare is of interest to military technophiles, encouraged by corporate interests that stand to benefit. After Israel used AI to target Gaza, Lucy Suchman and Brenda McPhail discuss what's at stake.

### Freedom of Expression, Protests and Encampments

*Tuesday, September 17, 2024*

Jamie Cameron, Sarah Hamill, Louis-Philippe Lampron, and Finn Makela discuss what we can learn from what happened on Canadian and Quebec campuses in the midst of the war on Gaza.

### The Life and Death of Freedom of Expression

*Tuesday, September 24, 2024*

Richard Moon and David Sneiderman discuss how social media adds to the ways speech can be harmful while undermining traditional legal protections.

### What To Do About Foreign Interference

*Tuesday October 1, 2024*

Nick Robinson in conversation with Tim McSorley, on Canada's Bill C-70 (Countering Foreign Interference Act) and its plans for a foreign influence registry, new powers for CSIS, and significant changes to the Criminal Code and Security of Information Act.

**Is investigative journalism  
in Canada dying?**

*Thursday November 21, 2024*

Investigative reporters Rob Cribb, Allya Davidson, Marie-Maude Denis, Anton Kuschany, Cecil Rosner, and Julian Sher discuss what's at stake as local Canadian newspapers are shut down and investigative units are eliminated.

**Global Surge in Attacks on University  
Faculty & Students**

*Tuesday, November 26, 2024*

A new report finds scholars and students around the world face frequent, pervasive attacks on their academic freedom. Amy Kapit, Shuchi Karim, Rob Quinn, Norah Vollmer, and Charles Reeve, all from Scholars at Risk, discuss.

**Can editorial standards be applied fairly  
in highly polarized situations?**

*Tuesday, January 14, 2025*

Bitter divisions over the war on Gaza provoked a flood of allegations that the media had abandoned editorial standards in their coverage. Samira Mohyeddin, Shree Paradkar, Ivor Shapiro, and Sakeina SyedKey address bias, editorial responsibility, and the balance between fairness and advocacy.

**What should be the limits to freedom of  
expression in Canadian universities?**

*Tuesday January 28, 2025*

Jamie Cameron, Louis-Philippe Lampron, Richard Moon, and Vershawn Young discuss the culture and limits of expressive freedom on campuses.

**“We can’t teach a book with  
that word in it”**

*Wednesday February 5, 2025*

Lawrence Hill in conversation with Debra Thompson, on the banning of his award-winning *The Book of Negroes* in classrooms by the London District Catholic School Board, due to its use of the N-word. A discussion on the role of literature in society.

**Censoring Books in Schools and Libraries**

*Wednesday, February 26, 2025*

Ira Wells and James L. Turk discuss Ira's new book, *On Book Banning*. The book explores the history of censorship and its consequences for human development, for art, and for democracy.

## AWARDS

### RBC PEN Canada New Voices Award

**Winner:** *Nancy Huggett*

Nancy Huggett is a writer and poet based in Ottawa. As part of the prize, Huggett received yearlong mentorship from Susan Olding, a writer, poet, and essayist based in Toronto.

Speaking of Huggett's winning poetry collection, *Revelation*, the jury says "a clear cohesion emerges in this epic work, in the interplay of illness and healing, making and breaking, and in the delicate engagement with the religious theme implied in the title. We were struck by the work's powerful emotional resonance and its brave exploration of a felt experience."

The jury also selected four finalists:

Georgio Russell (Saltborne), Hajera Khaja (The Rupture), Monica Nathan (Between Spaces), and Tessa Swackhammer (A Man Called Evergreen). They were chosen from 560 entries.

#### ***Past winners***

Christine Wu  
Fareh Malik  
Deepa Rajagopalan  
Em Dial  
Noor Naga  
Jaclyn Desforges  
Mikko Harvey  
Laura Legge  
Nadine Sander-Green  
Emily Izsak  
Claire Battershill

### Ken Filkow Prize

**Winner:** *Shree Paradkar*

Paradkar is a race and social justice columnist at *The Toronto Star*, where she also served as the first internal ombud in a newsroom in Canada, a position created to develop an anti-racist newsroom.

"Nominated for this award by her fellow journalists at the *Star* and elsewhere, Paradkar is regarded as a leader who shines a light on the marginalized and under-represented," the jury citation read. "Her active and committed support of young journalists of colour is fundamental to expanding free expression for those who are often excluded from the means to articulate marginalized experiences of an unequal society."

Paradkar has worked as a journalist in Toronto, Singapore, Bangalore, and Mumbai. Over the last 8 years, her *Star* column has tackled divisive, challenging topics, including police violence, anti-Black racism, the persistence of Islamophobia, the threat to LGBTQ+ rights, residential schools, anti-Indigenous racism, and the chill on Palestine advocacy.

The Ken Filkow Prize recognizes Paradkar for advancing freedom of expression in Canada. It is funded by Cynthia Wine and Philip Slayton, past PEN Canada president.

#### ***Past winners***

Brandi Morin  
Amber Bracken  
Amy Lai  
Tim Bousquet  
Justin Brake  
Desmond Cole  
Raihan Abir  
Franke James

### **Marie-Ange Garrigue Prize**

***Winner: Robina Aryubwal and Journalists for Human Rights***

Robina Aryubwal, a women's rights activist, and Journalists for Human Rights (JHR) were jointly recognized for their significant help to journalists outside Canada.

When the Taliban took over Kabul in August 2021, JHR immediately launched an emergency evacuation effort. To meet the urgent need for a liaison between JHR and Afghan refugees, Rachel Pulfer brought on Robina Aryubwal. Over the next three years, working closely with domestic programs director Jordan MacInnis, Robina used her experience as a former refugee to assist Afghan refugees in their evacuation, resettlement and integration efforts. Through these efforts, JHR helped more than 500 at-risk Afghan journalists, human rights defenders, fixers, interpreters, educators and their families.

This prize is generously funded by Cynthia Wine and Philip Slayton, who also fund the Ken Filkow Prize.

### ***Past winners***

Joan Leishman  
Mariam Al Zier

### **One Humanity Award**

***Recipient: Jimmy Lai***

Jimmy Lai is a journalist, writer, media publisher, and pro-democracy activist. The 76-year-old was the owner of the now-defunct Apple Daily newspaper, once regarded as Hong Kong's most prolific pro-democracy news outlet.

Lai has spent over four years in solitary confinement awaiting his trial in Hong Kong, which remains ongoing. If convicted, he could face a life sentence for his journalism. His case is illustrative of the Chinese government's willingness to use the legal system to silence dissent, which Lai's international legal team and PEN International have raised at the United Nations on several occasions.

The One Humanity Award, established in 2006, is given to a writer whose work transcends the boundaries of national divides and inspires connections across cultures. Lai's son, Sebastien, accepted the award on his father's behalf virtually while he campaigned in Prague and London for his father's freedom.

### ***Past recipients***

Alaa Abd El-Fattah  
Nasrin Sotoudeh  
Ashraf Fayadh  
Azimjon Askarov  
Eskinder Nega  
Raif Badawi  
Dieu Cay  
Nasrin Sotoudeh  
Lydia Cacho  
Jiang Weiping  
Zarganar

## SUPPORT FOR WRITERS IN EXILE

**George Brown College**  
**PEN Writer-in-Residence**  
***Recipient: Tala Motazedi***

Tala Motazedi is a queer playwright and screenwriter from Iran. During her residency, she visited classrooms across campus, sharing her life story with students and discussing the value of free expression.

Motazedi earned a degree in dramatic literature from the University of Tehran. As a screenwriter and playwright, she has collaborated across continents with theatre artists, had her plays performed internationally, and been recognized at international film festivals.

Despite the climate of censorship in Iran, she built a thriving international career in theatre and film. When Women, Life, Freedom protests broke out in 2022, Motazedi stood in solidarity with the movement, refusing to comply with hijab mandates. For this, she faced bans on her films and ability to work. Facing further political and personal persecution, she fled to Canada in 2023.

Her residency marks 20 years of the PEN Writer-in-Residence program at George Brown College, which has created opportunity for 18 members of our Writers in Exile community.

**Humber Polytechnic-PEN Canada**  
**Writers-in-Exile scholarship**  
***Recipient: Tala Motazedi***

PEN Canada maintains a full scholarship to the Humber School for Writers' graduate certificate program in creative writing, meant for a member of the Writers in Exile community.

During her scholarship, Tala worked on her debut novel, *King Kong 1941*, which examines race, resilience, discrimination, and queer life during World War II. She was mentored by Canadian novelist Antanas Šileika.

"This project draws from my personal experiences in Iran, where fear forced me to hide my true self for many years," she says, speaking of her identity as a queer woman, something she feels free and proud to be in Canada. "Now, in this newfound freedom, I am exploring the suppressed aspects of my identity and reflecting on how life under an oppressive government caused me to lose sight of who I truly was."

“NOW, IN THIS  
NEWFOUND  
FREEDOM, I AM  
EXPLORING THE  
SUPPRESSED ASPECTS  
OF MY IDENTITY  
AND REFLECTING  
ON HOW LIFE UNDER  
AN OPPRESSIVE  
GOVERNMENT  
CAUSED ME TO LOSE  
SIGHT OF WHO  
I TRULY WAS.”

# MEMBERS, DONORS, PATRONS AND PARTNERS 2024/25

THIS LIST ACKNOWLEDGES  
THOSE INDIVIDUALS AND  
ORGANIZATIONS WHO WERE  
MEMBERS OR PROVIDED  
SUPPORT BETWEEN APRIL 1, 2024  
AND MARCH 31, 2025



## Honorary Patrons

Margaret Atwood  
Gary Beelik  
Louise Dennys  
Sturla Gunnarsson  
Rick Mercer  
Jim Ryce  
John Ralston Saul

## Bequests

Anonymous  
Estate of Roy Neil Warn McDonald

## Platinum Patron (\$10,000+)

Anonymous  
Katherine Govier

## Gold Patrons (\$5,000–\$9,999)

Scott Connell and Anouchka Freybe  
Peter Grant and Grace Westcott  
Yann Martel  
Philip Slayton and Cynthia Wine  
Richard Stursberg

## Silver Patrons (\$2,500–\$4,999)

Linwood and Neetha Sands Barclay  
Margaret MacMillan

## Patrons (\$1,000–\$2499)

Sara Angel  
Scotia Bhattacharya  
Randy and Anna Boyagoda  
Beverley Chernos  
Adrienne Clarkson  
Ron Deibert  
Peter Donolo and Mary Cruden  
George Galt  
Anne Giardini  
Nicholas Giardini  
Anthony Jeffery  
Nina Josefowitz  
Alisha Kaplan  
Michael Kedar and Eva Seidner  
David Kendall and Toni Bramley  
Elaine Kierans  
Andrea Lenczner  
Lyndsay Green and Hank Intven  
Patrick Martin  
Hugh McLean  
Rohinton and Freny Mistry  
Karen Ruddy  
John Ralston Saul

## Sponsors & Supporters

### Diamond (\$50,000+)

RBC Financial Group

### Platinum (\$25,000–\$49,999)

Council for Canadian American Relations

### Gold (\$15,000–\$24,999)

Ontario Arts Council

### Bronze (\$1,000–\$14,999)

Balfour Bowen Family Foundation  
Butterfield Family Foundation  
Emerald Foundation  
Margaret Atwood Extra Pocket Foundation  
N.A. Taylor Foundation  
Freybe Foundation  
Horne Family Charitable Foundation  
Howitt Dunbar Foundation  
MacMillan Family Foundation  
Michael and Honor de Pencier Foundation  
Michael B. Dexter Foundation at Toronto Foundation  
Ngan Page Fund  
Norman & Margaret Jewison Foundation  
Penguin Random House Canada Limited  
The Rotman Family Foundation

## Programming Partners

Another Story Bookshop  
Arabic Canadian Book Fair  
Artists at Risk, PEN America  
Atwater Poetry Project  
Atwater Writers Exhibition  
Blue Metropolis International Literary Festival  
CBC Radio: *Ideas*  
CBC Radio: *The Current*  
Centre for Caribbean Studies, University of Toronto  
Centre for Free Expression  
Citizen Lab  
Committee to Protect Journalists  
Digital Media at the Crossroads Education Institute  
English PEN, *Transmissions*  
Forum for Caribbean Writers  
Friends of the McGill Library

George Brown College  
Globe and Mail  
Harbourfront Centre Theatre  
Hirut Cafe and Restaurant  
Hot Docs  
Hugh MacLennan Lecture  
Humber School for Writers  
International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN)  
IFEX  
McGill University  
New College, University of Toronto  
Port Medway Readers Festival  
Quebec Writers' Federation  
Romero House  
Sutherland House Press  
Toronto International Festival of Authors  
Toronto Metropolitan University  
Victoria College, University of Toronto  
Women and Gender Studies Institute, University of Toronto  
Word on the Street  
Writers' Trust of Canada  
Writers' Union of Canada  
Young Writers Committee, PEN International

## In Kind

Cision  
Marcello Di Cintio  
Soapbox Design Communications Inc.  
Literary Review of Canada

## Honorary Members

Alaa Abd El-Fattah  
Said Abdelkader  
Emanuel Asrat  
Temesken Ghebreyesus  
Matthewos Habteab  
Dawit Habtemichael  
Medhanie Haile  
Dawit Isaak  
Jimmy Lai  
Yusuf Mohamed Ali  
Narges Mohammadi  
María Cristina Garrido Rodríguez  
Seyoum Tsehaye  
Fesshaye Yohannes

## MEMBERS, DONORS AND PARTNERS

### Members

Catherine Abreu  
Irene Aguzzi  
Will Aitken  
Patricia Aldana  
Mozhgan Alishah  
Bahar Almasi  
Almohannad Alnasser  
Jason Anderson  
Ken Anderson  
Anneli Andre-Barrett  
George Anthony  
Richard Archbold  
Sally Armstrong  
Said Arvidsson Maslouhi  
Robina Aryubwal  
Ashley Audrain  
Parimah Avani  
Khalid Awan  
Richard Bachmann  
Britta Badour  
Sharon Bala  
Natasha Bartula  
Alison Bate  
Paul Bennett  
Steven Benstead  
Barbara Berson  
David Bezmozgis  
Ted Bishop  
Neil Devindra Bissoondath  
Robin Blackburn McBride  
Becky Blake  
Ronna Bloom  
Stephanie Bolster  
Marian Botsford Fraser  
Jane Bow  
Lynne Bowen  
Marilyn Bowering  
Darby Minott Bradford  
Anika Brigant  
Rebecca Brill-Argall  
Jay Brodbar  
Colin Browne  
William Bruneau  
William Bryant  
Gillian Campbell  
Thea Caplan  
Alison Carr  
Marc Luc Carrier

Kern Carter  
Jennifer Chapin  
Delvin Chatterson  
Miguel Antonio Chavez  
S D Chrostowska  
Ken Clowes  
Kristin Cochran  
Andrew Cohen  
Valerie Connor  
Margaret Cornish  
Susan Coyne  
Kerry Craven  
Patrick Crean  
Jim J. Creskey  
Alan Cumyn  
Gwen Davies  
Elizabeth Davis  
Ryan Day  
Teri Degler  
Helena Delaney  
Gezahegn Mekonnen Demissie  
Suzanne DePoe  
Marcello Di Cintio  
Fouad Diab  
Jo Ann Dionne  
Bronwyn Drainie  
Brynn Duggan  
Naomi Duguid  
Catherine Dunphy  
Deanna Duxbury  
Maggie Dwyer  
Kim Echlin  
Esi Edugyan  
Onat Ekinci  
Omar El Akkad  
Nadia Elmasri  
Jacqueline & Peter Elton  
Marina Endicott  
Akhtar Etemadi  
Christopher Faiers  
Jane Fairburn  
Marsha Faubert  
Thelma Fayle  
Robert Finley  
Christine Fischer Guy  
Ian Fisher  
Charlie Foran  
Lindsay Foran  
Charles Ford

Keath Fraser  
Josh Freed  
Mark Fried  
Wanja Gathu  
Marie-Louise Gay  
Masha Gessen  
John and Judith Grant  
Melvyn Green  
Andre Guertin  
Andrew Guy  
Beth Haddon  
Jennifer Hall  
Judith Hall  
Nancy Hansen  
Merle Harris  
Fiona Hartmann  
Elizabeth Hay  
Peter Hay  
Christopher Hedges  
Dorris Heffron  
Elizabeth Herlich  
Lawrence Hill  
Judy Holm  
Jennifer Holness  
Jennifer Hosten  
Ella Hough  
Louisa Howerow  
Ah Htwe  
Linda Huestis  
Isabel Huggan  
Nancy Huggett  
Graeme Hunter  
Abdullah Al Imran  
Hunyah Irfan  
Kevin Irie  
MD Shafiqul Islam  
Mohd Zainul Islam  
Frances Itani  
Scott Jacobsen  
Bassam Jamil  
Maureen Jennings  
Plum Johnson  
Elizabeth Johnston  
Kath Jonathan  
El Jones  
Milan Kang  
Janet Keeping  
Margo Kelly  
David Kent

Hajera Khaja  
Bill Killorn  
Camie Kim  
Mark Kingwell  
Julie-Ann Kirkpatrick  
Caroline Kirouac  
Heidi Klaassen  
Kathy Koch  
Brenda Koller  
Sheila Koop  
Myrna Kostash  
David Koulack  
Cengiz Koyuncu  
Christina Kramer  
Uma Krishnaswami  
Diana Kuprel  
Andrey Kurkov  
Tanya Kyi  
Anita M. Lahey  
Fiona Tinwei Lam  
Vincent Lam  
Sharlene Lazin  
Trudy Ledsham  
Alexander Leggatt  
Sylvia Legris  
John Lent  
Ezra Levant  
Gregory Light  
Dahlia Liwsze  
Damian Lopes  
Gloria Lorenzen  
John Lorinc  
Ann-Marie MacDonald  
Jordan MacInnis  
Wendy MacIntyre  
Janet MacLean  
Maria Maksymiw  
Kate Malloy  
Nicole Mankinen  
Lorna Marsden  
Lily Martin  
Sandra Martin  
Abdulrahman Matar  
Carol Matas  
Bob McArthur  
Richard McClelland  
S.A.M. McCue  
Hope McIntyre  
Scott McIntyre

Harvey McKinnon  
Neil McKinnon  
Susan McMaster  
Sia Mehta  
Samar Mezghanni  
Raffi Minas  
Susan Minsos  
Lawrence Mirkin  
Michael Mirolla  
Majid Mirzaei  
Salah El Mohssein  
M. Mehdi Moradi  
Rebecca Morris  
Elise Moser  
Ezat Mossallanejad  
Wren Mynhardt  
Dimitri Nasrallah  
Marie Natanson  
Monica Nathan  
Sylvestre (Dwoeen) Ngakie  
Chad Norman  
Peter O'Brien  
Gillian O'Reilly  
Susan Olding  
Katrina Onstad  
Antolina Ortiz  
Margaret Ostrowski  
Narendra Pachkhede  
Frederick Packer  
Laurence Packer  
Brian Panhuyzen  
Shree Paradkar  
Jeungsoon Park  
Kathleen Pattinson  
Shauna Paull  
Louise Penny  
Susan Perly  
Shahla Pezeshkzad  
Carolyn Poirier  
Luka Poljak  
Anna Porter  
Pamela Porter  
Rachel Pulfer  
Barbara J. Pulling  
Dilan Qadir  
Darlene Quaife  
Monique Rabideau  
Mehrub Rahman  
Suman Rahman

Deepa Rajagopalan  
Sharareh Rakhshan  
Ceta Ramkhalawansingh  
Sarah Rauch  
Rafi Raza  
Matt Redding  
Philip Resnick  
Pedro Restrepo  
Benyamin Rezvan  
Kamel Riahi  
Nino Ricci  
CS Richardson  
Dianne Rinehart  
Diana Rivington  
Diane Roblin  
Brenda Roche  
Laura Rock Gaughan  
Ingrid Rose  
Michael Rowe  
Georgio Russell  
Susan Ryan  
Mary Rykov  
Siavash Saadlou  
Maria Sabaye Moghaddam  
Dr. Farshid Sadatsharifi  
Jamal Saeed  
Judie Sahadeo  
Kerri Sakamoto  
Candace Savage  
Denise Schon  
Anneliese Schultz  
Shyam Selvadurai  
Giorgia Severini  
Arra Shadman  
Evelyn Sharpe  
Sheena Shirani  
Peter Showler  
Suzannah Showler  
Haroon Siddiqui  
Antanas Sileika  
Merylyn Simonds  
Marvin Singer  
Marsha Skrypuch  
Caitlin Smith  
Khin Soe  
Adam Sol  
Catherine St. Denis  
Andrew Steinmetz  
Hugh Stephens

## MEMBERS, DONORS AND PARTNERS

---

Lori Sterling  
Robin Stevenson  
Kate Story  
Susan Stromberg-Stein  
Sarmishta Subramanian  
Rosemary Sullivan  
Mark Surchin  
Susan Greer  
Tessa Swackhammer  
George Swede  
John Tackaberry  
Banafsheh Taherian  
Basima Takrouiri  
Barbara E. Tangney  
Jean Teillet  
Prof. Cheryl Thompson  
Marian L Thorpe  
Hung T. Ton  
Ziya Tong  
Andrea Torrey Balsara  
Laura Trachuk  
Istikbal Turut  
Rui Umezawa  
John Vaillant  
Nazanin Nana Valajam  
Aritha van Herk  
Mark Vessey  
Eleanor Wachtel  
Hazrat Wahriz  
Jennifer Walcott  
Bruce Walsh  
David Waltner-Toews  
Karen Walton  
Janette Watt  
Lucy Waverman  
Alison Wearing  
Janice Weaver  
Neil Weinstein  
Ira Wells  
Cheryl Wertman  
Elisabeth Westberg  
Patricia Westerhof  
Alan Whitehorn  
Laurelyn Whitt  
Janice Williamson  
Carolyn Wood  
Patrick Woodcock  
Donna Wootton  
Christine Wu  
Max Wyman

Serhy Yekelchyk  
Arzu Yildiz  
Ahmad Yousefi  
Chro Zand

### Donors

Jeff Abraham  
Shelley Ambrose  
George Anderson and Charlotte Gray  
Kate Andrew  
Annick Press Ltd.  
Patricia Balfour  
Arjun Basu  
Ali Boreyri  
Randy Boswell  
Harvey Botting  
Maureen Boyd  
Michael Brooks  
John Budd  
Bruce Burnett  
Jane and Tom Clark  
Sarah Colwell  
Trevor Corkum  
Sarah Cosh  
Barry Critchley  
Cassandra Cronenberg  
Stuart Culbertson  
Barbara Darby  
Maureen Donnelly  
Richard Doyon  
Susan Ellard  
Karen Enns  
Margaret Evans  
Karyn & Bernie Farber  
Kevin Farris  
Olga Feiguina  
Rob Fennell  
Flavelle Family Foundation  
Thistledown Press Ltd  
The George Cedric Metcalf  
Charitable Foundation  
Anne Golden  
Robert Granatstein  
Stephen Gray  
Karen Hainstock  
Judith G. Hall  
Adrian Harewood  
Ajay Heble  
Marianne Hero  
Clarke Herring

Jason Hooper  
Amy Hutchison  
Hon. Janis Johnson  
Helen Kersley  
Peter Kirby  
Joseph Kirman  
Lynne Kutsukake  
Hannah Lee  
David Leggett  
Bruce Libin  
David Lockhart  
Louise MacCallum and  
Michael Barnstijn  
Diane MacDiarmid  
J.B. MacKinnon  
Alexandra MacLennan  
Kristin Marshall  
Mateusz Sklad and Lynn Tobin-Sklad  
Paul Maurenbrecher  
Catherine McKenna  
Ian McKercher  
Norman McLeod  
Catherine Mitchell  
Nancy Moon  
Sarah Murdoch  
Maureen O'Neil  
Mark O'Neill  
Steve Paikin  
Marnie Parsons  
Constantine Partasides  
Barbara Payne  
Klaus Pohle  
Russell Prowse  
Resolute Funds Limited  
Corin Robertson  
Ian Robinson  
Kristina Roic  
Ronsdale Press Ltd  
Elspeth Ross  
Arthur Rubin  
Pierre Sarrazin  
Sheridan Scott  
David Simmons  
Jason Skomorowski  
Glenn Smith  
Roger Smith  
Roman Solonysznjy  
Gary Soroka  
Stephanie Stavro  
Evan Steingarten

Paul J Stoesser  
George Szanto  
Andrew Szende  
Paul Torrie  
Douglas Wilson  
Randy Witten  
Dorothy Woodhouse  
Dwayne Wright  
Wendy Wright  
Writers' Guild of Alberta

### **Board of Directors**

Grace Westcott  
*President and interim Chair,  
Writers in Peril*  
Esi Edugyan  
*Vice President*  
Elaine Kierans  
*Secretary*  
Carolyn Poirier  
*Treasurer*  
Lori Sterling  
*Chair, Canadian and Legal Affairs*  
Kathy Koch  
*Chair, Fundraising and Membership*  
Anouchka Freybe  
*Chair, Events*  
Gezahegn M. Demissie  
*Chair, Writers in Exile*  
Bruce Walsh  
*Chair, Communications and Co-chair,  
Eastern Canada Outreach*  
El Jones\*  
*Co-chair, Eastern Canada Outreach*  
Marcello Di Cintio\*  
*Chair, Western Canada Outreach*

### **Members at Large**

Peter Donolo  
Jean Teillet  
Ziya Tong\*  
Karen Walton  
Ira Wells†  
\* resigned December 2024  
† appointed March 2025

### **Past Presidents**

Richard Stursberg  
Randy Boyagoda  
Philip Slayton  
Charlie Foran  
Ellen Seligman  
Nelofer Pazira  
Constance Rooke  
Haroon Siddiqui  
Reza Baraheni  
Sandra Martin  
Ann Ireland  
Katherine Govier  
Ron Graham  
Nino Ricci  
Marian Botsford Fraser  
Alison Gordon  
Louise Dennys  
John Ralston Saul  
June Callwood  
Graeme Gibson  
Timothy Findley  
Margaret Atwood

### **Advisory Council**

Richard Stursberg, Chair  
Randy Boyagoda  
Neil Bissoondath  
Kristin Cochrane  
Valerie Connor  
Douglas Coupland  
David Cronenberg  
Ronald Deibert  
Louise Dennys  
Suzanne DePoe  
Omar El Akkad  
Charlie Foran  
Kevin Hanson  
Mark Kingwell  
Elana Rabinovitch  
Devyani Saltzman

Philip Slayton  
Tanya Talaga  
Michael Wernick  
Ken Whyte

### **Staff**

Brendan de Caires  
*Executive Director*  
Theresa Johnson  
*Director of Operations*  
Eilish Waller  
*Communications Coordinator*

### **Independent Contractors**

Joshua Knelman  
*Producer for PEN Canada events*  
Dmitry Beniaminov  
*Pixel Studios, Website maintenance*

### **Volunteers**

Anneli Andre-Barrett  
Mira Boyagoda  
Kim Echlin  
Hannah Fisher  
Charlie Foran  
Wanja Gathu  
Margo Kelly  
Keith Leckie  
Mary Jo Leddy  
Abdulrahman Matar  
Elise Moser  
Tala Motazedi  
Joan Leishman  
Mary Rykov  
Sophie Shields  
Andrew Steinmetz  
Sayan Supratim Das  
Hazrat Wahriz  
Patricia Westerhof  
Chro Zand

### Speakers

Catherine Abreu  
Marie-Célie Agnant  
Michelle Arbuckle  
Margaret Atwood  
Nahlah Ayed  
Britta Badour  
Zalika Reid-Benta  
Andersson Boscán  
Darby Minott Bradford  
Gezahegn M. Demissie  
Bushra El-Fadil  
Shams Erfan  
Charlie Foran  
Emily Tristan Jones  
Joseph Hafner  
Lidiia Karpenko  
Sebastien Lai  
Abdulrahman Matar  
Raffi Minas  
Tala Motazedi  
Luis Horacio Nájera  
Dilan Qadir  
Pedro Restrepo  
Robin Stevenson  
Banafsheh Taherian  
John Vaillant  
Christine Wu  
Arzu Yildiz

### 2024 Annual Award Winners

Jimmy Lai  
*One Humanity Award*  
Robina Aryubwal and Journalists  
for Human Rights  
*Marie-Ange Garrigue Prize*  
Shree Paradkar  
*Ken Filkow Prize*  
Nancy Huggett  
*RBC New Voices Award*

### 2024 Humber College Writers-in-Exile Scholarship

Tala Motazedi  
*recipient*

### 2024 PEN Writer in Residence program at George Brown College

Tala Motazedi  
*writer in residence*

### Special Thanks

#### *Jury for Ken Filkow and Marie-Ange Garrigue Prizes\**

Matt Redding  
Kate Malloy  
Elise Moser

*\*Prizes generously funded by  
Philip Slayton and Cynthia Wine*

#### *Jury for RBC New Voices Award*

Sharon Bala  
Dimitri Nasrallah  
Sarmishta Subramanian

Luba Pazyuk  
*Program Coordinator, Continuing  
Education for George Brown's ESL  
Part-Time Program for PEN's  
Writers in Exile, in honour of Aaron  
Berhane's legacy*

Paula Applebaum and  
Shannon McLean  
*mentors to Tala Motazedi (George  
Brown College Writer in Residence)*  
Susan Olding  
*mentor to Nancy Huggett, NVA winner*  
Antanas Sileika  
*mentor to Tala Motazedi (Humber  
College Scholarship)*

Artists at Risk Connection  
Gary Beechey  
Gary Beelik  
Kern Carter  
Richard Franklin Carter  
Cormorant Books  
Patrick Crean  
Suzanne DePoe  
Kim Echlin  
Charlie Foran  
Katherine Govier  
Don Gillmor  
Lenore Harris  
John Healy  
Hogg, Shain & Scheck  
Professional Corporation  
Mwafaq Katt  
Elizabeth Levitt  
Fareh Malik  
Leila Marshy  
Ésery Mondésir  
Luis Horacio Nájera  
Dimitri Nasrallah  
Pamela Purves  
The Printing House  
Deepa Rajagopalan  
Maria Saba  
Mathew Sandford, Pear Interactive  
John Ralston Saul  
Alec Robinson  
Philip Slayton  
Adam Shapiro  
Haroon Siddiqui  
Soapbox Design  
Saeed Teebi  
Madeleine Thien  
Alissa Trotz  
Jim Turk  
Urbanspace  
John Vaillant  
Writers for Peace Committee,  
PEN International  
Yonge Lawrence Dentistry  
Allison Zhao

DESIGN  
[soapboxdesign.com](http://soapboxdesign.com)

ILLUSTRATION  
[sandradionisi.com](http://sandradionisi.com)

EDITOR  
Eli Tareq El Bechelany-Lynch

ASSOCIATE EDITOR  
Eilish Waller

FREE  
EXPRESSION  
MATTERS  
PENCANADA.CA



[queries@pencanada.ca](mailto:queries@pencanada.ca)