

THE DEMOCRACY OF THE IMAGINATION MANIFESTO

PEN International was founded in London in 1921 to promote friendship and intellectual co-operation among writers everywhere, emphasize the role of literature in developing understanding, stand for freedom of expression and act as a powerful voice on behalf of writers harassed, silenced, imprisoned and sometimes killed for their views.

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passed with unanimity
at the Assembly of Delegates of PEN International
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Manila, Philippines
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Presented by Jennifer Clement, PEN International President

Per Wästberg, Emeritus PEN International President and Chair of the Nobel Prize for Literature

Eric Lax, Vice President of PEN International

Nayantara Sahgal, Vice President of PEN International

Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Vice President of PEN International

Paul Muldoon, Board Member of PEN America

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The opening of the PEN International Charter states that literature knows no frontiers. This speaks to both real and, no less importantly, those imagined.

PEN stands against notions of national and cultural purity that seek to stop people from listening, reading and learning from each other. One of the most treacherous forms of censorship is self-censorship —where walls are built around the imagination and often raised from fear of attack.

PEN believes the imagination allows writers and readers to transcend their own place in the world to include the ideas of others. This place for some writers has been prison where the imagination has meant interior freedom and, often, survival.

The imagination is the territory of all discovery as ideas come into being as one creates them. It is often in the confluence of contradiction, found in metaphor and simile, where the most profound human experiences reside.

For almost 100 years PEN has stood for freedom of expression. PEN also stands for, and believes in, the freedom of the empathetic imagination while recognizing that many have not been the ones to tell their own stories.

PEN INTERNATIONAL UPHOLDS THE FOLLOWING PRINCIPLES:

1. We defend the imagination and believe it to be as free as dreams.
2. We recognize and seek to counter the limits faced by so many in telling their own stories.
3. We believe the imagination accesses all human experience, and reject restrictions of time, place, or origin.
4. We know attempts to control the imagination may lead to xenophobia, hatred and division.
5. Literature crosses all real and imagined frontiers and is always in the realm of the universal.