On the Frontline
Defending Freedom of Expression and Promoting Literature
PEN is grateful to its many individual supporters and volunteers who make its work possible including Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), PEN Publishers, Writers and Readers Circles, International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN), the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF), Clifford Chance, Fritt Ord and Evan Cornish Foundation.

PEN International promotes literature and freedom of expression and is governed by the PEN Charter and the principles it embodies: unhampered transmission of thought within each nation and between all nations. Founded in 1921, PEN International connects an international community of writers from its Secretariat in London. It is a forum where writers meet freely to discuss their work; it is also a voice speaking out for writers silenced in their own countries. Through Centres in over 100 countries, PEN operates on five continents. PEN International is a non-political organisation which holds Special Consultative Status at the UN and Associate Status at UNESCO. International PEN is a registered charity in England and Wales with registration number 1117088.

http://www.pen-international.org/
Between 2015 and 2019, PEN International, the world's largest association of writers, worked effectively and tirelessly to defend freedom of expression and promote literature in an ever-deteriorating climate for freedom of expression.

This report will demonstrate the huge step forward PEN International has taken in delivering impactful and inclusive international programmes with the invaluable support of the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida). It seeks to provide an overview of PEN International’s work over the last five years through a series of case studies spanning that period, reflecting on PEN's achievements and on the challenges of working within a complex and deteriorating environment for free speech. PEN International’s organisational goals for 2015 to 2019 were achieved in two phases: a one-year phase of consolidation and planning for growth, including building capacity for monitoring, evaluation, and organisation-wide learning, and a four-year phase of coordinated programme expansion and capacity building.

This report seeks to demonstrate the impact that PEN International has had over the last five years in improving the situation of writers at risk, challenging structural threats to freedom of expression and creating spaces for literature and language to flourish.

**Between 2015 and 2019, PEN International:**

- Improved the lives of **283** writers at risk through solidarity, campaigning and protection work
- Supported **143** writers with emergency grants
- Returned **427** expert assessments to the International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN)
- Supported **60** writers through their asylum process
- Amplified the voices of **21** persecuted writers at national and, regional and international bodies
- Supported **28** PEN Centres demonstrated improved engagement with duty bearers leading to increased and continued advocacy
- 27 submissions to the United Nation’s Universal Periodic Review, leading to 346 recommendations being made by States that reflected PEN’s recommendations
- 3 amicus briefs, 2 before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights on the cases of Tulio Alberto Álvarez v. Venezuela & Julio Ernesto Álvarado v Honduras, 1 before the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Court of Justice in the case of the Federation of African Journalists v The Gambia. Positive judgements in all three cases including successfully securing ‘precautionary measures’ for Julio Ernesto Alverado in a landmark ruling.
- 26 third party interventions before the European Court of Human Rights on issues including Turkey, Hungary and the case of Khadija Ismayilova (Azerbaijan). Positive judgements in 2 cases where PEN headed interventions led to the release of Turkish writers Mehmet Altan and Sahin Alpay.
- 33 Centres from the global south participating in, and shaping the agendas of, PEN’s regional networks and standing committees
- 48,406 writers, journalists, academics, teachers, parents, community members, young people and more have benefitted from the Civil Society programme, of which 22,921 are female and 25,485 are male.
- PEN Centres estimate that a further **307,868** people have benefitted from projects indirectly
**Centres Network**

**Europe**
- Albania
- Armenia
- Austria
- Basque
- Belarus
- Belgian (Dutch)
- Belgian (French)
- Bosnia-Herzegovina
- Bulgaria
- Catala
- Chechen
- Czech
- Croatia
- Cyprus
- Danish
- Dutch
- English
- Esperanto
- Estonia
- Finnish
- French
- Galicia
- Georgia
- German
- German Writers Abroad
- Hungarian
- Icelandic
- Irish
- Italian
- Kurdish
- Luxembourg
- Macedonian
- Malawi
- Maldives
- Malta
- Mauritania
- Marocco
- Mongolia
- Morocco
- Mozambique
- Myanmar
- Nepal
- Netherlands
- Norway
- Panama
- Peru
- Portuguese
- Romanian
- Russian
- Serbian
- Slovak
- Slovene
- St Petersburg
- Swiss German
- Switzerland
- Swedish
- Swedish
- Togo
- Tunisia
- Ukraine
- Welsh
- Wyoming

**Latin America**
- Argentina
- Cape Verde
- Chile
- Cuban
- Gambia
- Guinea Bissau
- Haiti
- Iraq
- Malaysia
- Mali
- Mauritania
- Moscow
- South India
- St Petersburg
- Togo

**North America**
- Canada
- Catalon
- Canada
- American
- Canada
- USA
- Quebequois

**Civil Society Programme Centres**
- Afghan
- Afrikaans
- Argentina
- Bosnian and Herzegovina
- Cambodia
- Central Asia
- Entrea
- Ghana
- Afghan
- All-India
- Bangladesh
- Cambodia
- Chinese
- Hong Kong Chinese Speaking
- Hong Kong English Speaking
- ICPC
- Japan
- Korean
- Malaysia
- Melbourne
- Myanmar
- Nepal
- New Zealand
- North Korean Writers in Exile
- PEN Delhi
- PEN South India
- Philippines
- Peru
- Syrian
- Taipei Chinese
- Tibetan Writers Abroad
- Uighur
- Vietnamese Writers Abroad

**Middle East**
- Iranian in exile
- Iraq
- Israel
- Jordan
- Lebanon
- Palestine

**Africa**
- Afar
- Afrikaans
- Cape Verde
- Egypt
- Eritrea in Exile
- Ethiopia
- Gambia
- Ghana
- Guinean
- Guinea-Bissau
- Ivory Coast
- Kenya
- Liberia

**Asia Pacific**
- Afghan
- All-India
- Bangladesh
- Cambodia
- Chinese
- Hong Kong Chinese Speaking
- Hong Kong English Speaking
- ICPC
- Japan
- Korean
- Malaysia
- Melbourne
- Myanmar
- Nepal
- New Zealand
- North Korean Writers in Exile
- PEN Delhi
- PEN South India
- Philippines
- Perth
- Sydney
- Taipei Chinese
- Tibetan Writers Abroad
- Uighur
- Vietnamese Writers Abroad

**PEN Centres with Residencies for Writers at Risk**
- Canada
- Catalan
- Canada
- American
- Canada
- USA
- Quebequois

**New and revitalised Centres**
- Afghanistan
- Afrikaans
- Argentinian
- Bosnian and Herzegovina
- Cambodia
- Central Asia
- Entrea
- Ghana
- Afghanistan
- All India
- Bangladesh
- Cambodia
- Chinese
- Hong Kong Chinese Speaking
- Hong Kong English Speaking
- ICPC
- Japan
- Korean
- Malaysia
- Melbourne
- Myanmar
- Nepal
- New Zealand
- North Korean Writers in Exile
- PEN Delhi
- PEN South India
- Philippines
- Peru
- Syrian
- Taipei Chinese
- Tibetan Writers Abroad
- Uighur
- Vietnamese Writers Abroad

**PEN International is made up of 135 Centres, a network of writers across the globe, that together work to defend freedom of expression and promote literature.**

*The CSP offers a flexible framework for PEN Centres to identify and propose locally relevant projects that promote and strengthen civic spaces for expression through access to literatures, and linguistic and cultural rights—see page 40 for more information.*
On the Frontline: Defending Freedom of Expression and Promoting Literature

PEN International Timeline 2015 – 2019

The award-winning writer, activist and PEN Main Case, Enoh Meyomesse, is released from Kondengui Prison in Yaounde, Cameroon, following more than three years in prison. On his release Meyomesse said: ‘I don’t have the words to thank you for your unswerving support over all these years’.

Following a PEN International-led appeal to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in 2014, the Honduran state finally suspended the court-imposed work ban that had prevented Globo TV journalist and PEN Honduras member Julio Ernesto Alvarado from presenting his nightly news show since 30 October 2015 thus finally recognising its duty to comply with a landmark ruling.

PEN International provides direct assistance in the form of asylum support and emergency grants to 57 writers

New PEN Centres formed: Mauritanian PEN, Mali PEN

The letters that you collected and sent to me are so warm and show the strength of literature brotherhood. Thank you for that and for what you do.’

Ngugi Wa Thiong’s writes preface to report about publishing in African National languages Culture’s oxygen and expresses support for PEN International’s work on translation and linguistic rights in Africa giving greater visibility to PEN’s global work on the issues.

PEN International provides direct assistance in the form of asylum support and emergency grants to 40 writers.

PEN International is a joint recipient of the Turkish Journalists Association’s Press Freedom Prize ‘for the unique solidarity unparalleled in the past it showed against the assaults on press freedom in Turkey, for its efforts to bring to international platforms the violation of rights and for instilling in our Turkish colleagues the feeling that they are not alone.’

New PEN Centre formed: Togo PEN

16 PEN Centres initiated access to education and empowerment through literature projects for young and/or marginalised people across the globe

PEN International launches PEN OutWrite, a platform where a writers worldwide can raise their voices, inform public debate, create dialogue and highlight the challenges that they face.

Project launched to build the capacity of writers from PEN Centres through training and mentoring to take a leading role, alongside other partners, to advocate for the repeal of criminal defamation laws in Africa.

PEN monitored freedom of expression violations in over 100 countries and over 1,005 cases of persecuted writers. Of the 232 writers in prison, 82 were subsequently released and 25 were conditionally released.

18 participants from 15 PEN Centres from sub-Saharan Africa as well as Egypt take part in a training and knowledge-sharing workshop in South Africa with a focus on freedom of expression. Nine African PEN Centres participate in an additional follow-up advocacy and monitoring and evaluation training in Uganda; both these meetings lead to a strengthening of skills and networks.

New PEN Centres: Cuban PEN, Gambia PEN, St. Petersburg PEN, PEN South India.

19.915 young people, writers, indigenous language speakers and marginalised groups participate in Centre projects across the globe under PEN’s Civil Society Programme

PEN International provides direct assistance in the form of asylum support and emergency grants to 48 writers.

PEN’s work in Sierra Leone, South Africa, Uganda and Zambia informs PEN’s advocacy strategy and enhances the work of coalitions working to repeal criminal defamation at the national and regional level. In each of the four focus countries PEN increased public knowledge and support for the issue and put pressure on duty bearers to effect policy change.

PEN International leads a high-level mission to Turkey as the situation for freedom of expression dramatically worsened following a coup attempt. It is the largest PEN delegation to visit a country, standing in solidarity with persecuted writers and protesting the heavy-handed crackdown against free expression. The delegation meets with writers, journalists, human rights defenders, civil society actors, and political figures from across Turkey’s political landscape.

PEN joins the Council of Europe’s Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists.

100 countries and over 1,005 cases of persecuted writers. Of the 232 writers in prison, 82 were subsequently released and 25 were conditionally released.

PEN International joins the Council of Europe’s Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists.

‘I would like to thank you for all the support you gave me, and for all that you did to help my case. The letters that you collected and sent to me are so warm and show the strength of literature brotherhood. Thank you for that and for what you do.’

Ahmed Naji

On PEN’s Day of the Imprisoned Writer campaign - ‘I would like to thank you for all the support you gave me, and for all what you did to help my case. The letters that you collected and sent to me are so warm and show the strength of literature brotherhood. Thank you for that and for what you do.’

Enoh Meyomesse

This is just a snapshot – more detailed information can be found in reports of each year and throughout this report

Changes in the situation of writers at risk

Changes in structural threats, protecting and enhancing Freedom of Expression

Changes in space for literature, language, debate, dialogue, ideas and opinions

IMPACT

ACTIVITIES

IMPACT

ACTIVITIES

IMPACT

ACTIVITIES

IMPACT

ACTIVITIES

2015

2016

2017
‘I was stronger than I ever was on the outside. I thank you for the attention you paid to each sentence that I wrote and to your support which allowed my voice to be heard in the outside world.’

Zehra Doğan

27,551 young people, writers, journalists, academics, teachers, parents, community members and human rights activists participate in PEN Centre projects around the world

Positive judgements from the European Court of Human Rights in 2 cases from Turkey where PEN headed interventions leads to the release of writers Mehmet Altan and Sahin Alpay

14 writers released from prison, with a further 8 being acquitted or having charges dropped, following PEN campaigns

Liu Xia, the Chinese poet, writer and PEN member, is finally allowed to board a plane to Germany, following an eight yearlong unofficial house arrest.

A PEN delegation presents the report ‘Stifling Dissent, Impeding Accountability: Criminal Defamation Laws in Africa’ and a petition signed by more than 150 African writers before African institutions such as the Pan African Parliament (PAP) and the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR). The ACHPR welcomes PEN’s position.

New PEN Centres: Guinea Bissau, Iraq, Moscow, Perth, Cape Verde

2018

ACTIVITIES

IMPACT

PEN pilots a ‘learning-exchange’ trip through which five new and revitalised African PEN Centres carry out a peer-led evaluation of a long-standing project, examining how to have impact and address challenges in their own projects.

PEN Argentina hosts a meeting of the Latin American Centres, inviting the participation of 24 delegates from 18 Centres from across the region. The network meeting combined with Day of the Dead campaigning leads to strengthening of regional cooperation and collaboration.

PEN leads a high-level mission to Hungary and publishes the report Hungary: Limiting Expression, Rising Xenophobia, which highlights serious concerns for free expression, press and academic freedom, and civil society in the country.

“İlyaz” – a platform for young writers in Turkey – launches with the support of PEN International, PEN Turkey and Norwegian PEN.

PEN holds high-level side event on criminal defamation at the United Nations Human Rights Council.

2019

ACTIVITIES

IMPACT

The Dissident Blog is rebranded as PEN/Opp at Congress Manila, Philippines

26 PEN Centres take action on Day of the Imprisoned Writer, 15 November 2019

16 PEN Centres from the global south publish op-eds and hold panel events on the freedom of expression situation in their country on Human Rights Day, 10 December 2019

PEN Uganda Make Space project is initiated, creating a space in Kampala for refugee writers from the region to meet. From 2020 the project will grow the space into a base from which refugee writers can access professional development opportunities and protection support.

PEN International takes part in a joint advocacy mission to Turkey in September. The report is launched during a public discussion in Brussels in November, where mission members present their findings to EU leaders and policy makers and hold discussions on how the EU can best engage to support the plight of Turkey’s journalists

Consultation and planning results in PEN International’s strategy 2020 to 2023, an evolutionary development that will bring PEN through its centenary year.
In 2019, PEN International monitored 219 cases of attacks against writers across all regions, a small rise in the previous year’s total of 206 where there were slight increases in Africa and the Americas, and a rise of 20% in Asia, partly relating to a crackdown against Muslim Uyghurs in China, and increased harassment of writers and poets commenting on events in India.

Types of attacks

Lengthy terms of imprisonment and pre-trial detention account for the largest number of attacks, a total of 70 recorded in 2019. Of these the largest cluster are in China, including the Tibet and Xinjiang autonomous regions, a total of twenty-two, nearly all held under National Security legislation. This number is likely to be swelled by the recent crackdown against Uyghur Muslims where at least seven writers are among many thousands detained in the last year.

Long term imprisonment has also been a decades-long feature of suppression in Iran, where seven are in prison or under house arrest. In Turkey where four writers are among the over 100 journalists who are in prison with many more on trial and at threat of imprisonment. Countries in the Middle East and North Africa continue to use imprisonment to silence their critical writers including in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the UAE and Bahrain. Six poets were imprisoned in Myanmar and serving sentences for their criticism of the army.

Detention without trial is usually a relatively short period as a person is waiting to be brought to court. However, Ethiopia holds nine of the total 21 worldwide, almost all held since 2001, an extraordinary 18 years, in unknown detention places and where even the charges against them are not known.

Thirty-nine writers are known to be standing trial globally, including the Tibet and Xinjiang autonomous regions, mostly related to the 2016 coup attempt, but also including several who have been on trial since 2010. Eight are on trial in separate cases in India, most charged in 2018. That trials can go on for so long, usually with restrictions on travel and other rights, means that writers can be living under a shadow, sometimes for a decade or more.

One of the most common forms of censorship is persistent harassment, by both state and non-state actors. This is a pattern prevalent in the Americas where threats and actual violence continue to be a constant backdrop to the lives of writers who comment on issues ranging from corruption, criminality and traditional mores. Similarly, in Asia, notably in countries such as in India where a group of 10 poets form the minority Miya group have been threatened.

PEN Cases in Numbers: Total of 219 recorded attacks in 2019

In 2019, PEN International monitored 219 cases of attacks against writers across all regions, a small rise in the previous year’s total of 206 where there were slight increases in Africa and the Americas, and a rise of 20% in Asia, partly relating to a crackdown against Muslim Uyghurs in China, and increased harassment of writers and poets commenting on events in India.

Types of attacks

Lengthy terms of imprisonment and pre-trial detention account for the largest number of attacks, a total of 70 recorded in 2019. Of these the largest cluster are in China, including the Tibet and Xinjiang autonomous regions, a total of twenty-two, nearly all held under National Security legislation. This number is likely to be swelled by the recent crackdown against Uyghur Muslims where at least seven writers are among many thousands detained in the last year.

Long term imprisonment has also been a decades-long feature of suppression in Iran, where seven are in prison or under house arrest. In Turkey where four writers are among the over 100 journalists who are in prison with many more on trial and at threat of imprisonment. Countries in the Middle East and North Africa continue to use imprisonment to silence their critical writers including in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the UAE and Bahrain. Six poets were imprisoned in Myanmar and serving sentences for their criticism of the army.

Detention without trial is usually a relatively short period as a person is waiting to be brought to court. However, Ethiopia holds nine of the total 21 worldwide, almost all held since 2001, an extraordinary 18 years, in unknown detention places and where even the charges against them are not known.

Thirty-nine writers are known to be standing trial globally, including the Tibet and Xinjiang autonomous regions, mostly related to the 2016 coup attempt, but also including several who have been on trial since 2010. Eight are on trial in separate cases in India, most charged in 2018. That trials can go on for so long, usually with restrictions on travel and other rights, means that writers can be living under a shadow, sometimes for a decade or more.

One of the most common forms of censorship is persistent harassment, by both state and non-state actors. This is a pattern prevalent in the Americas where threats and actual violence continue to be a constant backdrop to the lives of writers who comment on issues ranging from corruption, criminality and traditional mores. Similarly, in Asia, notably in countries such as in India where a group of 10 poets form the minority Miya group have been threatened.

Writers killed in 2019

Muder not only extinguishes a critical voice, but also intimidates into silence those who were close to the victim, who shared their views or who dared to delve into the misdemeanours of the powerful. Over the decades, hundreds of writers have been killed for speaking out, caught in conflict zones or taking on dangerous assignments confronting criminals and extremists. How many others are driven to self-censorship knowing that they could share such a fate is impossible to measure. The vast majority of these murders are never resolved and the perpetrators rarely brought to justice. The impunity enjoyed by so many of those who carry out or who are the “invisible hands” behind the murders serves to deepen fear and suppression of free speech.

Journalists are especially vulnerable where the nature of their work places them at the centre of political controversy, or on the front-line in conflict zones and contested territories where criminals and extremists hold influence. In 2019, 25 reporters were killed because of their work, according to the press freedom monitor, Committee to Protect Journalists, which noted that this was the lowest figure it had recorded since 2002. Yet this remains too many deaths with far reaching repercussions. CPJ notes that the previous two years – 2017 and 2018 – had seen high profile killings, notably of the Saudi journalist, Jamal Kashoggi, murdered in Istanbul in 2018, and the Maltese reporter, Daphne Caruana Galizia. The drop in killings in 2019, half that in the previous year, could be seen in a positive light - that would be killers noting the high profile international campaigns around these and other notable murders, but, CPJ surmises, it could also be that the deaths and impunity granted to the killers has led to greater self-censorship. This is impossible to measure.

Impunity: PEN calls for justice

The impunity enjoyed by those who murder writers and journalists contributes to a wider silencing of independent and critical voices, making it especially important that PEN and others campaign for full justice. In 2019 investigations and trials had been launched against people accused of the murders of several writers in recent years including in Saudi Arabia, Malta, Bangladesh and India. However, in many cases there are concerns that these trials are flawed and have not included people, some at the highest level of government, who had masterminded the murder.

The highest profile, and shocking, case in recent years was the murder of Saudi journalist, Jamal Kashoggi, at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, Turkey, in October 2018. The global outcry at his death, and investigation by UN Special Rapporteur on extra judicial executions reporting in June 2019 that he was the “victim of a premeditated extrajudicial execution, for which the State of Saudi Arabia is responsible”. Eleven men were sentenced to death in Saudi Arabia for the murder in December. The killing, the court claimed, was a spontaneous rather than a premeditated act. This conclusion was derided by observers as
exonerating the masterminds behind what they see as an assassination linked to high levels in the Saudi government, with the Special Rapporteur calling it “the antithesis of justice” and a “mockery”. PEN Centres have joined with Amnesty International and other rights monitors to call for complete justice for Kashoggi.

Similarly, the murder of the Maltese journalist, Daphne Caruana Galizia, a year earlier in October 2017 in a car bomb, has been met with intensive national and international lobbying led by her family and international press freedom organisations, among them PEN. In 2019 PEN was among the organisations presenting information to the United Nations, the EU and to the Council of Europe, among others. Three suspects arrested in 2017 are still to be brought to trial. A fourth, a woman, who had gone into hiding after the murder of her friend, was herself killed by attackers with machetes in May 2015. By the end of 2019, several suspects in these three killings had been arrested and their trials are under way, but others involved remain at large.

In India extremists linked to right wing Hindu nationalism have been responsible for widespread and often extreme violence against Muslims and those who challenge Hinduism. In 2015 two writers were killed in separate incidents by members of one of the most dangerous of these extremist groups. In February that year, 82-year-old Marathi politician and author, Govind Pansare was killed outside his home in an attack that also injured his wife. Six months later, in August 2015, 78-year-old epigraphist, Dr Mallershappa Madivalappa Kallurgi was shot dead at his home. The previous year he had written articles challenging the sanctity of religious idols which had led to protests. In both cases individuals with allegiance to the Sanatan Sanstha extremist Hindu group have been arrested and are now being prosecuted for the murders. Sanatan Sanstha has carried out many of the bombings and other acts of terrorism in India over the past decade and despite calls for it to be banned, the significant presence of right-wing Hindu nationalists in Indian government at state and federal level has ensured that it remains a legal body.

The recent spate of horrific murders of writers in Bangladesh has, thankfully, abated with no further killings in 2019. Yet justice remains to be found for those who died in the past five years. Three murders in 2015 of atheists at the hands of religious extremists was met with worldwide shock. Publisher Faisal Arefin Deepan was hacked to death in Dhaka in October 2015. Earlier that year, in February, one of the writers published by Deepan’s publishing house, Avijit Roy, had been similarly murdered. Then, a third writer, a friend of Roy’s, Ananta Bijoy Dash, and who had gone into hiding after the murder of his friend, was himself killed by attackers with machetes in May 2015. By the end of 2019, several suspects in these three killings had been arrested and their trials are under way, but others involved remain at large.

In India extremists linked to right wing Hindu nationalism have been responsible for widespread and often extreme violence against Muslims and those who challenge Hinduism. In 2015 two writers were killed in separate incidents by members of one of the most dangerous of these extremist groups. In February that year, 82-year-old Marathi politician and author, Govind Pansare was killed outside his home in an attack that also injured his wife. Six months later, in August 2015, 78-year-old epigraphist, Dr Mallershappa Madivalappa Kallurgi was shot dead at his home. The previous year he had written articles challenging the sanctity of religious idols which had led to protests. In both cases individuals with allegiance to the Sanatan Sanstha extremist Hindu group have been arrested and are now being prosecuted for the murders. Sanatan Sanstha has carried out many of the bombings and other acts of terrorism in India over the past decade and despite calls for it to be banned, the significant presence of right-wing Hindu nationalists in Indian government at state and federal level has ensured that it remains a legal body.

In most cases women writers came under threat for the same reasons as their colleagues: for exposing corruption, challenging state restrictions, questioning traditional and religious mores, for example, or for being present as observers and commentators in conflict areas. However, women who comment on gender equality, sexual and domestic violence come under particular scrutiny. They are also more likely to be subjected to sexual violence and threats themselves.

In Iran, commentary on these issues have long brought women writers to government attention. Golrokh Ebrahimi Iraee was sentenced for a total of more than five years in prison for ‘insulting Islamic sanctities’ and ‘spreading propaganda against the ruling system’. Her unpublished fictional story that sees the main character protesting against the country’s practice of stoning to death. Academic, Sedigheh Vasmaghi, has also been charged for her opposition to the practice of stoning women found guilty of adultery, and has since her return to Iran after six years in Europe, lived under restrictions on her travel.

Of long-standing concern to PEN has been the women’s campaigner against sexual violence and child abuse who has, since the 2005 publication of her book Los Demonios del Edén (The Demons of Eden) that implicated leading business figures in a child pornography ring, lived under constant threat of death. The threats have not let up and in July 2019 became acute after her home was broken into and her two dogs killed, forcing her to leave Mexico for her safety.

Satire has long been a dangerous means through which to criticise authorities as Ugandan academic, activist and writer, Stella Nyanzi, found when she was sentenced to 18 months in prison in November 2018. Incensed by the lack of government response to a campaign for all women to have access to sanitary towels, she had posted poetry online that lampooned the President and First Lady. She was released early in February 2020. A comedienne in Zimbabwe, Samantha Kureya, endured a terrifying ordeal in August 2019 when she was abducted by unknown men who abused and beat her, stripping her naked before leaving her at the roadside. Commentary on sexual violence against children in April brought Indian cartoonist Swathi Vadlamudi charges of ‘hurting religious sentiments’ for her cartoon commenting on the rape of an 8-year-old girl where members of the ruling BJP party were implicated. Her image of the gods Ram and Sita remarking on the case also led to death threats.

Hatoon al-Fassi, who was arrested in June 2018 alongside a number of other women’s rights campaigners in Saudi Arabia was released pending trial in May 2019. There were disturbing reports that the women had suffered severe abuse while in prison including electric shocks, flogging, sexual threats and violence, leaving some with debilitating injuries. There were also reports that women among ten poets charged in India who face charges for their poetry describing the discrimination they face as a result of their Muslim Bengali heritage, were also threatened with rape.

In Brazil intolerance against LGBTI has grown, and the case of the playwright and two performers of the play The Gospel According to Jesus, Queen of Heaven, depicting Jesus as transgender have suffered harassment and threat since the play was first performed in 2016. In early 2019 the threat had become so great, that playwright Jo Clifford decided that performances should cease.

For more information see the PEN International Case List 2019 for a summary analysis of the cases monitored by PEN in 2019 and regional overviews of the wider context under which both journalists and writers are challenged.
Supporting Writers at Risk

PEN International is a solidarity network. It defends freedom of expression and supports persecuted writers globally.

PEN International provides protection in the form of emergency grants, asylum support and advice on appropriate protection options and mechanisms, as well as working closely with its partner, the International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN) to provide temporary long-term residencies to writers and artists at risk. PEN International sends Rapid Action Network Alerts (RANs) calling on 20,000 PEN members to take action on behalf of persecuted writers, write letters of solidarity, organise vigils and protests and advocate with local embassies and regional bodies alongside publishing articles to raise public awareness. PEN International coordinates solidarity actions such as sending letters to those in prison and marking their absence at public events with an empty chair. PEN promotes the voices of these persecuted writers by granting them awards, sharing their literature and twinning them with well-known writers as part of letter writing campaigns.

I thank you immensely for giving me a place in the campaign you are running with a thousand efforts and labour. Just as yesterday, your support and solidarity continues to be respite for me. I am grateful! Don’t go missing, please. Your efforts are invaluable in being the voice of the voiceless[...]

Nedim Türfent, Turkish journalist and poet, Van High Security Prison/Turkey

In 2019:

The situation of 104 writers at risk was improved by PEN International’s solidary, support, advocacy and campaigning.

32 PEN Emergency Fund (PEF) grants were given to writers facing immediate risk, supporting writers with medical treatment, 5 with accommodation and living costs and a further 17 with relocation, travel and subsistence.

12 asylum support letters resulted in successful asylum claims for 5 writers.

Rapid Action Network Alerts calling on more than 20,000 PEN members to take action on behalf of persecuted writers, involved more than 53 PEN Centres lobbying government officials, writing letters of solidarity, organising vigils and protests.

Solidarity is at the core of PEN International’s work. In 2019, of writers who saw positive changes in their situation said that the solidarity provided was important to them.

Rapid Action Network Alerts calling on more than 20,000 PEN members to take action on behalf of persecuted writers, involved more than 53 PEN Centres lobbying government officials, writing letters of solidarity, organising vigils and protests.

32 PEN Emergency Fund (PEF) grants were given to writers facing immediate risk, supporting writers with medical treatment, 5 with accommodation and living costs and a further 17 with relocation, travel and subsistence.

12 asylum support letters resulted in successful asylum claims for 5 writers.

Assessment of over 116 applications to the International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN) led to successful residency placements for 22 writers.

Yirgalem Fisseha Mebrhatu receives the inaugural PEN Eritrea Freedom of Expression Award at the PEN International/ICORN network meeting.
Improving the situation of writers at risk

Types of support PEN provided:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF SUPPORT</th>
<th>NUMBER OF WRITERS WITH +ve CHANGES TO THEIR SITUATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PEN Emergency Fund</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FEMALE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Cities of Refuge Network</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaigning (RANS &amp; Statements)</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asylum support</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solidarity</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One off grant given to support writers at risk. The PEN Emergency Fund (PEF) was set up by Dutch PEN in 1971.

Writers at risk who have been granted an International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN) placement for a two-year residency providing shelter, support and a literary platform.

Where PEN International campaigns and advocacy have led to a positive change to the situation of a writer.

Where PEN has provided letters and other forms of support for writers at risk leading to them being granted asylum.

Writers who have sent PEN messages of thanks for support provided, leading to improved conditions or morale.

RANS & Statements – Campaigning

- Released: 13
- Released, but rearrested: 2
- Released, but charges remain: 3
- Released but status uncertain: 1
- Released conditionally: 1
- Charges dropped: 1
- Acquitted: 4
- Censorship prevented: 1
- Persecutors facing justice: 3
- Extradition request rejected: 1

TOTAL: 30

Shahidul Alam and Zehra Dogan embrace at LiDi: Man/ Left Behind by Counterpoints Arts with The Open University and Tate Exchange in association with PEN International, English PEN and Index on Censorship.
Effective Campaigning: Writers Released 2019

Thirteen writers were released in 2019, with a further seven released conditionally. These writers include Ukrainian writer and filmmaker, Oleg Sentsov, who was freed on 7 September 2019 as part of a prisoner exchange between Russia and Ukraine. Hundreds of PEN members across the world actively campaigned for his release by sending appeals to the Russian authorities, taking part in solidarity campaigns and protests, organising film screenings, coordinating petitions, translating, publishing and promoting his short stories, and taking part in social media actions.

PEN International was honoured to welcome Oleg Sentsov to join PEN International and English PEN at an event at the Frontline Club on the 15 November 2019. Carles Torner, Executive Director of PEN International, introduced the event by presenting Oleg with the solidarity letters sent to him on Day of the Imprisoned Writer 2018, which were rejected and returned by the Siberian prison where he was held. The sold-out event included Oleg Sentsov signing copies of his latest book for every member of the audience as well as signing the solidarity empty chair posters of the 2019 focus cases.

Mauritanian blogger Mohamed Cheikh Ould Mkhaitir was finally released in July 2019 after more than five years in detention, all of them spent in solitary confinement. He was convicted of apostasy and sentenced to death in 2014 for posting an article online denouncing the use of religion to legitimize discriminatory practices against the blacksmith caste in Mauritania with which he identifies. The article was taken down the day after it was posted. His sentence was later commuted and reduced by an appeals court in November 2017 and he was therefore eligible for release due to time served; however, he remained in detention for almost two more years.

Between 2015 and 2019, PEN International carried out advocacy calling for his release, including a meeting with the Minister of Justice, as well as public campaigning as part of a broad coalition of NGOs. PEN also carried out solidarity work and a number of PEN Centres were involved in campaigning and advocacy on his behalf.

Mkhaitir told PEN that the efforts of PEN members “are very important, even if they do not see their results directly. For prisoners, the presence of people like ‘PEN’ represents psychological support which leads them to bear the bitterness of the prison.”

Mkhaitir thanked PEN upon his release:

“I am Mohamed Cheikh Ould Mokhitir, I was released from jail on July 29, 2019, and since that day I am looking for a way to communicate with you, and today I find myself lucky to have finally found your addresses. Thank you very much for the efforts you have made for my freedom, and for the wonderful and tremendous work you are doing every day to establish the principles of freedom of opinion and expression. For the five years and seven months I spent in prison, I held out the hope of freedom, because I am sure that having such wonderful people as you and an organization like PEN International is a source of hope for me and everyone who aspires to freedom of opinion, thought, expression and writing. I am now in France and I hope to communicate continuously, and accept my deepest appreciation, respect and gratitude. With all heart ... A thousand thanks to PEN International”

The numbers of writers released differ to those in the 2019 Case List due to a number of factors that can be attributed to differences in methodology; the most significant of which is that this report features the cases from which PEN International has carried out significant advocacy and can therefore trace its contribution to change.
In 2019, 79 per cent of writers who saw changes in their situation thanked PEN International for its solidarity during the time of their incarceration and following their release. PEN International was one of the first international organisations to take action for award-winning Sri Lankan writer Shakthika Sathikumara, when he was arrested and detained in April 2019, charged with inciting religious hatred and violating international human rights law. PEN released two RANs (Rapid Action Network alerts) calling for the authorities to drop its investigation and for his reinstatement to his job and featured his case for his reinstatement to his job and featured his case in the time of their incarceration and following their release.

In 2019, 79 per cent of writers who saw changes in their situation thanked PEN International for its solidarity during the time of their incarceration and following their release.

Solidarity: The core of PEN’s work

It was on this very day, on PEN’s Day of the Imprisoned Writer, on the 100th day I was behind bars, when I heard through the deafening shouts of other prisoners also trying to hear and be heard, that Arundhati Roy had written to me. That letter made a world of difference to me and to my fellow prisoners. It meant that despite what governments might do to us, despite their hope that we shall just curl up and be quiet, despite the many ways through which they try to buy our silence, we continue to speak, through words, photographs, cartoons and poems. I was strengthened, as I hope you will be, by the knowledge that there are countless others out there who continue to stand by our side. Come what may.

Bangladeshi photographer and writer Shahidul Alam writes to Shakthika Sathikumara on the Day of the Imprisoned Writer 2019

Shortly after Day of the Imprisoned Writer, Shakthika Sathikumara was reinstated in his job, however, the investigation had yet to be dropped at the time of writing. Sathikumara and his lawyer have both thanked PEN for its work.

Ugandan academic, writer and activist Dr. Stella Nyanzi was convicted of ‘cyber harassment’ in August 2019 and sentenced to 18 months in prison in relation to a poem she wrote on Facebook in September 2018 criticizing Uganda’s President Yoweri Museveni (and his mother). Nyanzi’s conviction under the Computer Misuse Act of 2011 is illustrative of the authorities’ increasing intolerance of criticism and takes place against a wider context of suppression of freedom of expression in Uganda, and in particular a crackdown on dissent online. In 2019, PEN released two statements and two RANs on her prosecution and conviction. She was also featured for PEN’s Day of Imprisoned Writer in November and nine PEN Centres around the world took action on her behalf. Nyanzi’s absence at the PEN International Congress was marked with an empty chair and in late 2019 she was nominated for the PEN International/Oxfam Novib award, which she won in February 2020. Her release in February 2020 followed shortly after the award was presented in a ceremony in The Hague, Netherlands. PEN continues to provide support to Stella Nyanzi.

“I thank PEN Uganda, PEN International and the other national chapters of PEN for the sustained solidarity with me. Although I am detained by a repressive dictatorship, I am not isolated. Although I am punished for my writing, I am not ashamed of my crime. Your support and good will have consoled and enthused me during this difficult season of my life. Your advocacy and publicity ensured that my story firmly remained in the limelight and on the agenda, even when my country instituted a public media blackout about my imprisonment. I will continue to boldly exercise my freedom to write, although I am still locked up inside Luzira Women Prison. Aluta continua.”

Ugandan academic, writer and activist Dr. Stella Nyanzi

“Solidarity: The core of PEN’s work”

PEN International and PEN Uganda had earlier advocated for Dr. Nyanzi’s right to freedom of expression when she was charged with the same offenses in 2017.

In a 2017 interview, Dr. Nyanzi told PEN International: ‘For those of us whose articulations criticise the government and its actors, those of us who question the status quo, those of us who expose the numerous everyday violations of citizens’ rights, those of us who resist and defy the system, their spaces for freedom of expression are shutting down fast. Gags, censors, intimidation, fines, threats, arrests, beatings, detention, raids, confiscation of materials, bans of our works, are increasing vices that the government metes out against us.’
Over the last five years PEN International has seen increased member and Centre participation in solidarity and advocacy efforts on behalf of writers at risk. A change in approach, with fewer actions in order to focus on sustained long-term campaigning has strengthened PEN International’s campaigning and the movement-wide support provided to writers.

The case of Kurdish journalist, painter and poet, Zehra Doğan is emblematic of the way in which PEN’s solidarity continues beyond a writer’s long-advocated release.

Zehra Doğan was charged with ‘propagandising for a terrorist organisation’ and membership of a terrorist organisation in July 2016. She spent four-and-a-half months in pre-trial detention, prior to her release pending trial on the first of these charges, the latter having been dismissed. The criminal charges against her related to a painting, a news article and her social media activity (the painting is her recreation of a photograph taken by the Turkish military and disseminated by social media accounts linked to the Turkish security forces. The picture was taken during the five-month curfew imposed on the town of Nusaybin, which was a site of the conflict between the Turkish army and the Kurdistan Worker’s Party – PKK).

On 24 March 2017, she was convicted of ‘propagandising for a terrorist organisation’ by the Second-High Criminal Court of Mardin province, southeastern Turkey, and sentenced to two years, nine months and 22 days in prison. She was taken into custody on 12 June 2017, while she was on her way to visit her family. She was released on 24 February 2019 after serving her sentence in full.

Zehra Doğan is a symbol of resistance – to quote Doğan herself ‘every act of oppression creates its own act of resistance’ – who found creative ways to keep expressing herself in prison when prevented from accessing painting materials. In a letter to a family member in October 2017, she wrote:

‘During my previous detention, I had commented “They imprisoned me for my writings and drawings but I still have my brush and pen”. This time round they’re not giving me my brush. But to provoke or prevent me from producing my art is nobody’s business. I learned within these walls to mix drawing colours from food and drink – I continue to paint and write. A person’s imagination expands when imprisoned. I paint the women here and write about their stories. You can imprison an artist but you can’t stop her productivity.’

Zehra Doğan’s case further shows how PEN’s solidarity continues beyond a writer’s long-advocated release. Freed in February 2019, she arrived in London in March to become English PEN’s Writer in Residence. In May, she hosted an installation – ‘E Li Dû Man (Left behind)’ – at the Tate Modern in London, co-sponsored by PEN International and English PEN. She travelled to France, Germany and Italy for exhibitions of her work and meetings with publishers, with the support of some PEN Centres. In November, she penned a moving letter to imprisoned Kurdish writer Nedim Türfent to mark PEN International’s Day of the Imprisoned Writer – exactly two years after PEN featured her in the campaign.

**Background**

More than three years since Turkey’s 2016 failed coup and one year after its state of emergency was lifted, its government continues its relentless and pervasive crackdown on civic space, media freedom and dissenting voices. Independent media has been all but wiped out. Turkey is the world’s most prolific jailor of journalists with at least 113 were languishing behind bars at the end of 2019, including scores of Kurdish journalists. Hundreds more are on trial.

PEN International and PEN Centres around the world have been an effective voice for change in Turkey for decades. Since the declaration of the state of emergency in 2016, the organisation has been working for the restoration of the rule of law. In these challenging circumstances, PEN International is undertaking a host of activities in close collaboration with PEN Centres and partner organisations, including: country visits, advocacy meetings and events, statements, submissions, trial monitoring, protection as well as solidarity actions.

PEN International started campaigning for Zehra Doğan’s immediate and unconditional release in August 2017. Solidarity quickly became a key component of the campaign, with PEN members encouraged to send her messages of support and give visibility to her writings and art. She was notably featured in PEN International’s 2017 Day of the Imprisoned Writer campaign, becoming a priority case for the organisation. The letter that artist and activist Ai Weiwei wrote in solidarity with Zehra as part of the campaign generated strong media coverage and helped raise her profile globally. In March 2018, street artist Bansky unveiled a mural in New York City dedicated to Zehra, also well covered in the press.

Scores of PEN Centres campaigned for Zehra Doğan’s release, including PEN Turkey, Kurdish PEN, English PEN, German PEN, Belgian PEN (French-Speaking), PEN America, PEN South Africa, PEN Melbourne, PEN Argentina and Swedish PEN as well as PEN International’s Women Writers’ Committee.

PEN International’s Impact in Turkey

Between 2015 and 2019, PEN International provided direct assistance to 32 writers, campaigned for an end to the persecution of writers and journalists through 160 statements and actions, carried out trial observations, published 2 reports, lead 9 and supported 4 third-party interventions on legal cases at the European Court of Human Rights, 5 leading to positive judgements [resulting in release of 2 writers]; 113 Writers were languishing behind bars at the end of 2019.
Dear friends,

Every moment you spend in this place where you are imprisoned for having freely expressed your thoughts, for having written or drawn, you search for a possible escape on every wall. You know that moment will come when the rays of light will make their way inside, and you wait for it impatiently.

As Zehra’s letters show, PEN’s campaign and solidarity lifted her spirit while she was in prison. She said she was ‘engulfed by very beautiful feelings’, ‘never (felt) helpless’ and ‘stronger than (she) ever was on the outside’. In that box locking you in, stoned in on four sides, every message of support that finds its way inside helps the light to break out on these grey walls and brings you life. In this space where I was walled in, your support surrounded me, embraced me. I felt as if at the heart of green branches of ivy. Living with such a sensation, in such a place, is the finest feeling in the world.

Thanks to this, I was stronger than I ever was on the outside. I thank you for the attention you paid to each sentence that I wrote and to your support which allowed my voice to be heard in the outside world.

[...]

It is thanks to your support that I am now a new Zehra, more insistent in her words, and who manages to transmit her own dynamic in the struggle.

I thank PEN International infinitely, the entire PEN family scattered across the word, all the organizations, associations and individuals, the artists and authors, for their precious support. To them I make the promise that I will hold my pencil with a hand even more assured.

Zehra Doğan, Istanbul, 2 March 2019

In the face of intractable and growing conflicts and an ever-decreasing space for freedom of expression, the long-term needs of writers at risk and in exile is growing. Throughout the last five years, PEN International has been continuing to support writers through its network of PEN centres. PEN’s research on individual cases provides crucial evidence in asylum applications and is the basis for Resolutions and other government communications, as well as campaigns and advocacy.

Providing Assessments to the International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN)

PEN International provides expert assessment on the suitability of writers for residencies with ICORN. All individual casework is undertaken in the context of PEN’s wider research documenting freedom of expression violations worldwide, and is grounded in the principle of informed consent. Writers apply to ICORN for two-year temporary residencies, to allow them a period of respite to gather strength while continuing to write and share their work.

Over the course of the past four years, the number of writers applying to ICORN has increased steadily, leading to a higher number of assessments delivered by PEN. Since 2015, PEN International has been contracted to provide 100 assessments a year to ICORN; a target exceeded in 2019. Applications from MENA still account for 59 per cent of all those received for assessment in 2019. Within this, Iran accounts for 24 per cent. PEN International’s capacity to assess cases from the MENA region, where demand has been consistently high, has increased over the last five years, following the appointment of an Arabic speaker and a part-time Farsi speaker.

Writers in the MENA region are particularly at risk for reporting on conflict, human rights violations and political turmoil, and writers from Yemen, Libya, Iraq and Syria continue to seek protection in large numbers. Many Egyptian writers have been imprisoned solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression and their human rights work, and exiled writers in Egypt face considerable problems and little protection. During 2019, PEN International registered a continuation of the steadily increasing trend of Egyptian applicants, as well as a notable increase in applications from Yemen and Palestine. Political protests in Iraq and Lebanon in the second half of 2019 exacerbated the situation for writers and journalists in these countries, and we can expect more applications from these countries in the coming months.

Received in 2019

Africa 15%
MENA 59%
Europe 9%
Americas 2%
Asia 15%

PEN Emergency Fund:
The PEN Emergency Fund (PEF) was set up by Dutch PEN in 1971. It is an international fund for writers at risk in need of immediate support. The fund provides assistance to persecuted writers and writers in exile by way of a one-off grant which grants them, and sometimes their families, support to manage their lives and their risk in emergency situations.

Over the last five years, PEF has supported 143 writers. Often grants are given while a writer is awaiting an ICORN residency or following their release from prison. Money can quickly be transferred to the writer in need, sometimes on the day of application. The financial support provided by PEF has contributed to saving lives.
Since blogger-led protests broke out in 2013 demanding capital punishment for war crimes committed during Bangladesh’s liberation war and calling for a ban on religious politics, radical Islamist groups have claimed the killings of nine bloggers, calling for a ban on religious politics, radical Islamist committed during Bangladesh’s liberation war and demanding capital punishment for war crimes. Since blogger-led protests broke out in 2013, PEN International has taken a multi-pronged approach to our work to address both the immediate effects on individuals at risk and the wider systemic challenges that perpetuate the country’s stifling climate for free expression. Working with partners (including ICORN, PEN Centres, embassies and other NGOs), our protection team has provided direct assistance to 51 writers, bloggers and publishers since 2015.

Several of these individuals have received multiple kinds of support, which has included combinations of any of the following:

- Emergency grants;
- Relocation (both short and long term);
- Asylum support letters;
- Psychosocial support and medical treatment;
- Professional networking and development;
- Security training;
- Advocacy (local, regional and international).

PEN Centres can provide letters of invitation and short-term support for writers at risk to enable them to access protection and respite outside their country for a short period. This can include being met at the airport, arranging accommodation, ensuring funds are available for immediate subsistence costs, access to medical help and legal advice if required; moral support and solidarity; local networking; invitations to attend and speak at their public events.

In addition, we have successfully campaigned for the release of individuals such as world-renowned photographer Shahidul Alam, and conducted high-level advocacy at the UN Human Rights Council.
Key Challenges & Learning: Improving the Situation of Writers at Risk

Campaigning for Writers at Risk – what works?

Over the last five years, PEN International has reflected on the impact of its campaigning and noted the most significant impact takes place when the following campaign tactics are adopted.

A Sustained Approach: PEN International has reduced the number of rapid action alerts in order to focus efforts on a more sustained and targeted approach with fewer cases. Through continuous long-term campaigning, PEN International has been able to sustain international attention and ensure that the network is equipped to respond to changes and ongoing needs of focus cases. This change in approach led to 100 per cent of actions being taken up by PEN Centres in 2019.

Highlighting Lesser Known Cases: As campaigns for the likes of Zehra Doğan, Kurdish journalist and poet Nedim Türfent and Shaktika Sathkumara have shown, PEN International should seek to highlight lesser-known cases whenever possible, as the impact on their plight and wellbeing is particularly strong.

Capturing the Attention of the PEN membership: To ensure the sustainabilty of, what can often be, long-term campaigning, it is essential to capture the attention of the membership. Zehra Doğan’s case resonated with the PEN membership, in part due to her gender and profession. The other priority cases in Turkey at the time were all male and a gender-balanced casework is important for PEN Centres. Her artistic background also made her standout. As PEN International’s campaign on behalf of Nedim Türfent also shows, there is a growing interest in supporting creative/artistic cases.

Engaging High Profile Members: Since 2016, PEN has highlighted the plight of persecuted writers on the Day of the Imprisoned Writer (15 November) by connecting well-known writers with those in prison, and publishing a letter exchange in international media. In the case of Zehra Doğan, approaching Aung San Suu Kyi to Alamy in 2018 while he was in prison.

Protection of Writers at Risk

The key external challenges that PEN International faces in assisting writers at risk are:

- Lack of political will: As the refugee crisis has mounted within Europe, many governments have failed to meet their obligations under the UN Refugee Convention to provide protection to those with a well-founded fear of persecution. This has made it difficult to obtain visas.
- Lack of access to legal routes: to enable writers at extreme risk to seek refuge.
- Inadequate support for writers in need of long-term protection. Most emergency funding and short-term relocation programmes do not address the needs of writers in need of long-term protection.
- Family: writers under threat with families to support find it much more difficult to manage their risk, and few relocation programmes can accommodate families.
- Conflict and shrinking civil society space: The numbers of writers with protection needs are growing, and our work should include more prevention-oriented protection measures, which aim to build safe spaces and enabling environments for persecuted writers to work.

Long-term Protection of Writers at Risk

Since 2017, and working closely with PEN Uganda, PEN International has been developing a strategy to support the needs of exiled and refugee writers in long-term limbo in Uganda, large numbers of whom are languishing without status, unable to work and in extreme financial need. Most will be suffering from post-traumatic stress and may have complex medical and psycho-social needs.

According to the United Nations, Uganda hosts the largest number of refugees in Africa, mostly from South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Burundi, Rwanda, Eritrea and Somalia. As of 31st August 2019, the number of refugees in the country stood at 1,331,565, living in 12 districts, including Kampala, which has a refugee population of 70,191. Some of these are writers who live on their own or in camps, with little realistic prospect of being resettled through the UNHCR program or alternative pathways (including ICORN).

A working space has been secured by PEN Uganda in Kampala, providing physical space, resources and opportunities for professional development for displaced writers from the region. Along with a working space, the PEN Centre will provide a library, internet access, trainings, events and workshops. The space will enable writers to come together to pursue their literary or journalistic work with a view to reaching new audiences in Uganda, their home countries and further afield through the publication of magazines, anthologies and online material. This will in turn allow the writers to contribute to and enhance civil society in Uganda as well as contribute to the long-term rebuilding of their community and country of origin. The project has a second stream, which is to connect with writers in refugee camps through creative writing workshops and literary readings. The project is in its inception phase, with around 8 writers regularly visiting so far. Potential partnerships have been identified and will be further developed during PEN’s second field visit planned for June 2020 (the first took place in February 2020).

The project also aims to build the capacity of PEN Uganda to provide solidarity support, a platform and publishing opportunities and to act as a referral to partner organisations. In 2021, after the Make Space Project has been established, PEN International and PEN Uganda will bring PEN Centres from the region to visit the project and learn from the successes and challenges in order to strengthen PEN’s protection capacity across the region.

PEN International will aim to replicate the Make Space Project in Asia or MENA, in a country where the need is similarly great.

Protection of Writers at Risk

Over the course of the last five years, we have seen that PEN members have considerable diplomatic leverage in their own countries which can be utilised to safeguard writers at risk. In addition, our largely volunteer membership base affords long-term engagement, expertise and commitment. Many PEN members have considerable expertise working with persecuted writers built up over many years, and also lived experience of the issues. Key to developing this work, will be producing best practice guidelines that can be shared with new members who are interested in working with writers at risk so that PEN’s protection work remains sustainable.

We have also experienced the challenge of having weak Centres in countries with significant freedom of expression concerns, such as Bangladesh. PEN has sought to identify language experts and partners with expertise in human rights research and casework to support us in the verification of cases. Training and professionalisation of PEN Centres at a local level is urgently needed.

Through PEN’s cooperation with ICORN during this grant period, PEN’s knowledge and expertise on protection has been greatly enhanced and our networks with partners in the field strengthened. Coordination of support with partner organisations, for example via the Journalists in Distress Network (JID), has been especially important in order to ensure that resources are dispersed appropriately and as widely as possible.

The numbers of writers with protection needs are growing, and our work should include more prevention-oriented protection measures which aim to build safe spaces and enabling environments for persecuted writers to work within a rights-based framework.

Ali Dorani, aka Mr. Eaten Fish, Manus Island Cartoonist, speaking during At Home, Everywhere – the ICORN/ PEN International Network Meeting in Rotterdam 29-31 May 2019
Challenging Structural Threats

PEN International and its Centres challenge structural threats to freedom of expression through coordinated advocacy, joining national and regional coalitions to call for the repeal of laws that infringe on the right to free speech. PEN members carry out trial observations, conduct research and lobby duty bearers for change. Our members speak on public panels and at high-level institutions, harnessing their strength as storytellers to communicate the impact of laws that curtail free expression on the everyday lives of writers and on democracy, communicating PEN’s demands and recommendations.

Impact between 2015 and 2019:

- PEN International amplified the voices of persecuted writers at national, regional and international bodies: 21
- PEN Centres demonstrated improved engagement with duty bearers leading to increased and continued advocacy: 28
- PEN Centres have contributed to progress on repealing criminal defamation in 4 countries: 27
- PEN Centres from the global south that participating in, and shaping the agendas of, PEN’s regional networks and standing committees: 33
- Submissions to the United Nation’s Universal Periodic Review, leading to 346 recommendations being made by States which reflected PEN’s recommendations: 26
- Third party interventions before the European Court of Human Rights on issues including Turkey, Hungary and the case of Khadija Ismayilova (Azerbaijan). Positive judgements in 2 cases where PEN headed interventions led to release of Turkish writers Mehmet Altan and Sahin Alpay: 3

Tamil novelist Perumal Murugan was a PEN main case in 2017 as a persecuted writer. Event at the Frankfurt Book Fair to celebrate the election of Perumal Murugan as Vice-President of PEN International in 2018. From left to right: Tamil Publisher Kannan Sundaran, Perumal Murugan, Jennifer Clement, President of PEN International, and Carlos Torner, Executive Director.

“PEN is an international organisation with a wide network around the world that has done a lot of work in this area. PEN has developed declarations and other documents in this field and therefore has increased awareness in terms of the rights of minorities - particularly linguistic rights - that I find helpful in my work as UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues.”

Fernand de Varennes, United Nations Special Rapporteur on minority issues
“I’m deeply thankful the PEN/Opp, for the opportunity to publish the feeling-thinking from the Mayan Tsotsil culture, write and declare to readers and listeners of different cultures, it is an opportunity and a struggle for linguistic, cultural survival and the urgency to produce a change in behaviour in intercultural relations between peoples and nations in friction”

Manuel Bolom Pale, Tsotsil writer from Chiapas, Mexico

“[PEN's Culture is Oxygen] report, in its analyses and recommendations...should be read by writers, policy makers, translators and publishers and financial institutions with a stake in equitable global development”

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Kenyan writer and academic
Connecting Indigenous Language Writers with duty bearers and international networks

In 2019, PEN International's Translation and Linguistic Rights Committee Meeting, ‘Writing the future in Indigenous Languages’, was held in Chiapas, Mexico, with the aim of creating new platforms to amplify the voices of indigenous language writers and promote their voices at local, regional and international level.

Eighteen local Mayan writers were joined by PEN members from 13 Centres. New local partnerships were formed with UNESCO and INALI, to build bridges between indigenous language communities and local institutions. During and following the meeting, a large amount of local and national media attention gave a platform to the writers and the importance of protection and preservation of indigenous language and culture. A short film about the meeting is available here. Following the meeting a number of indigenous language writers voiced their desire to become part of the PEN International network.

One of these writers is Ruperta Bautista who was invited to take part in the PEN International Congress in Manila in September 2019, which was themed “Speaking in Tongues. Literary Freedom and the Indigenous Languages”, in line with the UN’s International Year of Indigenous Languages. Ruperta Bautista participated as a guest under the banner ‘Aspiring Maya PEN’ and represented Mayan writers on a panel together with two writers in indigenous languages of the Philippines, the chair of the Committee of Writers in Indigenous Languages of PEN Argentina, and the United Nations Special Rapporteur in Minority Issues Fernand de Varennes.

Following the panel, Fernand de Varennes offered his office to support and channel concerns and demands of indigenous communities in Chiapas and the Philippines. Ruperta and others continue to work with PEN International towards setting up Mayan PEN Centre in 2020.

A report compiling the debates, speeches and articles shared during the Chiapas meeting is due to be launched in April, titled: Memory of the Meeting “Writing the Future in Indigenous Languages”. The report contains contributions from 27 authors from 14 countries and 17 languages, many of them are indigenous writers. Each author provides a perspective on what is happening in their countries, cities, cultures or languages in relation to literature, journalism, traditions, human rights and freedom of expression.

PEN Centre projects working on indigenous language rights and literature promotion

Since 2015, PEN Philippines has been running a project working to support and motivate language teachers to teach local language literatures.

The Centre is an active and important part of a coalition and has become the go to place on regional languages and diversity of literatures. Having been invited to join a technical committee to advise the commission of higher education (CHED), they have developed a Literature Programme focused on regional representation and diversity and managed to bring about a change in provision meaning that library holdings of Philippine higher education institutions should have Filipino books and publications, especially on Philippine literature and cultures, equivalent to 20 per cent of the total collection, instead of 10 per cent. They believe that being able to influence higher education policy – with four Philippine PEN members on the CHED Technical Committee – is the most significant change they have seen through the project as it will impact thousands of beneficiaries including students, teachers and writers in the coming years.

Looking to the future: Translation and Linguistic Rights

Promoting translation and linguistic rights and indigenous language writers is a core focus of PEN International’s strategic plan 2020 to 2023. PEN International will pursue its work with linguistic communities to ensure their participation in world literature and to enable them to raise their concerns in wider society. PEN International will work for the recognition of the indisputable links between linguistic rights and other fundamental rights such as the right to participation, the right to information and free expression, women rights, health rights, right to fair trial and land rights and fundamentally the right to equality. Development of advocacy strategies at the local and regional level will draw attention to the interconnectedness of these rights and the barriers to their enjoyment.
PEN Sierra Leone: working to repeal Criminal Defamation

The Centre: Sierra Leone PEN was established to reinvigorate the diminished writing community after the civil war and encourage those writers who remained to play an active role in society. It now has a large school clubs programme, which focuses on encouraging reading and writing amongst young people. It has also held short story competitions. The Centre plays a national role in Sierra Leone and is invited to national conferences as one of the main organisations working on education and freedom of expression.

Freedom of Expression context: Sierra Leone has a diverse media sector and journalists are generally free to express their opinions. However, criminal libel provisions under the Public Order Act (POA), which was enacted in 1965, have been used over the years to undermine media freedom and freedom of expression. These laws have been used to stifle political and social debate and to deter investigative journalism and media reporting of high-level corruption and other sensitive issues. Although few prosecutions have been recorded, the authorities have used the POA’s provisions to arrest, briefly detain and harass journalists and others, thereby contributing to a climate of self-censorship that weakens the media and harms the public interest. In addition to the libel laws, some journalists have faced intimidation and physical attacks from the authorities as well as other actors, in particular most recently during the 2018 elections.

Structural threats to Freedom of Expression: PEN Sierra Leone has been working to address the threats posed by the POA to freedom of expression. The Centre has worked with the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists on criminal defamation, in particular signing up to actions in support of Jonathan Leigh, a journalist who was arrested in 2013 on sedition libel charges. PEN Sierra Leone has also signed on to strategic litigation cases as amici curiae (friends of the court) alongside PEN International, PEN Centres and other freedom of expression organisations, such as on the landmark case of Konaté v Burkina Faso at the African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights, which found that imprisonment for defamation violated freedom of expression.

Most recently, PEN Sierra Leone increased its engagement on the issue of repealing criminal defamation laws through a two-year project funded by the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF) to build the capacity of PEN Centres to advocate for repeal of criminal defamation laws in Africa. As part of the project, which was coordinated through PEN International, the Centre took part in several training programmes between 2016-2018, both at national and international levels in South Africa, Uganda and home in Sierra Leone. PEN Sierra Leone also carried out interviews with writers to gauge their experience of laws that impede freedom of expression, and drafted a section of PEN’s overall report. This was a first for the Centre, who have significant experience with journalism and writing for young people but had not been involved with a research project of this kind. This research then informed the Centre’s advocacy efforts.

PEN Sierra Leone collaborated with sister PEN Centres in South Africa, Zambia, Uganda and Ghana to work on the UNDEF project and the report. PEN Sierra Leone used the voices of the writers they had interviewed to back up their interventions alongside PEN Centres at continental and regional meetings held with policy makers in Africa. PEN Sierra Leone participated in advocacy meetings at regional level, for example, the 60th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR) held in Niamey, Niger in May 2017. All of these events, trainings and meetings with civil society organizations, government and policy makers strongly increased the confidence and skills of the Centre.

In addition to the training support provided by PEN International, in terms of advocacy, research and monitoring and evaluation, the Secretariat also facilitated connections with regional advocacy targets, for example by facilitating PEN Sierra Leone to attend the ACHPR and a high level panel at the UN Human Rights Council in June 2018.

PEN Sierra Leone’s most significant achievements: During the project implementation period under review, the Centre’s visibility with regards to the project was established. They collaborated with many institutions including the Sierra Leone Association of Journalist (SLAJ), other civil society organization members, government officials and diplomats including the British High Commission in Sierra Leone.

This great collaborative effort led to the formulation of a joint policy paper as an outcome of a National Symposium held in September 2016. This paper was submitted to the government and with pressure from civil society organisations including PEN Sierra Leone, the government published a white paper in 2017 for onward submission to Parliament for enactment. A further meeting of civil society organisations was held in June 2018 following the election of a new government in Sierra Leone. Since then the government has committed to repeal the sedition libel provisions of the POA. The bill to repeal the libel law was tabled before Parliament for debate in December 2019, where it is currently. PEN Sierra Leone continues to draw attention to the matter to ensure that the bill is passed and becomes law.

Improvement in their ability to advocate with duty bearers: Throughout the last few years, PEN Sierra Leone has marked significant institutional improvement in their ability to advocate before duty bearers. During the course of the UNDEF project they met with the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Justice to share their concerns around the use of the sedition libel laws and push for their repeal. They had not previously met with government officials on this issue.
PEN Sierra Leone has strengthened their working relationship with the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (ISLA) through the various stakeholder meetings and advocacy meetings they have been part of together.

PEN Sierra Leone report that they have built trust and people are more comfortable working with them in the area of criminal defamation. PEN Sierra Leone has also reported that their visibility has increased from collaborating with various CSOs and carrying out meetings with officials and diplomats.

PEN Sierra Leone’s direct meetings with civil servants, as well as with the British and Irish High Commission, show that the Centre has gained access to government and other influencers, and that they are working collaboratively with the key stakeholders on this issue.

PEN Sierra Leone said that ‘from a humble start PEN has become a reference’, giving rise to invitations as discussant on radio programmes as well a better relationship with some Government actors (evidenced for instance by an invitation to collaborate on a national writing competition).

people are more confident in working with them in the area of criminal defamation. PEN Sierra Leone has also reported that their visibility has increased from collaborating with various CSOs and carrying out meetings with officials and diplomats, including the British High Commission.

PEN Sierra Leone’s direct meetings with civil servants, as well as with the British and Irish High Commission, show that the Centre has gained access to government and other influencers, and that they are working collaboratively with the key stakeholders on this issue.

Case Study: Myanmar Advocacy

PEN Myanmar was founded with 23 members – among them renowned blogger and activist Nay Phone Latt, Comedian, poet and activist Zargar, poet Saw Wai and writer Ma Thida – at PEN’s 79th International Congress in Reykjavik, Iceland, in 2013 with the mission of strengthening freedom of expression and legal mechanisms in Myanmar, in addition to working on the challenges facing the publishing industry and providing support to emerging writers. At the core of the Centre’s values is the understanding of the vital role of civil society in the development of an emerging democracy.

Over the past six years, the Centre has grown to represent voices across the country running a variety of different programmes. It has diversified its funding beyond that supplied by PEN International and other Centres. The Centre plays a central role in national advocacy efforts to bring about policy change in the country.

Through its work, PEN Myanmar has built a strong reputation among the country’s expanding civil society and has worked in coalition with other organisations on the ground to support the country’s burgeoning democracy and promote a human rights framework to which the country should aspire.

Freedom of Expression Context

In March 2016, the National League for Democracy (NLD) became the first civilian-led government to lead the country since 1962, bringing with it renewed hope for progress. The transition itself marked the first orderly handover of power to an elected government since Myanmar’s independence in 1948. With a litany of repressive legislation inherited from colonial rule and a legacy of military dictatorship, the NLD had the opportunity to bring about sweeping reforms in the country. This, however, has not come to fruition.

Several laws that criminalise expression – such as defamation, sedition, and article 66(d) of the Telegraphic Communications Law – going beyond the restrictions that are permitted under international law remain in effect and have been used against dissenting writers, journalists, human rights defenders. At particular risk are those critical of the government, Aung Sang Suu Kyi, the military or operations in Rakhine State, where the government has been found by the United Nations Fact-finding missions to have committed gross human rights violations of ethnic groups, especially the Rohingya.

PEN Myanmar reports that, by virtue of being members of the opposition for so long, few NL representatives have legislative experience and as such are cautious when considering the implications of abolishing existing laws. In some cases, the government have actually sought to strengthen restrictions on freedom of expression.

Challenging structural threats to Freedom of Expression: PEN Myanmar has focused its advocacy efforts on amending three key pieces of legislation that it identified as restricting freedom of expression:

- the News Media Law,
- the Printing and Publishing Enterprise Law
- Section 66(d) of the Telecommunications Law

By working together with a coalition led by PEN International, PEN Myanmar submitted a shadow report to the UN ahead of Myanmar’s scrutiny under the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2015. This process also led PEN Myanmar’s then-president to speak at the UPR pre-sessions and form a coalition with other Myanmar civil society organisations present. The Centre reports having continued to work with its coalition partners in the intervening years, and has expanded the number of coalition partners to include the ARTICLE 19 Myanmar office. The Centre engaged in the State’s mid-term review and anticipates that it will continue to engage in the mechanism together with its partners.

While the previous government failed to accept any UPR recommendations that explicitly called for the amendment of the News Media Law and Printing and Publications Enterprise Law, they did agree to conduct a review. As such, working in coalition with partners such as the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, PEN Myanmar has lobbied the authorities and conducted workshops. Through sharing their work with legislators, PEN Myanmar was invited to submit suggested amendments to the News Media Law to the Civil Rights, Democracy and Human Rights Committee.

In addition, the Centre sought to build the capacity of legislators in understanding their international obligations when it comes to freedom of expression, working with partners such as the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission, to deliver multiple trainings over the period to representatives of all states and regions and at both the upper and lower levels of parliament, as well as at the committee level, on freedom of expression. During the trainings the Centre has emphasised the importance of legitimacy, proportionality and public consultation in law making.

The Centre has also delivered freedom of expression awareness trainings for civil society organisations 17 times over the period across 14 provinces, which they have repeated in order to reach as many civil society organisations as possible.

Through its public events the Centre also contributed to awareness-raising at a local level among young people and university students. It is their expectation that these individuals will go on to call for policy change and best practice in the field of human rights and free expression. Through its Literature for Everyone programme, which was funded for three years by the Civil Society Programme, the Centre has promoted debate and dialogue around the country in at least 140 events held to date.

Through the production of its Freedom of Expression Scorecard – which it produces in collaboration with several other civil society organisations – the Centre is able to closely monitor the freedom of expression landscape, raising awareness and holding authorities to account. The scorecard informs training materials used in their workshops with CSOs and the authorities. While it has been received positively by CSOs, journalists and the international community, the Centre reports that it has not been as well-received by the Ministry of Information, which has refused to take part in the workshops.

PEN Myanmar’s most significant achievements

Achieving legislative reform, especially in such a fragile political landscape in which institutions have only just begun the long work of democratising, is likely to be a long-term process. However, PEN Myanmar are positioning themselves well to act as key advisers to the government regarding legislative reform and freedom of expression.

At this stage, the Centre has developed trust among legislators and has worked hard to educate them around freedom of expression and its importance during this phase of democratic transition.

Furthermore, PEN Myanmar has shown leadership and courage by speaking out on extremely sensitive issues, such as hate speech, and is working in an increasingly hostile environment.

Improvement in their ability to advocate with duty bearers

PEN Myanmar report that, through their trainings, they have been able to develop strong relationships with advocates for freedom of expression within government, who continue to reach out to the Centre for advice on law, policy and practice both through official channels such as trainings and informal meetings. Additionally, they have been contacted by other training participants, as well as the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission and government officials to assist in their activities pertaining to freedom of expression.

Their improved relationships with duty-bearers is borne out by the fact that, following the Centre’s intervention, the Shan State government have changed its position in the region to bi-lingual, recognising both Myanmar and Shan. The Shan State authorities have also welcomed PEN Myanmar’s offer of workshops and sent their personnel to attend workshops conducted by PEN Myanmar together with the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission.
Learning: Challenging Structural Threats Through Programmes, Literary and Research Initiatives

Working in Coalition
From 2015 to 2019, PEN International increased its impact in relation to challenging structural threats to freedom of expression, principally through its work in coalition. This is particularly evident in its work in Turkey, where the goal has been to provide consistent and regular information to state actors at all levels, and in its work in Africa to repeal criminal defamation.

The impact of the work to repeal criminal defamation has been considerable. Within PEN International, the project model is widely viewed as one upon which to build future projects, both in terms of the approach it took in targeting structural freedom of expression issues, and also the way in which it supported PEN Centres with capacity building in research, project management and coalition building.

Approaches to conducting advocacy in coalition:
• Consistent messaging by all actors;
• A focus on individual stories to communicate broader issues;
• Working across sectors; across the freedom of expression and human rights movement, with academics and cultural actors;
• Having a body of research gives more weight to events and to demonstrate the impact of the laws.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

The use of participatory monitoring and evaluation tools was new to PEN International with the creation of a Learning and Accountability Coordinator post as the project began in 2016. Reporting mechanisms were designed with learning at their core, and opportunities for reflection and adaptation were created throughout the project. Therefore, there was incorporation of lessons learned during the project lifespan, for example the decision to engage with regional mechanisms, such as the Pan African Parliament (PAP). Initially, the project plan was to hold an event at the African Union Heads of State meeting, but after getting advice from key parliamentarians in the region, including the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of expression at the African Commission of Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR), it was decided that the PAP was a better place to direct PEN’s efforts. This proved true in the sense that PEN was able to establish a relationship with the PAP and build engagement with parliamentarians. While the process has not been easy and takes time, thanks to this project PEN International has laid the groundwork for greater engagement with parliamentarians across Africa. This use of MEL tools within projects to compliment research and ensure adaptability is one that was extremely affective and which PEN International will enhance going forward.

Creating Spaces for Literature

Strengthening Civil Society: Increased space for freedom of expression
PEN International creates spaces for literature and language around the world, running access to education and empowerment through literature projects for those marginalised in terms of literature and language. PEN Centres build the confidence of young and new writers and give them a platform to speak, promoting their voices across communities and cultures, beyond prison walls and up through power structures.

Between 2015 and 2019:

48,406 writers, journalists, academics, teachers, parents, community members, young people and more have benefitted from the Civil Society programme, of which 22,921 are female and 25,485 are male.

PEN Centres estimate that a further 307,868 people have benefitted from projects indirectly.

Centres ran projects working with marginalized communities in 13 countries reaching 9,650 people, of which 4,876 female and 4,774 are male.

Improved the writing and critical thinking skills of more than 9,650 people, of which 4,774 are female and 4,876 are male.

Engaged more than 1,031 community members in discourse around young people’s rights.

Amplified the voices of 33,928 young people across 13 countries who gained confidence to speak up in public forums, of which 14,994 are female and 17,407 are male.

Equipped more than 451 teachers with the skills and resources to teach local and national literatures.

Provided enhanced knowledge of human rights issues for more than 4,957 young people.

Led 5 capacity building trainings for over 54 PEN members and civil society actors.
PEN Centres creating space for literature, language, debate, dialogue, ideas and opinions

**PEN Nigeria** has been successfully re-established as a voice on literature and freedom of expression issues through literary festivals, events and partnerships. 349 participants, 218 female, 131 male

**PEN Mali** has organized several dialogues among different cultures in the country, including Tuareg people from Azareed, as a participation of writers to the peace process. In 2016 PEN Mali organized an International Conference of Writers, Journalists and Traditional Communicators about «Growth of Violent Extremism as a Threat to the State, Social Cohesion, Rights and Liberties». 127 participants, 39 female, 88 male

**PEN Guinea Bissau** held events with high school and university student associations and took part in a book fair. They also held various workshops in institutions and universities in the capital city, growing their visibility, partnerships and membership. 129 participants, 22 female, 94 male

**The Gambia PEN** has grown its visibility and membership in the country. It held five induction activities targeting young and aspiring writers. They organized four literary events. The Centre welcomed two hundred new members with over a hundred people attending events, about half of whom are women. They established clubs in three schools with two further in formation. 114 participants, 45 female, 69 male

**PEN Guinea** has been running school clubs in a number of schools for several years now. The school clubs aim to encourage children to read and write, and to promote literature within education. Eventually PEN Guinea would like to see this kind of attention to literature extended to mainstream education. 25,070 participants, 10,510 female, 12,560 male

**PEN Sierra Leone** has been running its School Club project for nearly 10 years, this year expanding its programme to 20 further schools across the country. The PEN Youth Clubs (PYCs) consist of literary and debating activities and PYC Regional Literary Evening events. In 2019, the Centre used learning to strengthen their project. They set up the mobile library in four hard to reach areas and run a series of outreach and engagement opportunities such as performances and debates. Watch a short film about PEN Sierra Leone’s project here. 230 participants, 208 female, 246 male

**PEN Ghana** hosts 72 PEN Youth Clubs (PYCs) across the country, set up in the twelve years that the project has been running. Eight new PYCs were introduced in 2016 and 2017. The school clubs teach basic writing skills and increase awareness of human rights and social responsibilities. 1170 participants, 802 female, 377 male

**PEN Togo** used its grant to successfully break into the Togolese literary landscape, with its innovative and popular creative writing workshops for young people. It has expanded its project in 2019. The Centre has been focusing on supporting young writers by linking them up with established Togolese authors, organizing ‘master classes’ and setting workshops in schools in N Suspension. The project expanded from 2018 to 2019 to reach beyond the capital to young and diverse audiences. 2197 participants, 2002 female, 195 male

**PEN Nigeria** has been successfully re-established as a voice on literature and freedom of expression issues through literary festivals, events and partnerships. 349 participants, 218 female, 131 male

**PEN Mali** has organized several dialogues among different cultures in the country, including Tuareg people from Azareed, as a participation of writers to the peace process. In 2016 PEN Mali organized an International Conference of Writers, Journalists and Traditional Communicators about «Growth of Violent Extremism as a Threat to the State, Social Cohesion, Rights and Liberties». 127 participants, 39 female, 88 male

**PEN Guinea Bissau** held events with high school and university student associations and took part in a book fair. They also held various workshops in institutions and universities in the capital city, growing their visibility, partnerships and membership. 129 participants, 22 female, 94 male

**The Gambia PEN** has grown its visibility and membership in the country. It held five induction activities targeting young and aspiring writers. They organized four literary events. The Centre welcomed two hundred new members with over a hundred people attending events, about half of whom are women. They established clubs in three schools with two further in formation. 114 participants, 45 female, 69 male

**PEN Guinea** has been running school clubs in a number of schools for several years now. The school clubs aim to encourage children to read and write, and to promote literature within education. Eventually PEN Guinea would like to see this kind of attention to literature extended to mainstream education. 25,070 participants, 10,510 female, 12,560 male

**PEN Sierra Leone** has been running its School Club project for nearly 10 years, this year expanding its programme to 20 further schools across the country. The PEN Youth Clubs (PYCs) consist of literary and debating activities and PYC Regional Literary Evening events. In 2019, the Centre used learning to strengthen their project. They set up the mobile library in four hard to reach areas and run a series of outreach and engagement opportunities such as performances and debates. Watch a short film about PEN Sierra Leone’s project here. 230 participants, 208 female, 246 male

**PEN Ghana** hosts 72 PEN Youth Clubs (PYCs) across the country, set up in the twelve years that the project has been running. Eight new PYCs were introduced in 2016 and 2017. The school clubs teach basic writing skills and increase awareness of human rights and social responsibilities. 1170 participants, 802 female, 377 male

**PEN Togo** used its grant to successfully break into the Togolese literary landscape, with its innovative and popular creative writing workshops for young people. It has expanded its project in 2019. The Centre has been focusing on supporting young writers by linking them up with established Togolese authors, organizing ‘master classes’ and setting workshops in schools in N Suspension. The project expanded from 2018 to 2019 to reach beyond the capital to young and diverse audiences. 2197 participants, 2002 female, 195 male

**PEN Nigeria** has been successfully re-established as a voice on literature and freedom of expression issues through literary festivals, events and partnerships. 349 participants, 218 female, 131 male

**PEN Mali** has organized several dialogues among different cultures in the country, including Tuareg people from Azareed, as a participation of writers to the peace process. In 2016 PEN Mali organized an International Conference of Writers, Journalists and Traditional Communicators about «Growth of Violent Extremism as a Threat to the State, Social Cohesion, Rights and Liberties». 127 participants, 39 female, 88 male

**PEN Guinea Bissau** held events with high school and university student associations and took part in a book fair. They also held various workshops in institutions and universities in the capital city, growing their visibility, partnerships and membership. 129 participants, 22 female, 94 male

**The Gambia PEN** has grown its visibility and membership in the country. It held five induction activities targeting young and aspiring writers. They organized four literary events. The Centre welcomed two hundred new members with over a hundred people attending events, about half of whom are women. They established clubs in three schools with two further in formation. 114 participants, 45 female, 69 male

**PEN Guinea** has been running school clubs in a number of schools for several years now. The school clubs aim to encourage children to read and write, and to promote literature within education. Eventually PEN Guinea would like to see this kind of attention to literature extended to mainstream education. 25,070 participants, 10,510 female, 12,560 male

**PEN Sierra Leone** has been running its School Club project for nearly 10 years, this year expanding its programme to 20 further schools across the country. The PEN Youth Clubs (PYCs) consist of literary and debating activities and PYC Regional Literary Evening events. In 2019, the Centre used learning to strengthen their project. They set up the mobile library in four hard to reach areas and run a series of outreach and engagement opportunities such as performances and debates. Watch a short film about PEN Sierra Leone’s project here. 230 participants, 208 female, 246 male

**PEN Ghana** hosts 72 PEN Youth Clubs (PYCs) across the country, set up in the twelve years that the project has been running. Eight new PYCs were introduced in 2016 and 2017. The school clubs teach basic writing skills and increase awareness of human rights and social responsibilities. 1170 participants, 802 female, 377 male

**PEN Togo** used its grant to successfully break into the Togolese literary landscape, with its innovative and popular creative writing workshops for young people. It has expanded its project in 2019. The Centre has been focusing on supporting young writers by linking them up with established Togolese authors, organizing ‘master classes’ and setting workshops in schools in N Suspension. The project expanded from 2018 to 2019 to reach beyond the capital to young and diverse audiences. 2197 participants, 2002 female, 195 male
PEN Centres creating space for literature, language, debate, dialogue, ideas and opinions

2015 to 2019

PEN/Opp is an online magazine, founded by Swedish PEN, that serves as a forum for people to tell stories that relate to the struggle for freedom of expression across the globe. In the last five years, PEN/Opp has published 17 issues containing 196 texts from dissenting and diverse voices.

United Kingdom: 13 writers from 13 PEN Centres from around the world attended a workshop in Oxford in July 2017, equipping them with new skills, knowledge and networks.

Wales PEN Cymru’s project supports Kurdish communities through creative writing workshops and performances. Read more about the project here.

70 participants.
41 female, 29 male
42 under 26

Honduras Centre: In the challenging context for free expression in Honduras, including convictions against students, the PEN Centre managed to maintain open spaces to discuss barriers to freedom of expression through literary workshops for the students of the National Autonomous University in Honduras.

108 participants, 68 female, 34 male

PEN/Argentina delivered creative writing workshops in informal settlements and youth incarceration centres in Buenos Aires. The workshops provided the young participants with an appreciation of the written and spoken word, as well as giving them the tools to develop a deeper sense of self-worth through language.

1830 participants.
2084 female, 751 male

PEN Mexico created PEN Puntos, a digital platform which collects the stories of journalists and writers who have been killed, the voices of those who have lived to tell their story and confront the reality of their country, as well as the paths of those who live in exile. Read the blog here.

280 participants, 130 female, 150 male

PEN Haiti used its grant to create a website for the PEN Centre. The Centre did extensive research in advance of the website design to ensure the website was geared to all its membership and to attracting a new, young membership. The website has been successfully launched.

88 Participants: 61 female, 27 male.

PEN Venezuela welcomed in 2018 an International PEN mission to Caracas and organized meetings with journalists, publishers, freedom of expression NGOs and a public literary event about the state of freedom in Venezuela.

88 Participants: 61 female, 27 male.

PEN Bosnia and Herzegovina ran book groups and workshops to use literature and linguistic studies as a bridge to connect young people aged 17 to 24 from divided and fragmented communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH).

65 participants, 37 female, 28 male

Kurdish PEN held creative writing workshops for young people and women in five Ezidie Internally Displaced People (IDP) camps across Iraqi Kurdistan, with the aim of amplifying their voices to fight stigmas and stereotypes associated with Ezidie culture and to build understanding and empathy to enhance peace and togetherness within the society.

52 participants, 24 female, 28 male

Central Asia PEN carried out a programme of visiting lectures in universities in North and Southern Kyrgyzstan and in Tajikistan. In continuation of Central Asia’s previous programme of summer schools, the visiting lectures brought different cultures together and equipped students with an understanding of their human rights and a love of literature.

189 participants, 102 female, 87 male

Afghan PEN supported and promoted girls’ and women’s literature by publishing an anthology of women’s poetry and holding public events and readings to promote female voices.

128 participants, 68 female, 114 male

PEN Bolivia and Herzegovina ran book groups and workshops to use literature and linguistic studies as a bridge to connect young people aged 17 to 24 from divided and fragmented communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH).

65 participants, 37 female, 28 male

Kurdish PEN held creative writing workshops for young people and women in five Ezidie Internally Displaced People (IDP) camps across Iraqi Kurdistan, with the aim of amplifying their voices to fight stigmas and stereotypes associated with Ezidie culture and to build understanding and empathy to enhance peace and togetherness within the society.

52 participants, 24 female, 28 male

Central Asia PEN carried out a programme of visiting lectures in universities in North and Southern Kyrgyzstan and in Tajikistan. In continuation of Central Asia’s previous programme of summer schools, the visiting lectures brought different cultures together and equipped students with an understanding of their human rights and a love of literature.

189 participants, 102 female, 87 male

Afghan PEN supported and promoted girls’ and women’s literature by publishing an anthology of women’s poetry and holding public events and readings to promote female voices.

128 participants, 68 female, 114 male

PEN Bosnia and Herzegovina ran book groups and workshops to use literature and linguistic studies as a bridge to connect young people aged 17 to 24 from divided and fragmented communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH).

65 participants, 37 female, 28 male

Kurdish PEN held creative writing workshops for young people and women in five Ezidie Internally Displaced People (IDP) camps across Iraqi Kurdistan, with the aim of amplifying their voices to fight stigmas and stereotypes associated with Ezidie culture and to build understanding and empathy to enhance peace and togetherness within the society.

52 participants, 24 female, 28 male

Central Asia PEN carried out a programme of visiting lectures in universities in North and Southern Kyrgyzstan and in Tajikistan. In continuation of Central Asia’s previous programme of summer schools, the visiting lectures brought different cultures together and equipped students with an understanding of their human rights and a love of literature.

189 participants, 102 female, 87 male

Afghan PEN supported and promoted girls’ and women’s literature by publishing an anthology of women’s poetry and holding public events and readings to promote female voices.

128 participants, 68 female, 114 male

PEN Bosnia and Herzegovina ran book groups and workshops to use literature and linguistic studies as a bridge to connect young people aged 17 to 24 from divided and fragmented communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH).

65 participants, 37 female, 28 male

Kurdish PEN held creative writing workshops for young people and women in five Ezidie Internally Displaced People (IDP) camps across Iraqi Kurdistan, with the aim of amplifying their voices to fight stigmas and stereotypes associated with Ezidie culture and to build understanding and empathy to enhance peace and togetherness within the society.

52 participants, 24 female, 28 male

Central Asia PEN carried out a programme of visiting lectures in universities in North and Southern Kyrgyzstan and in Tajikistan. In continuation of Central Asia’s previous programme of summer schools, the visiting lectures brought different cultures together and equipped students with an understanding of their human rights and a love of literature.

189 participants, 102 female, 87 male

Afghan PEN supported and promoted girls’ and women’s literature by publishing an anthology of women’s poetry and holding public events and readings to promote female voices.

128 participants, 68 female, 114 male

PEN Bosnia and Herzegovina ran book groups and workshops to use literature and linguistic studies as a bridge to connect young people aged 17 to 24 from divided and fragmented communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH).

65 participants, 37 female, 28 male

Kurdish PEN held creative writing workshops for young people and women in five Ezidie Internally Displaced People (IDP) camps across Iraqi Kurdistan, with the aim of amplifying their voices to fight stigmas and stereotypes associated with Ezidie culture and to build understanding and empathy to enhance peace and togetherness within the society.

52 participants, 24 female, 28 male

Central Asia PEN carried out a programme of visiting lectures in universities in North and Southern Kyrgyzstan and in Tajikistan. In continuation of Central Asia’s previous programme of summer schools, the visiting lectures brought different cultures together and equipped students with an understanding of their human rights and a love of literature.

189 participants, 102 female, 87 male

Afghan PEN supported and promoted girls’ and women’s literature by publishing an anthology of women’s poetry and holding public events and readings to promote female voices.

128 participants, 68 female, 114 male

PEN Bosnia and Herzegovina ran book groups and workshops to use literature and linguistic studies as a bridge to connect young people aged 17 to 24 from divided and fragmented communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH).

65 participants, 37 female, 28 male

Kurdish PEN held creative writing workshops for young people and women in five Ezidie Internally Displaced People (IDP) camps across Iraqi Kurdistan, with the aim of amplifying their voices to fight stigmas and stereotypes associated with Ezidie culture and to build understanding and empathy to enhance peace and togetherness within the society.

52 participants, 24 female, 28 male

Central Asia PEN carried out a programme of visiting lectures in universities in North and Southern Kyrgyzstan and in Tajikistan. In continuation of Central Asia’s previous programme of summer schools, the visiting lectures brought different cultures together and equipped students with an understanding of their human rights and a love of literature.

189 participants, 102 female, 87 male

Afghan PEN supported and promoted girls’ and women’s literature by publishing an anthology of women’s poetry and holding public events and readings to promote female voices.

128 participants, 68 female, 114 male
PEN International's CSP has created space for literature, language, debate and dialogue in all of its projects, creating opportunities and platforms for young and diverse people to write and share their ideas and opinions through workshops, events, awards and online.

In 2019, PEN Eritrea in Exile, Afghan PEN, PEN Uganda and PEN Togo increased their capacity to reach and attract diverse audiences leading to greater participation in activities and events. Both the PEN Centres and their project participants have increased their confidence to speak up in public forums on issues facing communities locally and nationally. PEN Eritrea in Exile has been running a project called ‘breaking the silence’ focused on supporting exiled Eritrean writers to tell their stories. The Centre has held workshops in Israel and Uganda, has mentored the project participants following the workshops and has given a platform to their stories through their website and social media, competitions and their new Freedom of Expression award. The inaugural award was presented at the PEN/ ICORN Biennial Conference in May 2019. The impact achieved through the project can be highly attributable to the work of the PEN Centre and to the civil society programme, as the widely visited website, funded by CSP seed grant in 2015, is seen as a resource by many human rights organisations such as Amnesty International and the Committee to Protect Journalists.

The Gambia PEN, PEN Sierra Leone, PEN Haiti, PEN Guinea Bissau and PEN Argentina all ran short projects, between two months and a year. All five of them created opportunities for young voices to express themselves and have a platform.

Afghan PEN has been supporting female voices by publishing an anthology of women’s poetry and holding public events and readings. More than 100 people participated in one of these events, 45 per cent of which were girls and women. Afghan PEN note ‘this is a huge number of women participating in an event in Afghanistan where a lot of restriction and limitation have existed for girls and women’. Feedback from female writer Dr Sarwe Rasa was that she ‘appreciated the publishing of Afghan women poetry collection…it is a great job by Afghanistan PEN Centre which publish a collection of Afghan female poetry in three languages…[This has] rarely happened in Afghanistan and it is the best decision to gather all Afghan female authors and increase unity of Afghan nation’.

PEN Togo has created many opportunities for young and diverse voices to express themselves and have a platform. They have deliberately reached outside of the capital and have focused on ensuring the project is accessible for women and girls, having identified this as a weakness in their first round of CSP funding. The Centre established PEN clubs in remote areas to reach out to diverse, young demographics and report seeing the power of spoken word and slam poetry. The Centre reported that they feel more grounded, having developed a strategy and set themselves up with a permanent office.

In 2019, 11 PEN Centres acknowledged the different needs of women and men in their projects with two taking steps to recognise these differences within their project activities. Indeed, PEN Togo planned many of its workshops and events with the focus of attracting women and diverse audiences. Nine PEN Centres were ‘Gender neutral’, acknowledging differences but not addressing the barriers to access in planning and delivery of activities. With the groundwork laid for growth, PEN International will work closely with PEN Centres during the planning phase of their projects to ensure this awareness translates practically into project design and management going forward, to ensure that the obstacles for women and girls are challenged and that power imbalances are addressed through all civil society projects.
For the last five years, PEN Uganda has been running creative workshops for prisoners in some of the highest security male and female prisons in the country, supporting inmates to produce high quality creative work as a form of rehabilitation. Through poetry, theatre and creative writing, many inmates have said they have been given hope of a second chance, in a country that often disregards people in prisons as ‘without value’.

Many prison social workers and welfare officers have observed that inmates who take part in the workshops have a renewed sense of self-worth and motivation. Christine Naigaga, Rehabilitation and Integration Officer at Luzira Prison said: “You can see in their poetry they are remorseful and they have regret. They found it harder to express this regret to us before the workshops, but after they had started writing it down, they could come to us and say, this is what we’ve written, that’s how we feel. It takes time for people to open up, especially after some serious crimes, so this writing project has really helped them to share what they really feel. As social workers, we have to work out how best to help them. Before the creative writing project, it was like guess work. After they started pouring out their hearts we could help, we could come up with a plan.”

We have seen a lot of changes within the project participants, because as they have been able to pour out their hearts, they have been trying to heal within themselves. Here, as rehabilitation officers, you can’t do much until someone has started trying to heal from within. Through getting in touch with, and pouring out, their feelings they are starting to realise, yes, we have committed these crimes, but life doesn’t end there. We are human beings, we have feelings, we have friends.

Seeing the impact of the creative writing workshops in Luzira and Jinja prison, authorities have requested that PEN Uganda continue to replicate and roll out this programme to other prisons around the country. Prison officials see the potential impact of the workshops being, ultimately, that participants are less likely to reoffend.

For the last five years, PEN Uganda has been running creative workshops for prisoners in some of the highest security male and female prisons in the country, supporting inmates to produce high quality creative work as a form of rehabilitation. Through poetry, theatre and creative writing, many inmates have said they have been given hope of a second chance, in a country that often disregards people in prisons as ‘without value’.

Many prison social workers and welfare officers have observed that inmates who take part in the workshops have a renewed sense of self-worth and motivation. Christine Naigaga, Rehabilitation and Integration Officer at Luzira Prison said: “You can see in their poetry they are remorseful and they have regret. They found it harder to express this regret to us before the workshops, but after they had started writing it down, they could come to us and say, this is what we’ve written, that’s how we feel. It takes time for people to open up, especially after some serious crimes, so this writing project has really helped them to share what they really feel. As social workers, we have to work out how best to help them. Before the creative writing project, it was like guess work. After they started pouring out their hearts we could help, we could come up with a plan.”

We have seen a lot of changes within the project participants, because as they have been able to pour out their hearts, they have been trying to heal within themselves. Here, as rehabilitation officers, you can’t do much until someone has started trying to heal from within. Through getting in touch with, and pouring out, their feelings they are starting to realise, yes, we have committed these crimes, but life doesn’t end there. We are human beings, we have feelings, we have friends.

Seeing the impact of the creative writing workshops in Luzira and Jinja prison, authorities have requested that PEN Uganda continue to replicate and roll out this programme to other prisons around the country. Prison officials see the potential impact of the workshops being, ultimately, that participants are less likely to reoffend.

PEN Uganda held a launch of the anthology in the prisons in February 2020. Danson Kahyana, President of PEN Uganda said: “Four former inmates, whose work appears in the book, were present at the launch. I am glad I followed up on their coming, for the Chief Guest, the Director of Correctional Services, Mr Samuel Akana, presented them to the inmates with so much enthusiasm, telling them that writing poetry, short stories and drama was one of the activities that had contributed to their rehabilitation and integration into the society. This was humbling.

In her speeches in both prisons, the Commissioner of Rehabilitation and Reintegration, Madam Elizabeth Nantuka, informed the inmates that when we proposed the project, she doubted if anything worthwhile would come out of it, for this kind of work had never been done in prison before. When she saw the work coming out - the one we published in the first newsletter - she doubted that it was inmates’ work, until she saw the raw writing, and matched it with the published work. She was grateful to PEN International and Sida for funding of the project, which has given her and her staff an opportunity to know what goes on in the inner lives of the inmates, for their writing are unspoken thoughts and emotions.

During the launch, the inmates in the male prison took the opportunity to successfully advocate for sufficient writing materials to continue with their creative writing outside of the workshops. Danson Kahyana continued: Madam Nanfuka told us, as we bid farewell to each other, that the project has been transformational. For this reason, we should roll it to all Ugandan prisons. She said we should find a way of following up the writers who are still in prison, so that they continue writing. She promised to give us permission to access the prisons whenever we wanted, and to follow up on the Director’s promise of providing writing materials.

Alongside the anthology ‘As I stood dead before the world’, Voices from Luzira Prison, PEN Uganda have created a newsletter of literature from Jinja prison featuring more than 50 pieces. They are working towards their second anthology, to be launched in Summer 2020.
PEN/Opp: a platform for freedom of expression

Published 17 issues containing 196 texts written by writers in exile, censored texts, confiscated texts that have shaken those in power, texts that have been smuggled out of prisons, or that have barely been imagined due to self-censorship

Articles featured on PEN/Opp have been read by 1,121,200 unique visitors

Today, PEN/Opp is read in approximately 150 countries, including where censorship prevails and freedom of expression is dire such as in China, Iran, Russia, Turkey, Uganda, Saudi Arabia, Belarus, Bangladesh and Hungary

Awarded the Swedish Cultural Magazine of the year twice in 2015 and 2018

Since the launch of the new website in October 2019, PEN/Opp has increased the number of readers by 19.78 per cent

“Working amid siege, without any means of communication is the worst a journalist can face in the current times. For over 5 months, there was no internet in Kashmir as the Indian government, after stripping contentious region’s semi-autonomous status, tried to put an iron-curtain on all sort of protests and especially news from the region. Writing in PEN/Opp about how reporting in these times is an extraordinary task was most needed. In the times of constant news flow from conflict-ridden places, like Kashmir, putting on record the gags journalists are facing is most important work. PEN/Opp has been a reliable means of expression amid the voice-choking governments, media spaces.”

Aakash Hassan, journalist from Kashmir

“The fear. The way in which certain words can no longer be used aloud, or in polite conversation. PEN/Opp gave me room to talk about this, about how we shape our environment and fight to protect it through the words we do not want to cancel. Being able to voice this keeps our hopes alive.”

Ilaria Maria Sala, author and journalist from Hong Kong

PEN/Opp, formally called The Dissident Blog, is an online magazine that publishes the writing of dissident writers, writers in exile, writers at risk and censored texts that challenge those in power and assert the right to free speech. In the last five years, the magazine has published texts focused on a wide variety of issues and countries. In 2019 the magazine covered: The Unsung Heroes of Ethiopia; Hong Kong Voices With China in View; Linguistic Rights; Battle Of The Internet.

The new/revamped magazine was officially launched at the 2019 PEN International Congress in Manila, Philippines, with a Linguistic Rights edition strategically planned to match its theme. The development of the website combined feedback from Sida, PEN International, the board of Swedish PEN, PEN/Opp contributors and collaborators in order to present a new site with a more modern, clearer and more accessible approach.
In the last five years, PEN International has expanded its civil society programme reaching a total of 30 Centres and introducing a capacity building component, in the form of three Civil Society Programme Development Workshops and one Learning Exchange.

The Civil Society Development Workshops bring PEN members together for a week’s training in programme management, including theory of change, monitoring and evaluation, budgeting and financial reporting, and governance. They have been described as ‘transformative’ and have led to an improvement in compliance with PEN International’s policies, as well as in the quality of project planning, management and reporting. Furthermore, the workshops resulted in new partnerships between PEN Centres and a sharing of methodologies and best practices.

PEN International’s pilot Learning Exchange took place in 2018. Five PEN Centres – PEN Malawi, PEN Togo, The Gambia PEN, PEN Nigeria and PEN Zimbabwe – carried out a collaborative evaluation of PEN Sierra Leone’s school club project. The purpose of this trip was for visiting partners to feedback strengths and lessons learned to Sierra Leone, as well as feeding this into their own project planning and delivery. Simultaneously, the exchange aimed to build the capacity of the PEN Centres to carry out peer-to-peer reviews and evaluations. Research questions guided daily discussions and resources on evaluation methodologies including focus groups, and key informant interviews were available to participating Centres. Learning garnered has since been reflected in new projects, including in PEN Sierra Leone’s 2019 mobile library project.

For the last three years, PEN Centres in Latin America have come together on the Day of the Dead (1 November) to campaign for an end to impunity. Coordinated campaigning across the region has increased PEN’s presence in the Americas and strengthened the network, with increased collaboration including from new and revitalised Centres. Between 2018 and 2019, the campaign contributed to an increase in collaborative work between the network of PEN Centres in North and Latin American countries, with Centres developing actions together on a range of issues. PEN Centres mark the day with a range of activities, remembering writers and journalists who have been killed and calling on their governments to bring an end to impunity, violence and persecution of writers and journalists, as well as to protect freedom of expression. In 2019, seven PEN Centres from six countries participated in the campaign: Cuban Writers in Exile PEN Centre (USA-Cuba), PEN San Miguel de Allende (Mexico), PEN Nicaragua, PEN Guatemala, PEN Haiti and PEN Paraguay, running series of panel events, publishing brochures and creating a public altar.

In December 2019, to mark Human Rights Day, fifteen PEN Centres from the global south wrote a series of articles on the freedom of expression situation in their respective countries. Several then held public panel events to explore these issues and mark the day. The approach proved an effective way to engage Centres, with some had been traditionally less vocal on freedom of expression issues. Participating PEN Centres were: Afghan PEN, PEN Argentina, PEN Bolivia, PEN Eritrea in Exile, PEN Gambia, PEN Ghana, PEN Guinea, PEN Haiti, PEN Malawi, PEN Malaysia, PEN Nicaragua, PEN Nigeria, PEN Sierra Leone, PEN Togo, PEN Uganda and PEN Zimbabwe. PEN International showcased the work produced by PEN members on its website and on social media so far reaching more than 284,000 people through Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

PEN Guadalajara organised a public event on the Day of the Dead to remember all the journalists killed in the recent times in Mexico, the most dangerous country to be a journalist.
‘PEN’s Civil Society Programme is very relevant and necessary in the countries we visited. We saw how small grants can provide entry-points to advocacy and campaigning around linguistic and human rights in countries where FOE is under threat[...]
Continuing and refining the Civil Society Programme in the future would play to PEN’s strengths.’

External Evaluation of PEN International’s work, conducted in 2018

Over the past five years, the programme has developed and grown in terms of the capacity of Centres and of the Secretariat to support those Centres. We have seen an increase in Centre skills in terms of project management, including project design, management, monitoring and evaluation, reporting and, in some cases, financial management.

Going forward, as the 2018 external evaluation suggests, PEN International will build a sustainability component into project design and deliver Civil Society Development Workshops with a minimum of one project coordinator and one board member from each participating Centre, with the aim of training PEN members as trainers so that knowledge can cascade through the movement. We will also reduce the number of large grants, in order to refine and improve the Secretariat’s support to those that are running.

To ensure gender and diversity are mainstreamed through the programme, the first stage of the application process will be a needs assessment, including gender analysis. PEN International will work closely with PEN Centres at this early stage to ensure the different needs of women and girls are being addressed and barriers to access and representation are reduced through project activities.

Based on the success of the Civil Society Development Workshops and Learning Exchange Trips, PEN International will continue, refine and strengthen this area of work. In their reporting, PEN Centres highlighted the following key learning points from the period 2015 to 2019:

- The importance of the need’s assessment and of dedicating time to build trust within a community
- Adaptability as a key to success for many of these projects
- The necessity of building an amount for unforeseen expenses into the budget
- The importance of building partnerships throughout the projects
- The importance of incorporating gender analysis and making the projects accessible for girls and women from the beginning of the planning process
- Working towards sustainability: how to ensure facilitators of workshops remain engaged and involved in the project
- Planning and timing were a challenge for some PEN Centres. Delays from both secretariat and Centre meant that some Centres found it hard to catch up with their original project plan, particularly when reliant on school terms. A strong and realistic timeline is essential.
PEN International’s new strategy 2020 to 2023 represents an evolutionary development, rather than a radical shift in organisational direction. The 2018 evaluation of PEN International’s work recommended a refocusing of PEN International’s action, to maximise impact and ensure that efforts of staff and members are not diffused by overstretching the organisation’s modest resources. Learning gained from the last five years has been fed into strategic planning to ensure PEN International’s work builds on its successes and learns from the challenges.

PEN International’s work is built on the belief that literature can be a powerful catalyst for societal change and given the numerous threats to free expression, PEN International will focus its attention and resources over the coming years to build on the strength of its campaigning in the following areas:

• Increased and growing threats to writers from autocratic states and extremist non-state actors and enduring impunity for crimes committed against them
• Suppression of women and minorities’ free expression
• Squeezing of civil society space – repressive regimes closing and controlling avenues for free debate, artistic expression and dissenting voices
• Rise in hateful speech both on- and off-line with increased attacks particularly against women and minorities as well as legal barriers
• Legal Barriers – criminalisation of speech, including defamation/blasphemy
• Repression of languages and the loss of cultural heritage

PEN International advocates for structural change by encouraging, empowering and enabling writers to fully play out their role as key cultural actors. We will maximise PEN International’s influence and campaigning strength to join forces with allied freedom of expression advocates to press where necessary for policy changes to uphold freedom of expression.

We will specifically focus on three interconnected and reinforcing thematic areas:

• Promoting free expression particularly for women and minority groups
• Countering hate speech and legal barriers to expression
• Promote translation and linguistic rights

PEN International will build on the strength of its work to tackle manifestations of intolerance and prejudice. Research will continue to underpin our advocacy both for individual writers as well as improvements to the structural barriers to all forms of expression. Events, campaign actions and online platforms such as PEN/Opp will be enhanced by digital communications tools in order to reach new audiences and stimulate dialogue among and between communities, to create an enabling environment for free speech and equality.

We will continue to strengthen our assistance and solidarity to individual writers in prison or at risk of persecution and will work with strategic partners such as ICORN, PEN Emergency Fund, Journalists in Distress Network and IFEX members, and expand protection expertise and capabilities across the membership.

We will increase PEN International’s presence worldwide connecting our global network of PEN Centres and strengthening partnerships with allies to expand our reach and influence campaigns that promote and defend free expression.

We are committed to advancing the participation and perspective of women in shaping PEN International’s governance and programming.

We will strengthen PEN International’s flagship programme, the Civil Society Programme, to support Centre-led projects, which promote PEN’s mission and strategic focus.

We will significantly grow our funding base to acquire the skills and resources necessary for PEN Centres, the PEN International Board and the Secretariat to meet the challenges in delivering the aspirations of this strategic plan.

Looking forward: PEN International 2020 to 2023