2019 has been a year of growth for PEN International: in strength, in campaigning, in vision, in networking capacity. The United Nations proclaimed 2019 the International Year of Indigenous Languages and PEN celebrated with two major events. A meeting in Chiapas on translation and linguistic rights with the goal to promote all literatures without exception by Writing the Future in Indigenous Languages. The second was the PEN International Congress in Manila, under the banner Speaking in Tongues: Literary Freedom and Indigenous Languages, where the diversity of Filipino languages were experienced by all PEN delegates in the presence of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, Fernand de Varennes.

We evaluated the work for the whole period 2015–2019, which acknowledged that our international community is stronger than ever, thanks to multiplying our presence through the Civil Society Programmes and regional network meetings in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The protection of writers at risk in the face of an increasing number of authoritarian regimes and from the cruelty of non-state actors remains a critical area of our work. This was reaffirmed in May 2019 through the joint conference in At Home Everywhere held in Rotterdam with PEN’s Writers in Prison Committee and the International Cities of Refuge Network.

On 5 October 1921, when writer Catherine Amy Dawson Scott gathered a small crowd of writers in the Florence restaurant in Soho to launch PEN, who could have imagined that it would grow into a network of more than 143 centres worldwide? Today PEN is present in more than one hundred countries across all continents, including representing Tibetan, Uyghur, North Korean, Vietnamese, Iranian, Cuban and Eritrean literatures in exile.

As PEN prepares for its 100th birthday in 2021 with the deep conviction that our tradition of networking, debating and joint campaigning to protect and promote free expression remains as vital today as it was one hundred years ago. As a global network of writers, we are strengthened in our mission promoting literature and freedom of expression in all corners of a world where too often writers face judicial harassment, hate speech, attacks on women’s and minority voices and the daily violations of linguistic rights.
Who we are - History

PEN International was started in 1921 (then known simply as PEN) by Catherine Amy Dawson Scott as a way to unite writers after the devastation of World War I.

Over nine decades we have become a genuinely international organisation, encompassing a wide array of cultures and languages, and today the overwhelming majority of PEN International’s 143 Centres come from outside Europe. Women’s rights are promoted by centres participation to PEN Women Writers Committee and PEN has promoted peace in countries like Bosnia, Mali, Afghanistan or Sierra Leone through its Writers for Peace Committee.

In 1940, English PEN published its ‘Appeal to the Conscience of the World’ letter, a passionate plea for the protection of freedom of expression written by English PEN’s first woman president, Storm Jameson and co-signed by English writers including Vita Sackville-West, E.M. Forster, H.G. Wells, Vera Brittain, and Rebecca West.

There is a cast-iron sculpture entitled Witness by Antony Gormley, marking our 90th anniversary, standing outside the British Library in London.

We were the first worldwide association of writers, and the first organisation to point out that freedom of expression and literature are inseparable.

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Members of PEN in our first years included Thomas Mann, Rabindranath Tagore, Victoria Ocampo and Tōson Shimazaki.

Our name was conceived as an acronym: ‘Poets, Essayists, Novelists’ (later broadened to ‘Poets, Playwrights, Editors, Essayists, Novelists’)

Joining with partners across the UK in the early 2000s, we successfully campaigned for the protection of artistic freedoms in response to the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006.

...and what we stand for - (The Charter)

- Literature, knows no frontiers and must remain common currency among people in spite of political or international upheavals.
- In all circumstances, and particularly in time of war, works of art, the patrimony of humanity at large, should be left untouched by national or political passion.
- Members of PEN should at all times use what influence they have in favour of good understanding and mutual respect between nations and people; they pledge themselves to do their utmost to dispel all hatreds and to champion the ideal of one humanity living in peace and equality in one world.
- PEN stands for the principle of unhampered transmission of thought within each nation and between all nations, and members pledge themselves to oppose any form of suppression of freedom of expression in the country and community to which they belong, as well as throughout the world wherever this is possible. PEN declares for a free press and opposes arbitrary censorship in time of peace. It believes that the necessary advance of the world towards a more highly organised political and economic order renders a free criticism of governments, administrations and institutions imperative. And since freedom implies voluntary restraint, members pledge themselves to oppose such evils of a free press as mendacious publication, deliberate falsehood and distortion of facts for political and personal ends.
- The Board: The current governing board of PEN International is made up of our Executive Board consisting of International President, Jennifer Clement, International Secretary, Kätlin Kaldmaa, International Treasurer, Eric Lax, and seven other Board members.
Where we operate

143 centres around the world, networked from London

- North America
- South America
- Europe
- Africa
- Asia
- Australia
Our income
January 2019 to December 2019

How our income was generated 2019

How we used our income

Our detailed, audited annual reports can be found at pen-international.org/who-we-are/governance/audited-accounts

Funders/Donors/Partners
It is with a resounding thank you that we celebrate the incredible support of our generous donors, partners, and supporters. The continuous support of our funders has ensured our global influence and safeguarded our vital work with writers against increasing threats. Our donors make a significant impact on our work. We are immensely grateful for any help we receive and rely on kind donations to deliver our civil society programmes and vital protection work. As always, PEN International’s commitment to the promotion of literature and fight for freedom of expression would not be possible without the valued support of our donors across the world.
Our budgeted income for 2020
January 2020 to December 2020

Our budgeted expenditure for 2020
January 2020 to December 2020

STAFFING AND GOVERNANCE

- Staffing and recruitment: £1,027,000
- IT and administration: £177,000
- Board capacity building: £10,000
- Staff strategy training: £19,000
- Board meetings and congress: £15,000
- Audit and consultants: £54,000

CORE ACTIVITIES

- Civil Society projects: £155,000
- Congress: £60,000
- NMFA Project: £2,000
- Community - Network meetings: £53,000
- Other costs: £28,000
- Dissident Blog: £60,000
- ICORN: £22,000
- Fundraising cost and volunteers & interns: £23,000
Grants per region 2019

Europe £9,199
Americas £39,748
Africa £69,450
Asia £44,645

Budgeted grant per region 2020

AFRICA
- Afrikaans 5,000
- Eritrea 5,000
- Nigeria 5,000
- Sierra Leone 5,000
- South Africa 5,000
- Zimbabwe 5,000
- Make space Uganda 15,000
- Internet access for webinars 4,000
Total 49,000

ASIA
- Afghanistan 5,000
- Bangladesh 5,000
- Cambodia 5,000
- Malaysia 5,000
- Myanmar 5,000
Total 25,000

MENA
- Iraq 5,000
Total 5,000

EUROPE
- Bosnia 5,000
- Ilkyaz Website 10,000
- Creative witnesses 5,000
Total 20,000

AMERICAS
- Argentina 5,000
- Chile 5,000
- Guatemala 5,000
- Haiti 5,000
- Honduras 5,000
- Nicaragua 5,000
- Paraguay 5,000
- Puerto Rico 5,000
- San Miguel d’Allende 5,000
- Uruguay 3,000
- Day of the dead 7,700
Total 55,700

Highlights per region 2019

AFRICA
- PEN Eritrea in Exile, PEN Uganda and PEN Togo increased their capacity to reach and attract diverse audiences leading to greater participation in activities and events.
- PEN Uganda runs creative workshops for prisoners in some of the highest security male and female prisons in the country.
- PEN Eritrea in Exile is running a project called ‘breaking the silence’ focused on supporting exiled Eritrean writers to tell their stories.

ASIA
- Afghan PEN has been supporting and promoting girls and women literature and more than 100 people participated in one of their events, 45 percent of which were girls and women.

EUROPE
- PEN International takes part in a joint advocacy mission to Turkey in September. The report is launched during a public discussion in Brussels where mission members present their findings to EU leaders and policy makers on how the EU can best engage to support the plight of Turkey’s journalists
- The Dissident Blog is rebranded as PEN/Opp at Congress in Manila, Philippines

AMERICAS AND THE CARIBBEAN
- PEN Argentina ran a project aimed at indigenous language promotion in schools.
- Another project focused on sharing literature across communities.
- PEN Haiti created a website for the PEN Centre, helping attract new, young membership.
- PEN Centres mark Day of the Dead with a range of activities, remembering journalists who have been killed

GLOBAL
- 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 held public panel events to explore these issues and mark the day.
- Consultation and planning results in PEN International’s strategy 2020 to 2023, an evolutionary development that will bring PEN through its centenary year.

2020 Civil society projects update

Due to the unprecedented and devastating impact of the Coronavirus Covid-19, with the world in lockdown or living with social distancing, many PEN projects and events have been seriously disrupted. As in-person literary events, meetings and trainings were not possible in 2020, PEN International took the opportunity to reallocate its resources under the Civil Society Programme to invest in the communications and online presence of its Centres notably in Africa, Asia and the Americas. Modest grants have been provided to 24 PEN Centres who have developed online activities which seek to engage new audiences.

The grants are intended to support PEN Centres to grow their digital presence and voice, through a range of activities webinars, lectures, literary readings, online tutorials, interviews and podcasts using Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, SoundCloud, mobile apps, Centre websites and other platforms. We are delighted that so many Centres shared their ideas on how they are combining literary events with PEN’s freedom of expression concerns and highlighting PEN’s global themes, for example using our PEN manifestos (e.g. Women’s Manifesto, Girona Manifesto) to stimulate debate and reach wider audiences.
Key achievements 2019

32
PEN Emergency Fund grants were given to writers facing immediate risk, supporting 10 writers with medical treatment, five with accommodation and living costs and a further 17 with relocation, travel and subsistence.

5
asylum applications from writers threatened with deportation or stranded in refugee camps

79%
of writers who saw positive changes in their situation said that the solidarity provided was important to them.

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

The lives of 96 writers at risk have markedly improved through a range of initiatives including solidarity actions and campaigning, legal interventions and humanitarian assistance

14 writers released from prison in part as a result of PEN’s campaigning.

42 indigenous language writers (Innu, Izëtal, Tzosi, Maya, Zoque, Ch’ić, Marn, Mëphoa, Nahuatl, Quechua, Mapudungun, Aymara, Bikol) joined 17 PEN Centres in Chiapas, Mexico, for the Translation and Linguistic Rights Committee Meeting, creating new platforms to amplify the voices of indigenous literatures.

7,055 young people, writers, journalists, academics, teachers, parents, community members and human rights activists have been engaged in spaces created by PEN Centres around the world.

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

Since the launch of the new website in October 2019, PEN/Opp (previously named the Dissident Blog) has increased the number of readers by 20%

14 PEN Centre projects have opened spaces for young people to express themselves creatively and critically

IMPACT

- 14 writers released from prison, with a further eight being acquitted or having charges dropped, following PEN campaigns
- Kurdish journalist, painter and poet, Zehra Doğan, is released after spending more than 500 days behind bars and warmly thanks PEN for its solidarity campaign
- A PEN delegation presents the report Russia’s strident stifling of free speech 2012–2018 to Russia’s Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights, which pledges to cooperate with the organisation
- New PEN Centres in Guinea Bissau, Iraq, Moscow, Perth, and Cape Verde are set up

IMPACT

- Ukrainian writer and filmmaker Oleg Sentsov is released from prison after spending five years behind bars
- Yirgalem Fisseha Mebrhatu receives the inaugural PEN Eritrea Freedom of Expression Award at the International PEN/ICORN network meeting
- Liu Xia, the Chinese poet, writer and PEN member, is finally allowed to board a plane to Germany, following an eight-year-long unofficial house arrest
- İlinkyaz – a platform for young writers in Turkey – launch-es with the support of PEN International, PEN Turkey and Norwegian PEN
Theory of change

Outcomes

Support civil society to be creative and critical, so that it can influence policy and practice

Defend freedom of expression and promote literature by improving the situation of writers at risk

Enhance freedom of expression across the globe by influencing law, policy and practice

Build the capacity of PEN Centres, Secretariat and Board to deliver the strategic plan 2020 to 2023

Stakeholders

Writers, community actors, partners, donors, civil society organisations, policy makers, national governments, international institutions, sister human rights organisations, cultural organisations, publishers, the media, universities

Who we are

PEN International is a grassroots movement, made up of more than 20,000 writers from across the globe who work together to defend freedom of expression and promote literature. One of the peculiarities of PEN International is also being cross-organized on 4 Committees, the Writers in Prison Committee, the Translation & Literary Rights Committee, the Women Writers Committee and the Writers for Peace Committee.

Strategy

Areas of influence: what we’ll change

- Improve the situation of writers at risk, who are imprisoned or otherwise persecuted
- Create spaces for literature, language, debate, dialogue, ideas and opinions
- Challenge structural threats to freedom of expression

Our highest priorities: where we’ll work

- Promoting Freedom of Expression for women and minority groups
- Countering hate speech
- Promoting Translation and Linguistic Rights

How we’ll change as an organisation

- Strengthen the institutional capacity and sustainability of PEN
- Diversify our funding
- Strengthen and refine our civil society programme
- Enhance our communications

Our values

Solidarity • Expanding understanding • Fostering empathy • Cultural diversity • Creativity • Accountability • Transparency • Collaboration
Why work for PEN

We asked our colleagues why they chose to work for PEN International. Here’s some of the things that they said...

- My interest has always been in the human rights field, particularly humanitarian relief and PEN has given me the chance to focus on that work
- I love what I do and helping people
- My interest has always been in the human rights field, particularly humanitarian relief and PEN has given me the chance to focus on that work
- I believe in PEN’s mission and it makes me feel professionally fulfilled
- PEN is the only organisation that brings together literature and human rights
- The organisation has incredible potential and does lots of good work with hard-working staff and I’m glad to be a part of it
- Because I believe it is a truly unique organisation, that does amazing work
- I’ve been asked to serve the organisation and I feel that my contribution helps

Our biggest motivators for working at PEN...

- Intrinsic desire to do a good job 28%
- Having a real impact 23%
- Feeling encouraged and recognised 17%
- Believe in the organisation 17%
- Camaraderie, peer motivation 5%
- Growing professionally 5%
- Other 5%

In 2020 we shall...

- prepare 100 assessments for writers persecuted for their work and seeking to relocate for short term residencies with the International Cities of Refuge
- provide up to 50 emergency grants for writers at risk and actively campaign for those imprisoned or facing judicial harassment
- continue to advocate for the protection and strengthening of free expression policy and practice across the world
- publish our unique Case List which records over 250 cases of writers who are persecuted and imprisoned for their writing
- support up to 25 PEN Centres across the Global South with bespoke expertise and small grants to support digital inclusion and to promote their on line presence
- provide skills training to our members through a series of 10 interactive webinars
- complete PEN’s historic centenary digital archive which will launch PEN’s centenary year
- hold online literary events and interactive free expression panels at our four online Committee meetings
- hold our first digital Congress and welcome four new Centres to the PEN family

...as well as increasing our fundraising efforts

PEN International relies on voluntary donations and grants to be able to deliver its wide-ranging activities across five continents, as well as the crucial membership fees from Centres and our work with strategic partners. Our far-reaching and ambitious Civil Society Programme is supported by a grant from the Swedish International Development Agency, but one of the conditions is that we find matched funding from elsewhere.

In 2020 a new strategy has been developed in order to protect our work into the future and to address the risk of relying on a small number of funding sources. We hope that our Centenary in 2021 will provide the impetus and opportunities to diversify our funding streams, and to raise much more awareness and support of the work of PEN internationally.

We have achieved much in our 100 year history, but there are many challenges ahead, many global threats to freedom of expression, and many writers who are persecuted, imprisoned or silenced, who need the solidarity of the PEN movement. We can only help, only raise awareness, only campaign, only fight for change, if we have financial stability.

To that end, we will be fundraising for the essential but largely ‘behind the scenes’ work of the Protection and Research teams. We will be fundraising in order to continue our support of committee activities. We will be fundraising for the crucial but largely hidden work of our finance and admin teams. We will be fundraising to ensure the continuation of our Congress and other events. We will be fundraising to secure the work of our staff across the regions to support hundreds of local initiatives. We will be fundraising in order to support our Centres and to make PEN strong.
Some words of hope and thanks

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
Kurdish journalist, painter and poet,

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.

Shahidul Alam
Bangladeshi photographer and writer

I was released from jail on 29 July 2019, and since that day I am looking for a way to communicate with you. 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 organisation like PEN International is a source of hope for me and everyone who aspires to freedom of opinion, thought, expression and writing... With all heart... A thousand thanks to PEN International.

Mohamed Cheikh Ould Mkhaitir
Mauritanian blogger

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 Tsotzil 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

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... On this iron bunk bed, your solidarity will continue to be beside me, I believe this wholeheartedly.

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

I thank 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.

Dr. Stella Nyanzi
Ugandan academic, writer and activist