

## **Report from the International Secretary for the period June 1999 to Spring 2000.**

### **The UDLR meeting.**

My first task following the friendly and successful Warsaw Congress was to visit the Catalan Centre, which hosted the Follow-up Committee of the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights meeting 1st to 3rd July 1999. The meeting itself was held in the town of Girona, some 100 km north of Barcelona.

The core organisation and the hard work making this conference possible was provided by the dedication of the Catalan PEN Centre. The UDLR text, as an agreement between all the many NGOs concerned with linguistic questions, was first adopted in 1996, and was then sent to UNESCO as a proposal. It was there promoted by the Division of Languages, and was met by good will by many governments and hard opposition from a few. The task of the July meeting was to discuss and define the aims of continued action in promoting the UDLR document.

More than a dozen participants gathered from all over the world, thanks to the energy and commitment of the Catalan PEN under the leadership of Carles Torner, assisted primarily by Oriol Ramon (Secretary to the Conference) and a small secretariat. An agenda was drawn up for future action, aiming at ultimately achieving UNESCO support for a text that could go forward to the UN as a Declaration on this matter.

On behalf of International PEN, I would now like to ask every Centre to appoint, if you have not done so already, a special (board) member to be contact person for UDLR-questions. This person could also be responsible for co-ordinating Centre action towards home Governments on the importance of the UDLR aims. They could also be asked to try to get their home governments to translate the UDLR document into their home language. Thanks to Catalan PEN, International PEN has a considerable reputation among other NGOs in this matter, and it would be both in accordance with the aims of our Charter, and enhance our profile if we could be associated with success in this important aspect of promoting literature. Please get in touch with either me or directly with Catalan PEN in this matter!

### **Our Flagship Event for next year**

On September 13th I flew to Sarajevo where I was the guest of the President and Secretary of the Bosnian Centre, Mrs Hanifa Kapadzic-Osmanagic and Ms. Ferida Durakovic and also met other representatives of the board of the Bosnian Centre. The main purpose of my visit was to discuss the proposal for a Regional meeting in accordance with the resolution passed in Warsaw to be held in Sarajevo next year. The Bosnian Centre was very much in favour, despite the obvious material limitations that would define such a manifestation.

This meeting has now been designed vis-à-vis UNESCO as the Flagship Event of International Pen in our contribution to UNESCO's Year 2000 in promoting the Culture of Peace! It is expected to take place in October 2000.

Following this meeting, I flew to Ljubljana and there met Boris Novak and President of Slovene PEN Marko Kravos and Secretary Iztok Osojnik. We discussed the co-ordination necessary for matters concerning the Bled and Sarajevo meetings. Boris has now confirmed that the Bled Writers for Peace meeting will take place May 3rd - 7th 2000.

## **Ohrid**

From Ljubljana on to Macedonia for the 5th Ohrid Regional PEN Conference, organised by the Macedonian Centre. Some 30 foreign participants and guests combined with a broad participation of local members for three days of activities. Needless to say, given the restrictions imposed by the circumstances of a near isolated country and some uncertain governmental policies, the meeting seemed to be a very important demonstration of both poetry and the independent mind of the Macedonian PEN Centre.

The organisational input of the Macedonian Centre and its core members was extremely praiseworthy. Nevertheless, let us be aware of the pressures to which our Centres in this region are subjected. The Ohrid meeting gave me the opportunity of greater insights into the tensions of the region, which cannot help but influence the working conditions of the Centres.

## **Algiers**

On September 25th I flew to Algiers for the Arab Study Days on Literature and Poetry, coinciding with the Algerian Book Fair September 27th-29th. These were formally organised by UNESCO, International PEN, the Algerian Writers Union and the Office of Authors Rights (ONDA). Many important representatives from mainly North African countries attended. UNESCO had masterminded the international part of the conference, and in doing so had pointed in the direction of International PEN to ensure a connection to an international platform for literature.

The conference sessions started with thought-provoking contributions from distinguished authors, writers and poets, but very quickly developed into heated discussions encompassing i.a. the many linguistic divisions in the region.

The conference ended on a happy note. The Authors Union of Algeria came to support publicly International PEN as a colleague, not a competitor. The possible establishment of an Algerian Centre will of course follow due process and will be monitored through the London office. In all, the conference can be perceived as a signal event which can obviously be seen as promising in the politics of reconciliation, and which UNESCO sees as being of fundamental importance in supporting a culture of freedom of expression in Arab countries.

## **Kurdish PEN**

The Conference organised by the Kurdish PEN Centre and the Kurdish Institute in Brussels on "The Language, Literature and Culture of the Kurdish People" took place in Brussels Dec 9-10, 1999

Presentations treated the Kurds in international law, modern Kurdish poetry, standardisation and regional dialects in Kurdish, Kurdish literature for children, Kurdish mythology, the publication of Kurdish books, films by or about Kurds, and Kurdish literature in exile. A much appreciated reading of poetry took later place at the Kurdish Institute.

It must be underlined that at no point during the conference did anyone raise any question about matters not closely concerned with the set themes of the conference. Schougin's above-mentioned analysis of the Turkish situation - and the situation in Turkish prisons - was strictly

factual.

The final communiqué, which formally was the responsibility of the Chair was read in session, met with strong applause and declared accepted. The participants of the Conference pledged themselves to the peaceful development of the linguistic and cultural rights of the Kurdish people. They called for the support of the International Community in recognising the plight of the Kurdish people, and for the understanding and assistance in realising the birthright of the Kurds to their own language. They also called on all governments, both of the European union and others, to assist in the process of the thoroughgoing change necessary in order to assure Kurds everywhere these basic human rights.

In concluding, the President, Zaradachet Hajo, thanked all concerned for making the Conference a signal event in the history of Kurdish PEN.

### **Galician PEN**

Immediately after the February meeting of the Executive Committee, I flew to the beautiful historic city of Santiago de Compostela to join our president Homero Aridjis as guests of the Galician PEN Centre. President Luiz Tosar and his board were considering a Poetry Festival, and we were able to link this to our combined efforts with UNESCO to draw global attention to the same idea. UNESCO has during the year established March 21 as World Poetry Day – and in the course of promoting our relations to UNESCO I propose that International PEN adheres to this day where possible and convenient. Galician PEN have now expressed their intention to hold a festival in this spirit, commencing next year. This holds great promise, and will, I hope, be the inspiration for many.

### **The Strategic Plan**

In my address to the Assembly in Warsaw, I stated as my intent to set in place a Strategic Development Plan for International PEN. The work on this document has proceeded throughout this period, and is now under the attention of the Executive Committee. It will during the coming year be subject to an extensive consultation process, aiming at reaching the Assembly in a finalised state next year. Already before that – due to the fund-raising necessities of this organisation - it may become part of activities aimed at strengthening our economic position. A document of this kind is, as many will realise, quite necessary for extended core fundraising.

Our economic concerns at the Head Office are grave. New premises must be sought, and staffing extended to cope with growing tasks that present threatening overload. The Treasurer will be providing details on the current situation in due time.

Other projects, earlier presented in outline, still await steps towards realisation. This is true for ‘The Young PEN’, which during the year has now been accepted by UNESCO as a project to be detailed. Again, we are held back by economic considerations. On the other hand, many ideas also depend on the enthusiasm of single PEN Centres, who can help and assist with ideas and concrete projects. We look forward to hearing from those who feel stimulated by the ideas behind ‘The Young PEN’.

It is a pleasure to be able to announce a plan for economic membership due support to African

Centres, as detailed separately. This is thanks to a grant from Swedish SIDA. The support is as yet geographically confined to African Centres, but does not exclude similar projects for other less-favoured countries and Centres, should suitable sources present themselves – possibly raised through our own active creative forces! We are continuously examining possibilities of this kind.

In concluding – some two months before the next Assembly at the time of writing – the activities of International PEN hold great promise, although the cloud of economic pressure falls heavily over our ambitions. It will take the energy and determination of all to set International PEN on an even economic keel within the year. With the support of all I know we shall not fail.

Terry Carlbom