

## Report by the International Secretary to the Assembly of Delegates in Mexico, November 2003

Dear President, Vice-presidents, Delegates and Friends,

With the very memorable Congress in Ohrid in mid-September 2002 still vivid in memory, the following year has included much office work and much travel. It is more pleasurable to mention the latter, so I will begin with recalling the first trip post-Congress, which took me to Berlin and the international EBU conference seminar on 'Culture in Radio', held in connection with the Prix-Europa festival in Berlin, 17<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> October 2002. The public-service media, gathered as a section within the EBU, had not had a get-together like this for years. The selected theme was how to understand and react to present-day pressures on public-service radio, and the fact that this theme included aspects of civil courage in defending civil rights seemingly led to my being invited to attend. I believe the PEN experience (as the only invited NGO) was listened to with respect.

Later in October, I visited the Regional Conference of the PEN Centre of Bosnia-Herzegovina. This Sarajevo conference, arranged in connection with the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Bosnian PEN Centre, attracted some 25 invited guests from neighbouring countries. Some of our UNESCO support had been made available for the conference, but most had come from Centre fundraising otherwise. It was most heart-warming to meet friends from Bosnian PEN again. President Zdenko Lesic, former president Mme Hanifa Kapidzic-Osmanagic and Secretary Ferida Durakovic also invited me to visit the PEN office in Sarajevo, shared with others but still affording a small meeting-place for this active Centre.

The sessions were characterized by warmth and good will among the participants, but also by chilly reminders of the world outside. Otherwise, the event itself proved its inestimable value as a meeting-place for those who otherwise saw each other only rarely. The noticeable tone of friendship among those now from different nations was immensely encouraging.

In December 2002, I visited Croatian PEN and the Book Fair in Pula – the small town on the Adriatic coast, west of Zagreb, where the Fair was held. The Book Fair is now in its eighth year, expanding, and has a growing international participation. The prepared material in the form of programmes, presentations and printed texts was comprehensive, and first class in design and production. PEN and PEN events were mentioned extensively. Interesting authors abounded.

The energy put into the content and programme of the Book Fair event clearly bore the stamp of Croatian PEN and its energetic and high-profiled leadership - sometimes under severe and ugly pressure from domestic quarters for its independent stance on integrity and freedom of speech. Honours must go to president Sibila Petlevski and the other members of the Croatian PEN board, primarily vice-president Seid Serdarevic, for the 'pushing and planning' that make these kinds of events possible.

Early in January I had a meeting with our UNESCO counterparts in Paris, explaining PEN positions and proposals from our Centres for seminar themes.

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The long-planned second trip to Africa by Vincent Magombe and myself commenced on 8<sup>th</sup> February, and took us through southern Africa together until 23<sup>rd</sup> February, when we parted company at Lusaka airport. I headed back to Stockholm via London, and Vincent went on to Malawi and then Uganda, to visit the Centres there. A week later he too was back in Europe. This trip was supported by the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida). The aims can be summarised as follows.

1. to initiate personal contact with our South Africa PEN Centre,

2. to initiate interest in creating new Centres in Namibia, Botswana and Zambia
3. to gain first-hand experience of developments in our Malawi and Uganda PEN Centres.

A full report was again submitted to the Board – far too comprehensive to retell here, which seems slightly unfair to all the wonderful people and the hospitality we met. But our concluding remarks included:

1. Next to nothing can replace person-to-person contacts when encouraging the formation of a new Centre, or encouraging developments and new initiatives in others.
2. In order to imagine the continued existence of new Centres in Africa, it is absolutely essential that our Africa Centre Development Programme continues; a substantial element of this being able to cover the international dues of African Centres, thus enabling them to be full voting Members of World Congresses.
3. Coaching and advice during any restructuring or the formation of a Centre must follow, as this concerns not only due procedure, but also the transmission of core values as derived from our Charter and Membership Platform Document.

The Board later endorsed this, requesting the International Secretary to pursue dialogue with South African PEN in the light of this report, to continue to advise contacts in Namibia, Botswana and Zambia on the procedure to be followed in local initiatives taken to create new Centres in these countries, and noting with satisfaction Vincent's report from the Malawi and Uganda Centres.

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On the invitation of president Zaradachet Hajo I was invited to attend the Congress of the Kurdish PEN Centre, held in Berlin, 8<sup>th</sup> March 2003. Their Congress is held every three years, and I also attended the last one, in 2000 in Brussels. Their board and officers are thus elected for three years, but as they underlined, they have at least one annual meeting every year.

The Congress, held in the 'Litteraturhaus' in Fasanenstrasse in Berlin, had attracted some fifty of the 60–70 members. Among invited guests was our vice-president Lucina Kathmann, with special links to Kurdish PEN, although neither of us two speak Kurdish. One might observe that many of the members who attended spoke only Kurdish, with second languages being German, English or French.

The proceedings were thus naturally held in Kurdish, with a very efficient interpreter at our service. and were chaired and conducted in a most efficient and friendly manner. There was no marked party-political bias in any of the resolution texts that were discussed, as far as I know. Mr. Zaradachet Hajo was re-elected as president, and the board renewed with several members, among these two women.

One of the ideas ventilated in the side-lines was that maybe the Translation and Linguistic Rights Committee could be invited to host a regional conference on language and literature in Diyarbakir at which both Kurdish and Turkish PEN Centres could attend as co-hosts, and that a proposal for such a conference maybe also could be submitted to UNESCO for support. This idea was to be further explored during the year, when I flew to Ankara in May.

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My invitation to attend the 7<sup>th</sup> Ankara Short Story Days was issued by the Turkish Authors Association, with Mr Özcan Karabulut as president and Professor Aysu Erden as vice president. Mme Erden, professor of English Literature and Linguistics and a member of the Turkish PEN Centre, accompanied Mr Üsten Akmen, the president of Turkish PEN, to Ohrid for last year's PEN Congress. She realized that the Ankara Short Story Days (ASSD) would provide a good opportunity to spread information about International PEN and its values. The ASSD is rapidly growing in importance on the literary scene of Turkey. At the ASSD, I was asked to give a

presentation of International PEN at one of the working sessions, a session which was very well attended.

On 5<sup>th</sup> May, I was invited to give a lecture at Hacettepe University, at the invitation of the Dean of the Faculty of Linguistics (where Aysu Erden then held her professorship). My theme for this guest lecture, 'PEN and the role of the Intellectual in Western Society from Émile Zola to our days', attracted a crammed major lecture-hall audience. A number of media interviews were requested, together with a nearly continuous flow of contacts with colleagues. I had a brief meeting with Üsten Akmen, who also attended the ASSD.

During the early part of the year, Aysu Erden ensured that the basic documents of PEN – the Charter and the Membership Platform Document – were correctly translated into Turkish, together with various letters and communications to Centres from the HQ in London. She has paid special attention to the ideals of the WiPC in this process. In line with this, it is notable that the newly elected Turkish PEN Board, with Mr Akmen re-elected as president, has taken very definite steps to bring Turkish PEN into the mainstream of PEN Centre awareness and activities, including active WiPC work. This is most encouraging. I am very pleased also to mention that Mr Akmen pledged active support for any co-operation between Turkish PEN and Kurdish PEN in achieving a joint seminar in Diyarbakir on linguistic questions within the near future.

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I flew, with the same anticipation of meeting friends old and new, to Bled in Slovenia towards the end of May for the Writers for Peace meeting and the Bled Literary Conference. Our host, Mr Veno Taufer, will be known to most of you: he and the members of Slovene PEN Centre were as ever prepared to share their heritage with all invited. The WfP Committee got some very valuable work done, and the literary seminars were as always absolutely excellent.

In July, I travelled via Paris to the 6<sup>th</sup> International Literary Symposium in Dakar, arriving in the evening of 13<sup>th</sup> July. I was met on arrival by M. Alioune Bedara Beye, President of the Senegal Writers Association and Secretary General of the Senegal PEN. The central theme was: 'La Place de Culture dans le NEPAD' (The New Partnership for African Development). The status of the occasion was effectively marked by the morning opening ceremony on 15<sup>th</sup> July, in the Auditorium of the Ministries, presided over by the President of the Republic of Senegal, H.E. M. Abdoulaye Wade. The Speakers at the opening were M. Beye, myself, and historian M. Djibril Tamsir Niane. The President himself added a short statement.

The subsequent seminars were held at the building of the Writers Association and Senegal PEN, 'Keur Birago'. I am happy to report that one theme that was readily brought up for discussion was 'NEPAD: Place de Femme', where speakers found strong support in other voices on the same topic. Among them Mme. Fatou Ndiaye Sow, a name well known from many PEN Congresses and literacy projects for children. Overall, the interventions were vigorous but also filled with good humour.

Friday 19<sup>th</sup> July was entirely dominated by an invitation to meet H.E. the President of the Republic at his official office. The small delegation, headed by M. Alioune Badara Beye and M. Mamadou Triare Diop, consisted mainly of international guests. The president very kindly hosted this audience, giving us time to introduce ourselves and himself time to develop some of the themes dear to himself within the concept of cultural development of Senegal.

That evening, a small meeting of PEN representatives gathered at my behest to discuss questions close to the regional aspects of PEN in Africa. After a quick review of PEN in the perspective of the London HQ and a brief reminder of the oncoming Mexican Congress, M. Alioune Bedara Beye re-expressed his desire to present the Assembly with a formal application to host the Congress of 2007. He also detailed how such a Congress might be given both firm management and

room for regional participation and consultation. We agreed that a decision on 2007 was necessary to achieve in Mexico.

On Saturday late afternoon, the closing ceremony took place at 'Keur Birago'. It was honoured by the presence of the Prime Minister, H.E. M. Idrissa Seck, who also chaired the session. I was again included in the panel of speakers. In a most accommodating way the Prime Minister spoke of his concerns, and his belief in consulting the writers of Senegal along the way. The audience that packed the house was obviously charmed by his uncomplicated way of discussing matters of mutual concern.

My concluding remarks must include my admiration for the way M. Alioune Bedara Beye handles the interests of both the Association of Senegal Writers and Senegal PEN. His ability to high-profile the organisations, and usefully further the great heritage of former President Léopold Sédar Senghor, is demonstrated by the interest shown by the political representatives associated with the Symposium. This support perhaps arises from the political concerns of the representatives of government and political life, but as far as I could perceive this has not been allowed to interfere with the basic integrity of the PEN Centre. Furthermore, meetings, seminars and symposia can be difficult to organize. M. Beye's ability to surround himself with a team to produce solutions seems admirable.

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In between other international travel, my trips to the London Office have been around once a month. This has included or been combined with Board meetings. In July, there was also the extended Board meeting in Bellagio in Italy.

In September Jane Spender and I visited Tromsø in northern Norway to meet the Norwegian PEN Centre and to discuss the forthcoming 2004 Congress there. Norwegian PEN president Kjell Olaf Jensen and associates had arranged this visit to coincide with a literary festival there. This provided excellent opportunities to meet representatives from all ranges of the community. We were all happy to promote the idea of the Congress as well as studying together the hotel selected and other local arrangements possible. I think I can safely say that both Jane and I felt very comfortable indeed with the detailed pre-congress planning Norwegian PEN had undertaken.

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My next trip took me to 'The First European-Pacific Congress', held in Vladivostok 23<sup>rd</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> September 2003. Arriving from Stockholm, I joined Russian PEN Secretary General Sasha Tkachenko, Grigori Pasko and about five other members of the Russian PEN Centre in Moscow for the long flight to Vladivostok. Later on the day we arrived the official opening took place, headed by the city's mayor, Mr Y. M. Kopilov.

The Congress had the subtitle 'Globalization: Interaction of Economies, Cultures, Technologies and Nature', and obviously covered broad ground. Central to this were city and regional development, with a traditional priority on investment and economic activities, and a dominating attendance of business people from China, Korea and Japan and their Russian counterparts. The 'Culture and Nature' elements had the distinctive flavour of afterthought, but Sasha Tkachenko and PEN members saw it as their task to give these themes a more prominent position. 'Nature', i.e. sustainable and responsible ecology, was most interesting to us, given the presence of Grigori Pasko and the severe treatment he received in suppression of his reporting on the disposal of nuclear waste.

One of the strategic aims of the visit was to co-operate with Russian PEN in securing 'an understanding attitude' from the city administration towards Russian PEN and its Vladivostok branch. It must be remembered that the name of Russian PEN was well known in Vladivostok, especially to the FSB, the security forces and the local civil and military courts, due of course to

Sasha Tkachenko's countless visits to the city on behalf of Grigori Pasko.

It is near impossible for an outsider to fathom the complexities of civil government in Russia. In Vladivostok the core person is without any doubt the dynamic, energetic and media conscious Mr Kopilov, the Mayor, who has rapidly been enhancing the city profile over recent years. Russian PEN had actively involved itself in the Europe–Pacific Congress, one of his many pet projects. The reason for this PEN interest is obvious – by making an active contribution you can both assure a formative input of ideas and play a substantial part in the ensuing invitations. Now the time had come to seek ‘commitments’ from the city regarding Russian PEN ambitions.

The mayor had mentioned that his intention was to make this Congress an annual occasion. At a session on Friday 26<sup>th</sup> September a dozen people assembled to sign the European–Pacific Alliance Charter. As it was a Russian project, Russian PEN signed it. I believe the visit was important for Russian PEN, and for their continued ability to operate in this Pacific-Rim city. I personally had many a happy meeting with our Russian and international colleagues.

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My next international trip took me in October to Armenia for the International Conference on ‘The Future of Poetry through Translation’. Among the international guests were Gustav Murin (Slovak PEN), Veno and Jasna Taufer (Slovene PEN), Grigori Kruikov from Russian PEN, Milena Bernadelli of Italian PEN and Fatou Ndiaye Sow – the first visitor from Senegal ever to visit Armenia.

The event was organised by Anna Hakobian, president of the Armenian PEN Centre, with the dedicated support of her husband Mikael (of Helsinki Watch) and a marvellously friendly group of assistants and interpreters. It was also associated with the Armenian Writers Association and Yerevan State University, where the opening ceremony took place on 10<sup>th</sup> October. Here, in one of the main auditoriums, Pro-Rector, Deans, faculty members and a delightful assembly of some 200 students made an introduction to PEN and PEN values seem very worthwhile.

The literary sessions were well-organised into agonizingly but necessarily short slots, and, although much had to be left unsaid, core translator experiences were aired and views exchanged – some impassioned. There were many memorable contributions also at the end-of-session poetry reading. The committed effort of the participants mirrored their enthusiasm for the conference, which I understood to be the first of its kind in Armenia, apart from specifically academic meetings.

There is a strong element of cultural pride in the collective identity of Armenians. Nevertheless this pride in national identity did seem to be totally compatible with the internationalism of PEN. Obviously, Armenian PEN has as one of its main aims to link on to the international literary and poetry scenes through PEN, an aim that also opens two-way exchanges between Armenia and the international scene. The literary magazine of Armenian PEN also speaks of the highest literary ambition and core PEN values.

Generally speaking, the contributions during the three separate working sessions were energetic, focused and interesting. I got the impression of considerable satisfaction with this international gathering, and not only because of warm and generous hosting.

Summing up, my impression was that this conference was all one could wish for: very well organized, giving significant opportunity to provide information about PEN to its participants, and hopefully creating for the Armenian PEN Centre the high profile it deserves in its very worthwhile civil mission in local society.

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My next visit took me to Istanbul, as it happened at fairly short notice. Correspondence on developments in Turkey had been accumulating during the summer, after my previous visit to

Ankara in May, pointing to interesting and promising developments in this country. In the background was also both the wish to broaden contacts with Turkish PEN and to establish further support for the prospective Conference in Diyarbakir 2005.

Thus, when an offer came from Mr Sanar Yurdatapan, an energetic Human Rights Watch person, to join in “The 3<sup>rd</sup> Gathering of Freedom of Expression Initiative” in Istanbul, I seized the opportunity to go. The very first Gathering, in 1996, was initiated by Yurdatapan who organized a solidarity campaign and collected signatures from authors all around the world. PEN was supportive right from the start, sending participants to the first event. It was attended by, among others, Joanne Leedom-Ackerman, Alexander Tkachenko of Russian PEN and members of several other PEN Centres. The WiPC has been supportive in the campaign ever since. This felt like a natural follow-up, and I was joined in Istanbul also by the WiPC Programme Director Sara Whyatt and, I am happy to say, Sasha Tkachenko once more.

Other international guests, most arriving Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> October, included representatives from Human Rights Watch, Stop Censorship of Arts Initiative, Forum for International Justice and Amnesty International. Most of us paid a special visit to the Office of the Public Prosecutor on Friday 24<sup>th</sup> October (UN Day!), together with the vast majority of the participants, in order to register for public prosecution, as a protest against remaining restrictions in Turkish law regarding “activities against the State”.

While I leave the complexity of the Turkish legal system with the comment that those more knowledgeable than myself are still worried and still being prosecuted, I note that the Istanbul municipality kindly hosted both our first evening welcome dinner, and the closing ceremony events. The city obviously wanted to be associated with a consistent return to the civil freedoms of Western counterparts.

I would now like to mention the meetings with Turkish PEN that Sara and I had. First, on Wednesday evening, we had dinner with the Turkish WiPC, with Chair Mrs Müge Gürsöy Sökmen as host. The involvement of these representatives of Turkish PEN was extremely encouraging. The meeting also provided an opportunity to discuss much concerning PEN activities, normative aspects of WiPC cases and the in Turkey understandably delicate case of Leyla Zana (see latest Centre to Centre newsletter from the WiPC), and also to explain the Women Writers Committee, and so on.

Next evening, President Üstun Akmen had invited Sara, Sasha and myself to the small but nicely adequate office of Turkish PEN in a high-rise building partly overlooking the Bosphorus. About a dozen people were present, including Esber Yagmurdereli. We had a very open discussion. Sara made an excellent introduction to WiPC questions, also referring back to the previous evening. I am very happy to mention that the exchange of questions and answers was made in the best of moods. We also discussed the Translation and Linguistic Rights Committee Resolution on the Kurdish language. Mr Akmen saw no problems at all about pursuing the road of co-operation in this and other related matters.

The evening contained much good news for our mutual relations and common efforts for the modern PEN aims and values. I am sure that relations between the International PEN Secretariat and Turkish PEN will be open and understanding, now that a new leadership is steadily moving ahead with the changing times around us.

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Finally, a few words about the London Office. Pressures continue on brave but very limited staff resources. No room for a newsletter, but our website is under reconstruction. Top marks – as usual! – to Administrative Director Jane Spender and to WiPC Programme Director Sara Whyatt, and to all the other staff – Kathy Barazetti and Katy Nicholson on the office side, and Sara Birch, Cathy McCann and Dixie Wills in the WiPC. Much of our work during the year is assisting the Centres,

but this year the Secretariat has put considerable effort into supporting the Board and the Trustees, especially in their important work on the review of the governing structures of PEN and subsequent necessary proposals for amendments of the Regulations. The internal co-ordination between the Secretariat and the WiPC office is as usual governed by continuing dialogue, very often including the Treasurer. Constructive optimism in the face of economic restraints ... well, you've heard all that before, I think.

Terry Carlbom  
International Secretary  
November 2003