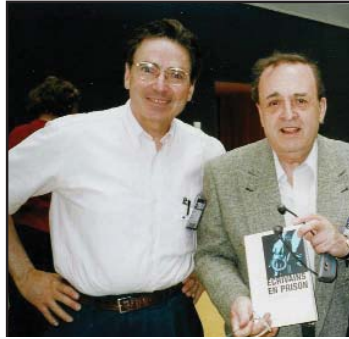


# Peace and P.E.N. International

## P.E.N. International



Alfred de Zayas and Jiri Grusa, President of P.E.N. International, with the book published by PEN Suisse romande "Ecrivains en Prison"

**I**nternational P.E.N. is the foremost international organization of writers. It was launched in London in 1921 as a private peace-through-literature initiative, in a way anticipating UNESCO's universal vocation. A British novelist, Mrs. C.A. Dawson Scott, founded the first P.E.N. Club in London. John Galsworthy became International P.E.N.'s first President.

The acronym P.E.N. refers to poets, essayists and novelists, but the organization embraces non-fiction authors, historians, lawyers, editors, translators and others engaged in the dissemination of all kinds of literature. The acronym also stands for that writing instrument, potentially more powerful than the sword (Cervantes/Richelieu).

At the end of the First World War, intellectuals and writers were convinced that the "war to end all wars" had been a colossal calamity, and a thoroughly avoidable conflagration. Henceforth it should be a high priority of writers to endeavor to build bridges among nations and peoples, in

order to help prevent future wars through better understanding of our common values and interests, through open dialogue over our differences and through sincere efforts to settle potential sources of conflict. Indeed, if we know each other's literature, we would be less afraid of our neighbors, because we would recognize our very own yearnings and feelings in their novels and poetry. Thus, we should make words -- instead of war.

Remember the commonalities between the German Erich Maria Remarque in his touching novel "All quiet in the Western Front" and the poetic forebodings of the British soldier Wilfred Owen in his Anthem for Doomed Youth (1917)

*What passing bells for those  
who die as cattle?  
Only the monstrous anger of  
the guns.  
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid  
rattle  
Can patter out their hasty ori-  
sons.  
No mockeries for them from  
prayers or bells,  
Nor any voice of mourning  
save the choirs,*

*The shrill, demented choirs of  
wailing shells;  
And bugles calling for them  
from sad shires.*

*What candles may be held to  
speed them all?  
Not in the hands of boys, but in  
the eyes  
Shall shine the holy glimmers  
of good-byes.  
The pallor of girls' brows shall  
be their pall;  
Their flowers the tenderness of  
patient minds,  
And each slow dusk a dra-  
wing-down of blinds.*

The First World War, in which some 9 million Europeans lost their lives, would yet be followed by the Second World War, even more frightful than the first, claiming some 50 million lives. How many artists lost their lives in those wars, how many were silenced by the traumata?

The objectives of P.E.N. are: a) To promote intellectual co-operation and understanding among writers; b) To create a world community of writers that would emphasize the central role of literature in the development of world culture; and, c) To defend literature

against the many threats to its survival which the modern world poses.

As of September 2006, P.E.N. encompasses 144 Centres in 101 countries on six continents - with a total membership of more than 10,000. International PEN has many sub-committees, including a Writers for Peace Committee (Chair: Edvard Kovac), a Women Writers Committee (Chair: Judith Buckrich) and a Writers in Prison Committee (Chair: Karin Clark). It holds yearly Congresses in cities throughout the world. In November 2003 the 69th Congress took place in Mexico City, under the Presidency of Homero Aridjis (Mexico). In September 2004 the 70th Congress took place in Tromsø, Norway, under the newly elected International PEN President Dr. Jiri Grusa (Czech Republic), the 71st Congress took place in Bled, Slovenia, in June 2005, the 72nd Congress in Berlin, Germany, in May 2006. The 73rd Congress is scheduled for July 2007 in Dakar, Senegal, where the World Education Forum took place in 2000.

At the Berlin Congress from 22 to 28 May, Gunther Grass, the Nobel laureate for literature, delivered a most thought-provoking opening speech, making the link between writers and peace, from Aristophanes during the Peloponnesian war to Andreas Gryphius during the Thirty Years War, to Harold

Pinter during the Iraq and other on-going armed conflicts of today.

There are three P.E.N. Centres in Switzerland, one for the German-speaking, one for the French-speaking, and one for the Italian-speaking writers. P.E.N. Suisse romande entertains close relations with the other two Swiss Centres, the Deutschschweizer P.E.N. Zentrum and the Centro P.E.N. della Svizzera italiana e retoromanca. In 2005 the three P.E.N. Centres in Switzerland signed an agreement so as to coordinate nationwide activities, such as participation in the Geneva book fair and in conferences on behalf of writers in prison. The Presidency of the new coordinating committee rotates. Current president is Kristin Schneider of the Swiss-German PEN.

P.E.N. Centre Suisse romande was founded in 1949, and it welcomes all French-speaking writers residing in Switzerland. Most of our members come from Geneva, Nyon, Lausanne, Vevey, Montreux, Aigle, Leysin, Martigny, Sion, Sierre, Fribourg, Morat, Neuchatel, La Chaux de Fonds, Delemont, Yverdon, but, of course, some reside in the frontier regions of Gex, Ferney-Voltaire and even Thonon-les-Bains. On 11 March 2006, the General Assembly of our Centre elected me as its new President for a term of three years, thus



*Alexis Koutchoumow, former President of PEN Suisse romande, Alfred de Zayas, and Zeki Ergas at the PEN stand in the salon du livre de Geneve 2006.*

following in the distinguished footsteps of the admirable Geneva poet Vahe Godel, the novelist and philosopher Fawzia Assaad, the poet and editor Alexis Koutchoumow, the television commentator Jean-Pierre Moulin and the great Denis de Rougemont. At the Geneva book fair (27 April to 1 May 2006) we had our own stand and many of our poets, essayists and novelists came to meet with other authors and sign their books.

Our Centre also entertains synergies with many other organizations which similarly promote the right to freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of research, access to information including internet. We are active in the Club de la Presse in Geneva, the Geneva Writers Group, the Societ  des Ecrivains de Gen ve, and Millennium Solidarity (in

which many PEN members serve in the Board, including Zeki Ergas, Alexis Koutchoumow, Fawzia Assaad, Parfait Bayala and myself). We have organized panels at the United Nations together with the Union Internationale des Editeurs. Our Rapporteur for human rights is our former President, Fawzia Assaad, a well known face at the Palais des Nations, who for years spoke on behalf of P.E.N. at the Commission on Human Rights and now represents us at the Human Rights Council. Our Centre regularly conducts poetry readings and other literary events together with the United Nations Society of Writers and its literary journal "Ex Tempore".

*Alfred de Zayas, Pr sident, Centre P.E.N. Suisse romande*

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