

PEN International's Oral Statement at the 57th CSW Session

PEN International is the world's leading association of writers. We work to defend freedom of expression and to promote literature. Our global network of 145 Centres is active in over 100 countries and our Women Writers Committee works directly with writers including journalists, poets, novelists, translators and bloggers.

Women Writers and Freedom of Expression

Freedom of expression as elaborated under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and International Covenant on Civil Political Rights is a fundamental human right and the cornerstone of a democratic society. Women writers, through their promotion of the freedom of ideas, opinions, and information, play a crucial role in advancing plural, inclusive and equal societies. Their reporting on all human rights issues, including violence against women, is essential to the promotion of women in society and to the protection of their rights. PEN International's research, however, demonstrates that too often women writers are subject to violence from both State and non-State actors in an attempt to punish and deter them from carrying out this critical work.

Violence against women writers is a truly global concern. From Russia, where justice remains long overdue for the murders of journalists Anna Politkovskaya and Natalia Estemirova; to Pakistan, where 11 year old blogger Malala Yousafzai was shot by the Taliban for her writings promoting girls' education; to Liberia, where Mae Azango, reporting on Female Genital Mutilation, received threats that she herself would be "cut" to make her "shut up"; to Mexico, where investigative journalist Lydia Cacho

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was attacked and forced into hiding for her work exposing child abuse and sex-trafficking.

Sadly, these examples represent only a fraction of the shocking number of instances of such violence and experts believe that many more to go largely unreported due to the stigma involved and the fear of losing one's job, home or husband. PEN's Writers in Prison Committee is actively monitoring cases where women writers have been raped, beaten, harassed, had teeth broken during questioning, and their family members, even their unborn children, threatened because of their work. Although the context varies hugely, it is clear that in all of these situations women writers have been directly targeted for their role in advancing freedom of expression. Violence and intimidation against women writers is intended not only to silence them speaking out but to have a chilling effect on freedom of expression across society. Where such violence is tolerated, all of society suffers.

Existing measures to protect women writers are limited. PEN therefore calls upon member States to firstly acknowledge the significant role of women writers in the advancement of freedom of expression. We ask that States protect women writers from violence perpetrated by both State and non-State actors by recognising such violations and by providing effective security measures.

Fighting impunity is essential for the security of women writers. PEN calls for States to ensure that such violence is promptly and impartially investigated and that those responsible are punished in an appropriate manner.

Finally, as with all human rights defenders, women writers must be recognised as the experts in their own protection and it is essential that they are specifically engaged in the design of protection programmes.

PEN is deeply interested in strengthening our existing networks, such as our partnership in the Implementation Strategy of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of

Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. We are eager to engage with partner organisations and intergovernmental bodies concerning the protection of women writers.

Mr Chair and members of the Committee, Women writers face extraordinary risks due to their work for the promotion of freedom of expression. On the occasion of the 57th CSW, PEN calls upon all parties to join us in celebrating women writers' vital contribution and remarkable courage.