



INTERNATIONAL PEN TOKYO CONGRESS, SEPTEMBER 2010

by Margie Orford, Executive Vice President, SA PEN

I attended the 76th PEN International Congress in Tokyo at the end of September 2010. I had an extremely busy and productive time. I will detail a few of the main things that pertain to South Africa, PEN in Africa and then PEN International. But first let me say how stimulating I found the trip. Tokyo is an amazing city and Japanese PEN – which has well over three thousand members and is a very prestigious and highly regarded organization in Japan – were wonderful hosts. They provided quite substantial funding towards many of the delegates (me included) from developing countries.

and the other members from a whole range of PEN centres around the world.

Many of the delegates I met were pleased to have South African PEN represented at a Congress. South Africa plays an important role in people's literary and political imagination of the world and there was much interest in the work that we have been doing around the Protection of Information Bill and other work around freedom of expression.

The main achievement was, I think, getting a strongly worded resolution passed on the Protection



PEN African Network delegates at the PEN International Congress in Tokyo

The Congress itself is quite formal and tightly scripted as there is a great deal of business to accomplish in a limited amount of time. So during the more relaxed post Congress tour to Kyoto, I could get to know people. Kyoto is the old capital of Japan and is as measured and calm as Tokyo is frenetic. It is the home to many traditional Japanese crafts and there are Shinto and Buddhist shrines and temples in abundance. This was worthwhile, as I got to spend time with and get to know Hori Takeaki, the new Secretary General of PEN International; Haroon Siddiqui, a board member with a keen interest in South Africa; John Ralston Saul, the President of PEN International; Marion Botsford Fraser, chair of the Writers in Prison Committee;

of Information Bill. The draft I put forward for late consideration to the Writers in Prison Committee (the appropriate channel) was immediately seconded by several African PEN centres as well as English PEN, Austrian PEN and a number of others. You have all seen the resolution that was voted on in the Congress.

This was one of a number of resolutions dealing directly with infringements of citizens' rights to freedom of expression. It was fascinating to see the Protection of Information Bill in the context of what is happening in China, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Mexico, Honduras and several other places. My impression is that governments around the world are becoming increasingly restrictive. The internet especially, >>

with its inherent democracy and speed of communication, seems to attract particular ire. So I think that South African PEN will need to be vigilant in safe-guarding our hard-won rights to information and transparency and the use of that by writers to hold governments accountable.

It was with this in mind that I agreed, and as suggested by several PEN International Board members and the chair of the Writers in Prison Committee and English PEN, to form a new Writers in Prison Committee in South Africa. This committee will be the obvious channel for the work that remains to be done around the Protection of Information Bill. Here we should continue to work with other civil society partners.

Another part of this committee's work would be to adopt African writers in prison as honorary members of South African PEN. There are several writers in prison in a number of countries. Interested members of the committee would then take it on to write to these prisoners and to their families in addition to keeping their stories and progress about their cases in the public eye. I have had several offers from PEN members to assist with this work.

International Writers in Prison day was on the 15th of November. Ben Williams featured this event on the BOOK SA website this year with a reading by Albie Sachs from *The Prison Diaries of Albie Sachs* and a notice about the establishment of a Writers in Prison Committee. 2011 will be the time to get this up and running.

Sara Whyatt of International PEN suggested that I attend the International Writers in Prison meeting in Brussels in March 2011. This will be a very useful opportunity to learn about this aspect of PEN International's work and how we can use this here in the future. It will be useful to continue the work and discussions I had in Tokyo and to consolidate the work getting off the ground here.

The pressing issues around freedom of expression in South Africa – the new legislation, the hostility towards the press – are not going to disappear any time soon. So I think this is an area where South African PEN will need to allocate both time and resources (which we currently have in short supply) in the future.

The Writers in Prison Committee, with a dedicated focus on freedom of expression is, in my view, essential for future fundraising efforts as it is an area which affects us all as writers and citizens.

The next Congress will be in Belgrade and I am hoping to attend, if the board is willing for me to do so. It will be good to have continuity and to help shape the direction of PEN International. As you know, John Ralston Saul is the new president. He is an energetic and vigorous man and has quite a vision for PEN International. One change that he instituted at the Congress was to have a half day for open-ended discussion. (I had never been before, obviously, so I was informed that it was new). These focus groups looked at various issues – fundraising, future regional co-operation, a number of things. And I think they were productive. I certainly found it very useful to share information about how we do things and to learn from others. Collective brain work is something I am used to – but I think it was quite startling for some of the more senior PEN delegates who seemed very used to a formal quasi-UN way of discussing things.

There were two areas that I thought were of particular relevance to South African PEN and other African PEN centres. The one was communication and the use of the PEN International website and offices. I put forward Ben Williams's excellent website <http://book.co.za> (BOOK SA) as a possible model. This was met with much interest so hopefully we will soon have a dynamic and open-ended website which will, in my view, revitalise PEN and speed up its communications.

Another suggestion that is being taken up by Belgian PEN is the idea of 'carbon trading'. There had been a motion put forward by Dutch PEN to hold Congresses every two years because of the cost – financial and environmental. There was quite vigorous opposition to this from a number of delegates. African delegates argued that it was easy for Europeans and North Americans to meet and communicate as people travel widely for other reasons, but they (and several of the Asian and South American centres concurred) felt that one of the few opportunities to network and to build on their work came through these international meetings. Delegates from the various dissident Chinese PEN centres, writers who live in exile, Kurdish PEN, amongst others, argued that two years was too long – repressive governments can do a great deal in one year. And it was felt that it would be counter-productive to wait for the collective voice of PEN international to weigh in against actions taken against writers.

I voted against the motion – along with my fellow African members – but I did suggest that wealthier PEN centres could offset their carbon footprint by sending only one delegate and using the money to bring delegates from twinned and needy centres. The Belgian PEN members liked this very much – I detected a note of low country sibling rivalry but made no mention of it! We will see how this can be taken forward. So lets see, maybe we will have a PEN Clean Development Mechanism.

The PAN network has been in existence for several years now. The African centres representatives at the Tokyo Congress met to discuss the issues facing PEN centres on the continent and the role of PAN. Moraa Gitaa, of Kenyan PEN, was elected as co-ordinator of PAN and Abdul-Rahman Harruna Attah, of Ghanian PEN, as secretary. These were very interesting meetings as there are several issues that affect us all – repression and the harassment of writers, declines in funding, low literacy levels, weak communications and infrastructure. There have been several exchanges between African PEN centres (funded via the small grants from PEN International in London).

There are several areas of interest here for South African PEN. The links between literacy and literature, is one. The continent-wide problems with transparency, freedom of speech and democracy is another. There is much potential in these relationships and there are several ways in which these can be developed by South African PEN members with writers and others in the continent. An African PEN meeting will be held in Cairo in December, hosted by Egyptian PEN and funded by the Egyptian government. SA PEN Vice President, Ray Louw, will be attending and will present a paper there.

Cape Town will be hosting Open Book, a new book festival in September 2011 and South African PEN will be hosting our first Free the Word! Festival in 2011. Pen Centres throughout the world host these events with assistance from the >>

Prince Claus Fund. This funding comes via PEN International and will enable us to host writers from South America, the Caribbean and from Africa. This will be in addition to South African writers. PEN International President, John Ralston Saul is planning a visit (on our invitation) to South Africa, so I hope he will be able to attend then. The planning of this event will take place with the Open Book Festival organizers. Lots to be done and thought through, but it will be a very stimulating event. Gillian Slovo, of UK PEN will also attend.

I had several fruitful discussions with UK PEN during the Congress and after. They are keen to find ways to work more closely with South African PEN. Their campaigns around

various issues in the UK have been very effective – from blasphemy laws, to work with new immigrant communities, expanding and broadening the membership of PEN – so I am looking forward to developing these connections with them.

Thank you all, the PEN board, the members for entrusting me with representing South African PEN at the 76th PEN International Congress in Tokyo. I felt honoured to be there and was inspired by the work being done around the world and the work that there is to be done here.

PEN INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE – 08/10/10 NOBEL PEACE PRIZE AWARDED TO FORMER PRESIDENT OF INDEPENDENT CHINESE PEN CENTRE

PEN International today calls on the People's Republic of China to release the writer and academic Liu Xiaobo, winner of the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize.

Liu, currently serving an 11-year sentence in China, is a former president of the Independent Chinese PEN Centre and is one of the PEN Writers in Prison Committee's most prominent cases. He is one of more than 40 writers, journalists and intellectuals detained in Chinese prisons at present.

'Awarding Liu Xiaobo the Nobel Peace Prize is an affirmation of the central importance to everyone of freedom of expression, of which he is a courageous exponent,' states PEN International President, John Ralston Saul.

In December 2008, Liu was a signatory to an open letter to the Chinese authorities calling on the National People's Congress to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Liu was also instrumental in launching Charter 08 on 9th December 2008, a declaration calling for political reforms and human rights, which was initially signed by over 300 scholars, journalists, writers and activists. Charter 08 now has more than 10 000 signatories from throughout China and the Chinese community abroad.

Liu was arrested in December 2008 and detained until he was formally charged in June 2009 with 'spreading rumours and

defaming the government, aimed at subversion of the state and overthrowing the socialism system in recent years'. He was convicted and imprisoned for 11 years on 25th December 2009.

'Charter 08 contains this phrase: We must stop the practice of viewing words as crimes,' says Marian Botsford Fraser, Chair of PEN International's Writers in Prison Committee. 'Liu is serving 11 years for that simple credo, and his belief in democracy for the Chinese people. We fervently hope that Liu's winning of the Nobel Prize furthers those causes.'

Liu Xiaobo commands great respect among Chinese intellectuals and writers, and several leading intellectuals took a bold step in signing a letter in support of his nomination for the Nobel prize. Although he has been banned from publishing in China, his work continues to appear in Hong Kong and Chinese publications abroad.

Liu holds a doctorate in Chinese literature and taught at Beijing Normal University until prevented from doing so over his involvement in the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989. He was one of those intellectuals labeled the 'Black Hands of Beijing' by the authorities after Tiananmen Square. Since then, Liu has experienced frequent arrest, harassment and censoring of his work. He also served a three-year sentence in a labour camp in the mid-1990s.

2011 PEN/STUDZINSKI LITERARY AWARD by Deborah Horn-Botha

A total of 531 entries were received for the 2011 PEN/Studzinski Literary Award from authors who are citizens of SADC countries. The "sifter" reading process started in April and was completed in September 2010, with a total of 1 109 readings having taken place. SAPEN thanks the team of 20 diligent readers. The Editorial Board have subsequently read 168 entries and recently

selected 22 stories to be included in *African Pens 2011*, to be published in mid-2011. J.M. Coetzee will select the three prize-winners. Shortlisted finalists will be contacted in December and the prize-winners will be announced at the launch of *African Pens 2011*. Best of luck to all who entered.
Write! Africa Write!

The following publications have been received by SA PEN. Should you wish to read any of them please contact Deborah on rudebs@icon.co.za / tel. (021) 701-8510.

- ✓ *Carapace* 79 (May 2010), 80 (July 2010), 81 (September 2010), 82 (Akwe Amosu - *Not Goodbye*)
- ✓ *Catalan Writing*, June 2010
- ✓ *Italian PEN Club magazine* issue No. 12 (July - September 2010) available at http://www.penclub.it/files/magazine/12/Pen_12.pdf, No. 13 (October - December 2010) available at www.penclub.it/files/Magazine/13/Pen_13.pdf
- ✓ *Japanese Book News*, No. 64, Summer 2010 and No. 65, Fall 2010
- ✓ *PEN for Freedom* No. 2, Summer 2010 (Independent Chinese PEN Centre Quarterly Journal of Literary Translations) (available via email)
- ✓ *The Danny Diaries, Overcoming Schizophrenia* by Ann Cluver Weinberg
- ✓ *The Taipei Chinese PEN* - A quarterly journal of contemporary Chinese literature from Taiwan, No. 151, Spring 2010 and No. 152, Summer 2010

ZOO CITY BARES CHARITY AUCTION

by Lauren Beukes

As midnight approached on August 10th, a frenzied literary bidding war erupted online over five one-of-a-kind works of art inspired by my novel, *Zoo City*. I was hoping, optimistically, that the Bares would raise R10 000,00 for The Suitcase Project, a children's refugee organisation in Hillbrow. But by the time the dust cleared after the official cut-off time, the bids totalled almost double that.

The idea was inspired by remix culture; setting your work free in the world to let other people play. It's about seeing how others reinterpret your work, what it means to them, how they riff off it.

It started with the writing of the book, where I approached other writers to contribute chapters that were perpendicular to the plot, but helped establish the world, from a series of prison interviews by Sam Wilson, to a psychological paper written by Charlie Human and an interview with a fictional music producer by real-life music journalist Evan Milton.

It was an easy jump to creative collaborations in the real world for the launch of *Zoo City*, including an official soundtrack I put together with African Dope Record's DJ HoneyB and creating a range of collectible art toys we would auction for a charity that somehow reflected an aspect of the book.

the dark, with a sloth on her back and mischievous demons cavorting in her shadow.

I found The Suitcase Project through their wonderful book, *The Suitcase Stories*, which documents Glynis Clacherty's art-therapy initiative that helps refugee children to come to terms with the trauma of fleeing war-torn countries and arriving in Johannesburg without their parents or family or any kind of support system.

Trauma, hostile environments and refugees are all themes of *Zoo City* and decorating art toys inspired by a fictional story to help kids who decorate suitcases as a way of telling their real stories seemed a perfect match.

The Bares were exhibited in Cape Town, Johannesburg and at Forbidden Planet in London in time for the *Zoo City* UK launch to drum up interest for the auction. But I still never expected the phenomenal response we had. By closing bell, we had raised R17 600,00.

Glynis Clacherty, who started The Suitcase Project back in 2001, sent me an email to say that the funds have been shared out among the original kids, now grown up. The money is helping for one to study civil engineering at the University of Johannesburg, for



Bares in a row

I approached six Cape Town-based designers and illustrators who donated their time and talent to hand-painting five of Am I Collective's huge blank collectible vinyl toy Bares. The brief was left open as long as it was in some way inspired by the novel, which is about animal familiars, crime and magic, music and refugees and the possibility of redemption.

The results were extraordinary, and, best of all, surprising. Carine Nguz and Bia Van Deventer's Borne managed to be both daintily pretty and macabre, a bird perching on a ribcage, whorls of intestine. Clem de Bruin's Pretty Wise depicted a thug-life old man inseparable from his familiar owl.

Zoo City cover designer Joey Hi-Fi's Muti Monster was a grisly collection of animal parts, broken wings and a dismembered tail and mercurial droplets of the Undertow, a seething darkness from the book. Nonnetjie by Elise Wessels sparked off the idea of the feminine spirit of the barn owl captured in a West African mask design.

And Willeen le Roux's Bi-Polar Bare captured the struggle of the book's noir-ish heroine, Zinzi, caught between the light side and

another to set up her own small informal cooking business and to help a third finally realise his dream of becoming a nurse. She says, "He is at Netcare college and he proudly came to show me his uniform and his watch."

I'm very grateful to everyone who helped spread the word about the auction, the enthusiastic and quite vicious winning bidders and especially the artists for making it happen.

Visit

<http://laurenbeukes.book.co.za/blog/2010/08/18/london-wondrous-frightful-marvellous/> for Lauren's blog post on the London book launch.

ROOM TO READ

by Jennie Orchard, Room to Read's Development Director in Australasia

The Room to Read story began in 1998 when Founder John Wood took a much-needed break from his top executive position with Microsoft in Sydney and went trekking in Nepal. Offered the opportunity to visit a school in Bahundanda, he was shocked by the lack of resources and vowed to help, returning a year later with a donkey train and thousands of children's picture books. Having discovered that around 750 million people in the world lacked basic literacy skills, two thirds of them women, he knew that help was desperately needed.

This early initiative in Nepal quickly gathered pace and over the past decade Room to Read has expanded significantly and now works in seven countries in Asia (Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Laos, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Vietnam) and two in Africa (South Africa and Zambia).



South Africa, students in library

Founded on the belief that World Change Starts with Educated Children®, Room to Read seeks to transform the lives of millions of children by focusing on literacy and gender equality in education. Working in collaboration with local communities, partner organizations and governments, the two primary goals are to develop literacy skills and a habit of reading among primary school children, and to support girls to complete secondary school with the relevant life skills to succeed in school and beyond.

In one short decade, the organization has achieved exceptional results, building 1 128 schools, establishing over 10 000 libraries, publishing and donating more than seven million local-language and English language books, and supporting the long-term education of nearly 10 000 girls.

Room to Read is successful because it is run like a business, with relatively low overheads and a sharp focus on results. Reporting regularly and transparently to its donors, the aim is to constantly improve the quality and outcomes of programs through ongoing monitoring and evaluation. Headquartered in San Francisco, Room to Read has evolved to become a truly global organization, hiring and empowering local teams in each of its nine program countries and coordinating fundraising chapters in more than 45 cities.

Working in South Africa since 2006, Room to Read has encountered a range of problems, particularly the discrepancy of educational quality between urban and rural areas. Specific problems include overcrowding, poor school infrastructure, high student / teacher ratios, lack of educational materials – and 80% of state-run South African schools lack a library. Room to Read has been working in three regions (Mpumalanga, Eastern Cape and more recently Limpopo) to introduce several variants of its reading room or library model as well as publishing children's books (both fiction and non-fiction) in all of the eleven local languages (to be reduced to seven languages in 2010).

The reading room program consists of a four-pronged approach: supplying the resources necessary to establish a library; enlisting community co-investment to ensure long-term sustainability; building the capacity of librarians to manage and maintain the

libraries; and providing ongoing monitoring and support. In some cases, libraries are created in separate rooms but where space is limited, the appropriate model is the classroom library. In both cases, the resources supplied include books in a mix of the local languages prevalent in the host community and English, also games, puzzles, posters and other educational materials as well as library furniture and shelving.

The goal of the local language publishing program is to promote literacy and the habit of reading by introducing a variety of age-appropriate and culturally relevant materials, and sourcing these books from local authors and illustrators (emerging and established) via a variety of means including writers' competitions and workshops. Room to Read has been selected by the National Library of South Africa and the National Ministry of Arts and



Zambia, girl reading

Culture as one of the few publishers of indigenous local languages in South Africa and the Room to Read program featured in their 2008/09 National Catalogue, distributed throughout the entire country.

Nelson Mandela has said, 'Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.' Since establishing a presence in South Africa in 2006, Room to Read has worked with a number of partner NGOs and succeeded in creating 190 libraries and publishing 32 children's books. In 2009 the Department of Education selected eight Room to Read libraries to be community libraries and will invest additional resources to ensure their sustainability. Supported by Room to Read, the Department also introduced a program called 'Foundations for Learning', requiring students to be granted a daily 30-minute period to 'Drop All and Read'.

The plan for 2010 is to create 90 libraries and to publish another ten children's titles – in English, Afrikaans, isiXhosa, Sepedi, siSwati, Xitsonga and Tshivenda. As Room to Read moves into its second decade, John Wood states: 'Our goal is both simple and bold: to forever end the day when a child can be told she or he was born in the wrong place, at the wrong time, to the wrong parents. The hunger to learn, that element that defines our species, is present in every child. It's both a responsibility and an opportunity for all of us, as citizens of a world that becomes ever smaller, to do our part to feed that appetite for education.'

For further information about Room to Read's operations in South Africa, please contact: Sonia Torres, Senior Associate, Public Relations, sonia.torres@roomtoread.org, tel. +1 415-839-4411, www.roomtoread.org



During 2011 Executive Vice President Margie Orford will be in touch with Jennie Orchard to discuss how best SA PEN can work with Room to Read to improve literacy in South African schools. PEN upholds freedom of expression and encourages literature, it should surely also encourage the young to read? We use the slogan Write! Africa Write! - we may well add Read! Africa Read! Anthony Fleischer, President, SAPEN.

WORLD PRESS FREEDOM HERO AWARD TO LYDIA CACHO

by Adré Marshall

The courage and tenacity of Lydia Cacho, who has spent years as an investigative journalist exposing corrupt practices at the highest levels in the Mexican administration, has now been accorded even more impressive recognition. In April this year Lydia received the prestigious World Press Freedom Hero award, one of very few women to be so acclaimed.

Lydia, from Mexico City, is a human rights activist, feminist, award-winning journalist and author. Her investigative report, *Demons of Eden: the powers behind child pornography* (*Los demonios del eden: el poder detras de la pornographie infanti*) led to her arrest by police agents who had been bought over by the ringleader of a paedophile network exposed in her investigation. She was incarcerated for months, but refused to retract her report. Lydia eventually won the case and the ringleader was jailed.

At the PEN International Free the Word! event in London last year, Lydia was one of the speakers on the topic "Hell on Earth." She gave a vivid but restrained account of the persecution and torture she was subjected to following her exposure of Mexican politicians involved in child pornography and prostitution. In spite of her personal suffering, Lydia, uncowed, has pursued her mission of exposing corruption and malpractice at the highest levels in Mexico. At the time of the Free the Word! Festival, she was working on a book on the worldwide trafficking of women by global cartels.

Lydia Cacho is a worthy recipient of the International Press Institute's World Press Freedom Hero award, and it is unfortunate that she was unable to attend the presentation ceremony at IPI's 60th World Congress, held in September. At a time when freedom of information and freedom of expression are once again under threat in South Africa, we honour all those who, like Lydia, refuse to be silenced, and continue to uphold the highest ideals of freedom of speech.



Lydia Cacho at the PEN Free the Word! Festival in London, April 2009

MORE 'MANN ALIVE'

by Geoffrey Haresnape

Home from Home: New and Selected Poems offers a comprehensive collection of work by one of South Africa's long-standing poets. Placed recently fourth on the list in the race for the distinguished position of Professor of Poetry at Oxford University, Chris Mann has, since 1977, published twelve individual volumes of poems. Taken together, these represent a steady output of well-crafted and innovative verse. *Home from Home* is, in part, an important retrospective on his earlier work and, in another way, a showcase for poems collected for the first time.

In a South African publishing environment well-known for slim, and often even ultra-slim, volumes from the hands of poets who spring up overnight like mushrooms soon to wither and to be seen no more, Mann's book reflects a substantial achievement. What he has put together here is not something that can be achieved in a month, in a year, or even in ten years. It is, quite simply, the fruit of a lifetime's commitment to the art of poetry. English is this poet's mother tongue and this is abundantly evident in the extent and subtlety of his vocabulary, in his finely nuanced phrases, and in the idiomatic assurance of his lines. The mainline tradition of English poetry has been fully absorbed into his sensibility and has been put to the purpose of writing poems in and about the South Africa of which he is a loyal citizen. He does not shy away from fellow South Africans of differing backgrounds, but rather actively embraces their uniqueness, which includes their languages and modes of expression.

If it is necessary for any poet of consequence to have a distinctive voice, Mann has clearly satisfied this requirement. Whether he is writing about denizens of the natural world ('The Bees in the Wheatland of Genadendal'), local people he has met ('Victorians in the Provinces') or the constant change in scientific theorizing

('The Mutability of Science'), this writer has his own unmistakable register of cognition and feeling. His work makes no secret of the fact that he operates within the framework of a particular faith system, and this in itself adds intriguing associations to his viewpoint on almost any subject. His belief that there is, ultimately, a redemptive sub-text to all things gives a fresh and positive spin to his verses. As a person concerned with ethical values, Mann does not allow his work to sink into relativism. He can incline to the didactic, but is hardly ever domineering or pietistic. To recall the witty title of one of his early volumes, this poet is, indeed, *Mann Alive*.

I believe that *Home from Home* will provide an enlarging reading experience to poetry lovers in this country and elsewhere in the English-speaking world. I like the way in which the table of contents organizes the individual poems into an A to Z of subjects, ranging, for example, from A for Animals, to F for Fossils and W for Words. Such sub-headings affirm the wide range of Mann's interests, as do the titles of individual poems collected under each of them. Mann's imagination is as likely to be stirred by 'Daffodils, Pumpkins and the Moon' as by 'A Contemplation of the Soul', 'Compost' and 'Mandela's Cell.' Illustrations by the artist, Julia Skeen, complement texts which, taken together, show a rich understanding of life's paradoxes. This may be summed up by what Mann asks in 'Epiphanies.' 'Who ever grew wise/without sorrow?' 'Whoever loved/until they'd trusted enough/to bleed?' and 'who understood/until they'd shivered/in terror at their ignorance?'

Home from Home: New and Selected Poems, Echoing Green Press, Fish Hoek, 2010.