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International PEN Women Writers Committee (IPWWC)

INTERNATIONAL PEN WOMEN WRITERS COMMITTEE

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ABOUT IPWWC CHAIR, JUDITH BUCKRICH

Dr Judith Buckrich was born in Budapest, Hungary in 1950 and emigrated to Australia with her parents in 1958. She is a Research Fellow at Melbourne University's Cultural Heritage Unit and Consulting Fellow of the World Innovation Foundation.

Judith is the author of several books about aspects of the history of Melbourne and the biography of Commonwealth Prize winning science fiction writer, George Turner. In her writing life she has written (and performed) her own one woman shows, short stories, and feature articles; she is working on a memoir.

She has returned to Hungary several times and was working for the English language *Daily News* in Budapest during the 1989 velvet revolution. In 1995 she co-edited (with Lucy Sussex) *She's Fantastical*, the first



Australian anthology of women's science fiction and fantasy. Judith has been the President of the Melbourne Centre of PEN for ten years.

A WORD FROM THE CHAIR

This issue of *Network* coming from Melbourne, Australia, is the first visible sign of my work for IPWWC. However, I have been very busy contacting women writers at all PEN Centres and establishing a truly international network. By the time you read this, the new IPWWC website and an email network will be up and running.

Simple tasks like assembling an up-to-date contact list and trying to ascertain the greatest needs of PEN's women writers have been a priority. I have talked to dozens of women writers all over the world in the 7 months since my election and look forward to seeing many at the upcoming Tromso Congress. One of my tasks there will be to improve cooperation between Chairs of PEN Committees.

To Marta Cerda, of Gauadalajara Centre, previous Chair of IPWWC, we owe years of unflagging and successful

work. A tribute to Marta appears in the Minutes of the 2003 Meeting, p.17.

Tiina Pystynen, our Human Rights Commissioner organises a mentor program for women Writers in Prison, and a Safe City Program in Helsinki, as well as keeping me in touch with the situation in Central Asia which I hope will become a focus of action for IPWWC.

Lucina Kathmann has continued to be the glue for so much of our activity. Much of what I have done has been a result of constant consultation with Lucina.

berni m janssen of Melbourne PEN has built an Asia and Pacific Writers Network and has particularly kept me in the loop with regard to women writers in our region.

Thanks to other women of the Melbourne Centre, particularly Melissa Miller and Sandra Shotlander. And to Judith Rodriguez and Rowena Hilton, our editors.

TALE OF A LINDEN TREE

by Mavis Guinard (*Suisse Romand Centre*)

That year, I had to see Appenzell's Landsgemeinde. Our three daughters had just been naturalised Swiss and I felt directly concerned with the event. Nor was I the only one, everyone seemed expectant. A rumour went through the crowd, "even the President of the Confederation is coming today."

On balconies above the large square, foreign television crews adjusted their cameras. In one gabled house, women peeked from a lace-curtained window. Workmen put finishing touches to the podium. Policemen set up rope barriers around the central area. Only one little boy, in a bright red weskit, a black velvet beanie on his flaxen hair, couldn't care less, chasing his sister up and down a long bench under an immense linden tree.

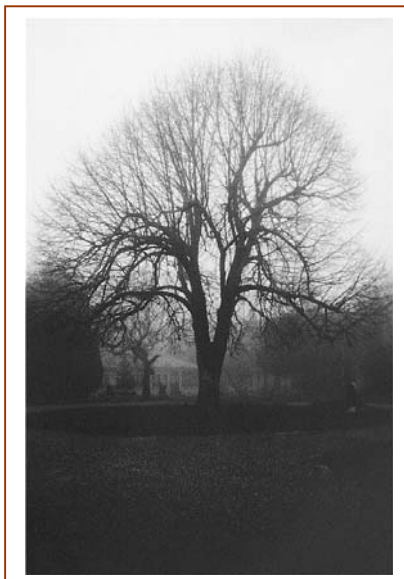
For centuries, the tree had sheltered Appenzell's open-air legislative assembly, Switzerland's last instance of direct democracy. In the past years, the men gathered here to argue whether women should vote.

Like other Swiss women, the women of Appenzell had obtained the right to vote on national affairs in 1971. After the federal example, eager or reluctant cantons followed suit – except the smallest of all, Appenzell Innerrhoden, soon as famous for its obstinacy as for its cheese.

Three times, the men of the half canton refused women the right to enter the Landsgemeinde. Appenzell – the thirteenth canton to join the confederation back in 1513 – had always run its affairs this way and did not intend to change. To pass the wait, I went into a shop to buy some lace hankies and asked the owner if she thought the men would accept the vote today. Tossing her traditional winged coif of black lace, she pretended

not to care. "Who rules the roost, rules the vote," she snapped.

Men in their sombre black hats, black suits, black waistcoats gathered with no hurry. They'd check large silver watches hanging from heavy silver chains and go on chatting. The oldest headed for the long wooden bench, shooing away the children. To enter the cordoned area, the men had to show proof they were honest citizens. Many younger men presented bayonets or Swiss officers' daggers, the older men bore swords. Earlier, I'd spotted a new one, gleaming in an armourer's show window, price tag 400 francs. Probably for tourists. The ones here looked as if they might have been handed down from some ancestor back from foreign wars.



The farmers and cheesemakers made no attempt at military swagger. They let the swords flap against their legs as they walked, leaned on them as on any handy old stick. When they sat down, they clasped the finely chased silver handles in their hands and rested their hands on them.

Along the sidewalks, onlookers now pressed against the taut ropes strung by the police. Behind me, a burly girl in a black leather jacket elbowed and pushed for a better view. She would not mind a vote.

Now, the square seemed packed, black-uniformed band players – many of them women – stopped fussing with drums and brass instruments, and fell in line to lead the parade.

Up the main street and into the square came the landammann and magistrates in wide black capes. Their march was ponderous, impressive. In a sort of anti-goose step, all wove solemnly

forward, hesitated, stepped slowly to the right, paused, then stepped slowly to the left. Between each group, first doffing plumed hats, the flag-bearers tossed and swirled heavy cantonal flags high into the air.

Once all officials and guests had taken their places on the platform – and after the landammann's opening speech on the state of the world, the country and the canton – cantonal affairs and changes to the laws of the land were discussed one by one. Arms were raised to vote, amazingly rapid counts were made, section by section. But, though Switzerland's President had come, the Landsgemeinde once more refused women the right to vote. How long would this male bastion hold out?

As the crowd dispersed, I took a last disappointed look at that towering linden tree. Such immovable strength...

However, citizen's groups persisted and pushed their claim to Switzerland's highest court. In 1990, a single word finally settled the affair. In the Federal Tribunal, after four hours' discussion, one woman and six men agreed that not only the voting rights of 1971 but equal rights of 1981 were being

denied. The problem was how to enforce the decision. Should the court use its power to coerce the tiny canton? The ruling was exemplary, written in the spirit that has kept a diversity of cantons together.

"All," said the court, "rests on one word. Appenzell's constitution gives the right to vote to "Landleute" – the people of the land. In the nineteenth century when it was written, this tacitly meant men, not women." The judges decided that Appenzellers now just had to interpret "Landleute" in the modern sense, men and women. No constitutional change needed.

And that is how the women of Appenzell Innerrhoden became people and got to vote.

Now, on the last Sunday in April, they enter the open air assembly beside the men. Women citizens simply show pink vouchers instead of swords. And – my shoplady was wrong – many people did care. A surge of Appenzell women entered politics, leading one, Ruth Metzler, all the way to Parliament.

By a strange coincidence, the old linden tree died. But, in the quiet square, a new linden tree is growing.

NUESTRA VOZ / NOTRE VOIX / OUR VOICE, VOLUME 3 **– CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

The International PEN Women Writers' Committee invites contributions of poetry and short stories in Spanish, French or English for the third volume of the anthology *Nuestra Voz* (*Notre Voix*, *Our Voice*), to be published by the Biblioteca de Textos Universitarios of the Universidad Católica de Salta.

GUIDELINES:

Contributors must be women and PEN members. Only those women who do not have work already published in the first and second volumes are eligible.

The length of manuscripts is strictly limited to 1500 words. No pornographic material or anything inciting to violence will be included. Manuscripts will not be edited.

Deadline for contributions is December 1, 2004. Manuscripts received after this date will not be included.

Please forward contributions as a Word document to penmelbourne@optusnet.com.au, clearly marked with your name, address, email address, PEN Centre, and word count.

BELARUSIAN BATTLEGROUND

by Olga Ipatova (Belarusian PEN)

Ex-President of the Belarusian Writers' Association

The situation of Belarusian Women Writers is quite different from that of their European colleagues. Those in power terrorise dissidents and attack the editorial staff of the Belarusian Writers' Union. Our magazines operate as holding companies where there is no place for democratic writers – particularly at the mercy of those in power are writers who live in the province – and it affects creativity. Next, Belarusian men's mentality does not tolerate independent women. We have also great problems with the shrinking use of our national language. It is disappearing from schools as it did during Soviet times. In almost every woman writer's texts you can hear fear for the future of our nation, stuck between east and west.

Still, female prose and poetry is very strong in Belarusian literature.

Our oldest woman writer, Nina Taras, doesn't write anymore; nobody remembers her, because writers of song lyrics aren't mentioned in concert credits.

Svetlana Aleksievitj, of the middle generation, is widely known. We have very active young poets, for instance, Valzina Mort, Volga Gapeeva and Valeria Kutova; and interesting prose-writers – Eva Veznvez, and Nataalka Babaina, whose ironic and metaphoric view of life makes us feel its tragedy even more strongly.

A problem for all our women writers is publication. Though poet Ludmila Rublevskaja can easily publish with the political publisher Mastazkaja Literatura – she works for our President's newspaper *Sovetskaja Belarusia* – Maria Voitesjonko can hardly publish more than 200 copies of her fine, sharp portraits of today's village women.

Last year it was like a present to read an independent *Belarusian Anthology of Poetry* of almost 900 pages, presenting a range of women poets such as Nina Matjasj, Ludmila Pavlikova, Galina Korzanevskaja,

Valentin Aksak, Hristina Lalko, Nadeja Artimovich (a Belarusian poet from Poland), Ludka Chilnova and others – whereas a sponsored book of today's prose-writers presented only three women. In our writers' union there are 38 women; many women writers don't belong, but still publish their works in reviews such as *Arche* and *Dsejacloc* (started only last year).

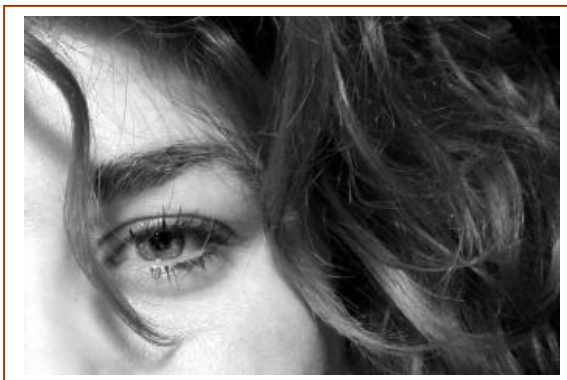
The Women Writers' Committee of our PEN Centre undertakes to promote our talented women writers, and to help writers in the provinces. Some women writers need mental as well as other help from their city friends. Poet Maruja Borovik lost her job of many years as head librarian in Podsvilje

solely because she wanted to promote the Belarusian language. Now she is so poor that she can't come to Minsk to visit colleges. In the city of Polozk a talented poetess, Lera Com, also had problems with her work and her college. Activist

prose-writer Irina Zernosek wasn't even invited to this year's official Literature Day celebration in Polozk.

Indeed, on that day PEN members usually aren't invited on stage. There's a widespread feeling that PEN must be some kind of terrorist organisation!

Another problem: the many political and public utility organisations don't invite women to their events, only the few women writers who are very well known. A Belarusian library can't afford to invite them to meet their readers. Belarusian women writers try to do their own publishing despite difficulties. However there are no women's reviews like those in Russia where women can discuss gender issues in literature or other problems. Official magazines such as *Alesja* and *Hosjajka* consist more or less of just recipes.



It is time to start new reviews to publish women writers and introduce our thoughts! They might work slowly, but they would have a deep influence on our conservative attitudes. It has been often said in Belarusian writing (e.g. by Vasil Bykov) and in politics (remember Senon Posnjak, who built up a Belarusian popular front and now lives in exile) that women are much more determined than men even though it

can go unnoticed. It can be seen clearly in literature, especially in the prose and verse of young writers who have just started their literary career and are already here.

Fast money! Sell all old pieces of jewellery that you don't need anymore!
Translated from Russian to Swedish by Rimma Markova (Swedish PEN); from Swedish to English by Tiina Pystynen (Finnish PEN).

BELARUSIANS ARE AFRAID OF FEMINISM

by Svetlana Kurs, writer and editor of the weekly Nasha niva

A paradox of Belarusian society: on one hand women constitute 53% of the population and 52% of the employed, yet they are scarcely represented in decision-making. 10% of Members of Parliament are women, and they make up 22% of municipal administrators. A majority of the population, and better educated than men, they have less power. Such a society, that prohibits women from participation in running things, is throwing away women's potential.

The value of women's unpaid work is said to be as high as one-third of GNP. 70% of the unemployed are women, and the salary of those employed is about 19% (in some fields 30%) less than men's. Yet fighting for your rights is thought of as coarse and unfeminine in Belarus! The half-official press willingly supports this myth. One newspaper stated: "The Slavic women's position as mother, wife and protector of the home has always been respected. For this reason the fight for equality with men in every aspect – the definition of feminism – is completely foreign to our women and revolutionary winds from Western Europe alone can shake the holy foundations of our life."

In another newspaper it was written: "Widespread homosexuality is a phenomenon reaching out the same way as fierce feminism." A feminist is labelled as a woman who is against marriage, men and make-up and defends silly principles such as dying before having someone help her put her coat on. Representatives of women's movements have to defend themselves in

public by claiming not to be feminists despite the fact that they want to bring discrimination into the open.

This appeared in the "Letters to the Editor" in the local paper *Vitebskij kurir*: "[Feminists] are dumb people who haven't met real men. Well, if you haven't ever encountered love in your life, what else is left in the end except fighting for your rights?" and "If everyone becomes a feminist who will give birth to children?"

We affirm that the only difference is women's ability to give birth and breastfeed. All other differences depend on society, and society can be changed. So we can reject stereotypes.

More and more people believe women must wield power; after all, men have already shown what they are capable of. Belarusian women have great qualities including an amazing ability to survive, witness the twofold burden of hours of daily housework on top of an 8-hour working day. Women are discriminated against when they are forced to give up having a family, or – having a family – every kind of leisure and relaxation, in order to have a career or get involved in politics. Men do not face such a choice.

The Belarusian state is built on exploiting women. Stereotypes are promoted by the media and majority culture, and legislation doesn't help the fight to improve women's rights. Nonetheless, feminism will one day flourish here.

Translated from Finnish by Pauliina Luoto (Finnish PEN)

BEING A YOUNG WOMAN WRITER IN BELARUS

Volha Hapejeva (Belarusian PEN) gvolja@hotmail.com

You never know why one day you begin writing. There is no universal reason; each person has their own. The most terrible and beautiful thing about it is that often you are not sure why you are doing all this and whether it is worth your time and energy. Nevertheless, you continue, just because you cannot live without it.

Once, in a depressed state, I lost belief in myself and in everything I did, I said to my friend Nadia, "Maybe I should stop writing, who cares, who reads all this?" She gave a canny reply: "And can you NOT write?" I think this question to yourself clarifies a lot and helps you to understand something important inside you.

So here I am, Volha Hapejeva, the author of the book *Reconstruction of the Sky*. It was released last year and now I am working at the new one. I write poems and prose and also tried plays. Together with my friends, who are also poets and writers, we staged my play *The Collector*. We liked working together so much that we decided to continue our collaboration, so now I'm writing a new play. I live in Minsk and I'm in my last year at Minsk State Linguistic University. I study English, German and French along with Linguistics and Pedagogy. I translate from English and German. I am a member of a literary group, "Schmerzwerk" (factory for pain production – German). There are six of us, with only two women.

At first sight it may seem that there is nothing to complain about. Vera Burlak, a Belarusian poet, has released a book of her poetry; another poet, Valzhyna Mort, has her book ready for publication. If you open a literary magazine you are sure to find women among the authors. But it is only one side of the story.

The other, not so pleasant, doesn't lie on the surface. Stereotypes are strong in our society, and rooted so deeply that some people just take them for granted. I myself saw such stereotypes at work. When my novel was published in the literary

magazine, a reader called me. He wanted to get acquainted, because as he said he liked my novel. "It was the best I read in this magazine, besides you are a woman and it is a double pleasure". That actually meant that if I am a woman I cannot write well. It's not easy to hear such things. This very reader turned out to be an educated young man, who graduated from university and continued his studies in other educational institutions. For me that made it doubly annoying.

Another example: when I was younger I participated in literary seminars, held by the editor-in-chief of the literary magazine *Pershatsvet* (Primrose). Young poets and writers came to read and to listen to their colleagues. I still remember one thing the editor said: "It is a pity that our girl-poets stop writing when they marry." Yes, it is a sad fact that can be explained by the economic situation in our country. If your work is not highly paid and your husband's isn't either, you (and your husband) have to look for an additional job. If you have children, the main task of their upbringing will be laid on your shoulders. And don't forget about household duties, they are very time-consuming. After such a working day do you have any physical strength for writing? Family life can mean for some women the end of their literary career. Not necessarily

so, because there are women who find time and strength for everything. But I don't want women to just survive, I want them to live, because I am one of them and because I may have children in future and I do not want them to live in this kind of society, where a woman's status is lower than a man's.

As the proverb says: a tree must be bent when it's young. It's

almost impossible to change an adult. That is why everything should be started in childhood. Much depends on school and teachers and parents themselves. A few



words about literature as a school subject: during all twelve years spent at school children read literary works. Usually when you read a novel or a story you try to identify yourself with the main hero, you look for the qualities you have in you or which you would like to have. When I look back at my school years I can honestly say that I never identified myself with female characters, I didn't want to be like any of them. I wanted to act, to save someone, to be in the center of the crowd – but as a rule, all these were typical features of male characters. I do not blame the writers, because they just reflected the situation of those times. And the majority of the writers studied at school are male writers. But at the same time it must bring us modern writers and poets to the thought that what we write today may influence the younger generation. Thus, the responsibility each of us has is immense. The other thing is whether our conservative society will accept a new vision of the world – a woman vision. As Olga Ipatova said, very often men do not accept active and independent women.

The other day I read an article in a Belarusian newspaper of 8 March, which is celebrated in our country as women's day. The title was "10 anti-women of Belarus". Sure, the article is a bit humorous. But as people say, in each joke there is a bit of a joke. The passage which didn't leave me indifferent, was about literary and artistic circles. The author wrote, "In our literary circles the girls seldom ask each other, "Who are you?" Usually they ask, "Whose are you?" Never in my life have I heard such a question and I hope I won't, though I do communicate with other writers, and belong to several literary circles. I shared my thoughts with Vera Burlak, also a poet. And she confessed that after her marriage with the Belarusian poet Viktor Zhybul some people started to treat her like an attachment to her husband. I was really shocked. But I don't want to end on a pessimistic note. This stereotyping is caused by ignorance. We lack gender education. So I'm thinking of issuing a popular magazine, devoted to gender problems, where women and men could find out more about themselves. I hope that one day this idea will be realised.

CENTRAL ASIA: A MUSE CRIES UNDER HER VEIL

by Vera Tokombaeva (Bishkek Centre)

Influential cultural persons – men – often come to my office to complain that their talents are no longer used. Older ones look back longingly at Soviet times, when the States not only published their work but paid good money. The young understand the market economy and rarely complain. Not once has a woman come to me. Women of the East don't have a habit of complaining. They plod on, grinding their teeth, hoping that no worse will happen. Only at night can they rest from perpetual drudgery at work and at home. Then they respond to the call of their souls, and muses come to them. And women of Asia don't complain about hours stolen from sleep in order to achieve something, nor because it's unpaid.

Young, highly-respected writers from Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tadzhikistan are members of the PEN Centre founded in Bishkek, in Kyrgyzstan. They recently voiced concern about the

decrease in numbers of women writing creatively.

While previously one could name dozens of noted women writers, today there are literally a handful left. Has democratisation completely defeated women's creativity by forcing women to carry the burden of the heaviest work – providing for the family?

The PEN Centre in Bishkek made a small study of women's situation.

An opera singer worker is a market-vendor. Children's writer Marina Kostrigina washes floors. Poet Malika Shabaeva died of malnutrition. Young Tatjana Tajanova died in a car crash late at night as she was coming back from her night shift.

Writers are often appreciated only after their deaths. Does the same apply to literature? Would the complete lack of it at last awaken people? The voice of women writers in Middle Asian republics has drowned in poverty and economic cynicism.

Do women writers miss creative work? Many think fiction, art, poetry and science aren't needed right now. Others believe a woman is first and foremost a mother. Will these stereotypes prevail? The ranks of creative intellectuals are thinning, and hopes for a cultural revival are running low.

Shops are stocked with thrillers, cookbooks, cosmology and astrology. Modern Kyrgyzstan prose and poetry can't be found there. Publication is possible only in authors' editions; no publisher will make a profit on marketing and distributing new Kirgiz, Uzbek or Tadzhik literature.

Happy are the handful of writers who find sponsors for their books. The exceptions to this are those with power. Benevolent sponsors picked up the bill to publish a book by the nation's first lady!

A few Maecenases are still trying to save educational publishing. It is risky, though a profit can be made. But not one of them is interested in Middle Asian literature. All literary magazines in Kyrgyzstan have become unviable and ceased publication. Women writers are isolated, in a cultural vacuum; they are not able to get in touch



with colleagues outside their own country, and hence know nothing of the state of culture in the world. Their spirit is being overwhelmed by the daily battle for survival. No one has found a more effective way to silence a creative individual!

There is no war here now, nor persecution. Everything written in the country stays in the desk drawer. The disappearance of Kirgiz, Uzbek and Tadzhik authors of the twenty-first century will perhaps one day be pointed out as one of the greatest tragedies of our nation. Where there are no books,

there is no spirituality. The void is filled with ethnic and religious speculation and political eruptions. The global community has started to pay attention to Middle Asia. Its difficult geopolitical situation can lead to the penetration of violent, ultra-religious and fundamentalist ideologies into the area. It is precisely

the lack of modern literature that creates a breeding ground where alien ideologies become rooted in young people. Flourishing modern literature would be the means with which democratic social awareness could be born.

Translated from Russian to Finnish by Tanja M. Tiainen; from Finnish to English by Pauliina Luoto (Finnish Centre).

KURDISH PEN CENTRE WOMEN WRITERS' COMMITTEE by Berivan Dosky

The Women Writers' Committee of the Kurdish PEN Centre actively works for the promotion of Kurdish language and literature, especially of women writers. Women make up 30% of the Centre's members, and have worked in all its activities.

Linguistic oppression is practised on Kurds; in some parts of our homeland Kurdistan even speaking in Kurdish is prohibited. So promoting the mother tongue is one of our priorities. Kurdish women writers have always stood against the denial to our children of their basic rights of reading, writing and speaking Kurdish, and women in this Centre play an important role promoting

reading and writing in Kurdish, especially for children.

Women, e.g. Ermine Erdem and Yayla Monch-Bucak, from North Kurdistan (Turkey), were involved in the foundation of our Centre. Women in our committee play active roles in cultural and literary seminars, and with other members represent the Centre in PEN conferences – Seferaz Naqishbandi, from South Kurdistan (Iraq), Hevi Berwari (currently Chairwoman of our Committee) and Berivan Dosky, both from South Kurdistan.

Kurdish women are vulnerable in almost all parts of Kurdistan because of both their gender and their ethnicity. This

committee defends their rights and exposes perpetrators when violation of women's rights has occurred. We believe in solidarity with women writers world-wide in promoting women's rights, and we hope to have the support of women writers everywhere for our just cause.

I recently joined the Women Writers' Committee of the Kurdish PEN Centre in the

"Smart Group Network", believing that women's participation in all aspects of life promotes and highlights their positive impact in the changes that Kurdish society is witnessing.

For further information, please contact Berivan Dosky at bdosky@hotmail.com

TURKISH PEN WOMEN WRITERS' COMMITTEE AT MANISA *by Aysu Erden (Turkish Centre)*

On May 22, 2004, the members of Turkish PEN Women Writers' Committee met with local readers and established writers in Manisa, a small central Aegean city. Workshops were organised by Manisa writers Sukran Farimaz and Bedriye Aksakal, as follows (group leaders in alphabetical order):

Sezer Ates Ayvaz: "The eye that sees the future"

Nalan Barbarosoglu: "The changes of life, between watching television and reading books"

Jaklin Çelik: "Writing"

Aysu Erden: "Critical reading"

Müge Iplikçi: "A day in Manisa – Daily Politics"

Sema Kaygusuz: "Who does literature talk about?"

After the conference, the writers gathered to present a summary of the morning, each writer expressing her own opinions of the topic chosen by herself for the workshops. Literature lovers of different ages attended the literary workshops free.

LETTER FROM NICARAGUA

by Christian Santos (Nicaraguan Centre), corresponding with Lucina Kathmann (San Miguel de Allende Centre)

Dear Lucina,

...I sent your call for manuscripts to the office of the Nicaraguan Association of Women Writers, ANIDE, and from there to the whole list of its members. Have you received manuscripts from Nicaraguan writers?

The work of ANIDE is going well...we have had several literary workshops, especially in prose – we have a lot of good poets, but few prose writers. We have organised poetry and prose competitions. We have also taken courses on the production of magazines, and our members travelled to meetings in various countries where we have presented our magazine with success.

So despite economic difficulties, we have managed to go on publishing for three years in a row; though we have to take up money among ourselves to cover the high cost, we have done it... It's marvelous how much literary production there is - we always have texts left over for the next issue. The editorial page is published in the literary supplement of our best daily paper, with the biggest circulation. It gets posted off far and wide, to universities and libraries in Europe, Australia, and the Americas...[By subscribing to ANIDE] people can learn about literature by Nicaraguan women, and we will have a little more money to help pay the cost of making and printing it!

Christian Santos can be contacted at christia@ibw.com.ni

BLACK WOMEN PUBLISHERS – WRITING AND PUBLISHING OUR FUTURE

by Kadija Sesay (African Writers Abroad Centre)

Did you know that Black women publish most of the books by Black writers in Britain today?

The African Writers Abroad (PEN Centre) Women's program hosted a one-day symposium on Black women publishers and writers in Britain to celebrate this. 'Black Women Publishers, Writing and Publishing our Future,' took place on Saturday 6 March in London.

Pioneers of the Black publishing industry in Britain have seen women at its forefront with previous Pandora award winner (1993) Margaret Busby of Allison and Busby and Jessica Huntley of Bogle L'Ouverture.

As conglomerates of the publishing and retail book industry swallow up smaller ones, the decisions on not only what is 'publishable literature' by Black writers but also topics that concern Black communities, are increasingly affected. The lack of a significant Black presence within the mainstream leads to important works being marginalised or sidelined if not seen as commercially viable - or basically, if just not understood. A recent report by *The Bookseller*, funded by Arts Council England, revealed statistics that, while showing the expected low numbers of Black people in decision-making positions, concerned us by how little it was taken seriously.

We came together to ask: What are the solutions? How do we strike the balance between big guns and small guys? How do we build on our strengths and move forward as a positive and valid force in the community and the industry? What is our role on the world publishing stage? It was also an opportunity to meet and teach; make suggestions; collate ideas and plan strategically in order to control our own publishing future.

Our panellists were: Margaret Busby, Sheree Thomas (Wanganagresse Press, New York), Vastiana Belfon (Brown Skin

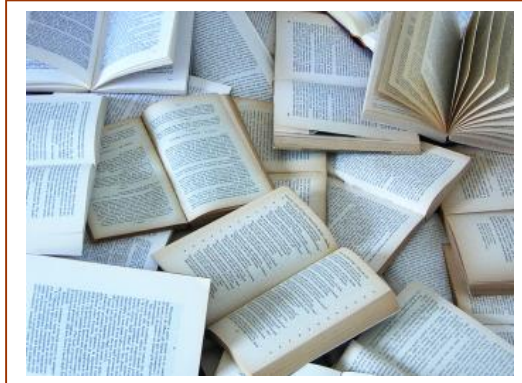
Books), Jessica Huntley and Verna Wilkins of Tamarind Books, and myself, as General Secretary of African Writers Abroad, chairing. Joan Anim Addo (Mango Press) and Rosemarie Hudson (Black Amber Books) were unable to attend.

What could happen with so much dynamism in one room?

The group – about 40 women from across England and the US – were all eager and anxious to talk, learn and share experiences and knowledge and to offer support. During the day we discussed matters relevant both to our business and our community, with long tea breaks and a long lunch break for networking – we realised there is never too much time for networking!

The panel discussion in the morning was followed, after lunch, by one workshop on marketing (including press and publicity) and another on getting published, self-publishing and setting up a small press.

We covered the ground originally planned as four smaller workshops – the preferred model – and feedback also showed



a need for specialist topics like contracts and rights. At the end, the plenary session (too short!) was the time to discuss how we could pool ideas and resources.

Suggestions included collective distribution and buying of print making

materials; forming a book club to sell our books; pulling together a list of places where we can inform people of our books; selling them at targeted events to churches.

A skill pool of volunteers, we decided, was also key to this, and we started that same afternoon to build our contact list. The group now includes website designers, PR consultants, fundraisers, journalists, people willing to set up a book fair, and just good volunteers offering their time. Small publishers offered valuable work experience,

and declared a mandate to support British writers of Black and Asian descent through writing course bursaries (in exchange for work experience, selling their books, or advertising space) in *Sable LitMag*, my literary journal.

Women asked for more workshops throughout the year, based on other issues regarding Black people and writing. The other demand was industry balance, to have more Black women in mainstream publishing as well as independent publishers.

Some of the most poignant words that day came from Vastiana Belfon. She said that just coming together to share her experiences and frustrations with other women, and get some feedback, was uplifting in itself, and that we didn't do enough of just coming together socially. And so socialising became more than 'time off when we had other (work) things to do' – it was a strengthening of spirit and support.

The next symposium is being planned as a weekend instead of just the day, with the focus on writing and publishing for children and young people. There's international interest, from a Jamaican women's publisher, women writers in PEN Centres throughout Africa and indigenous women writers and publishers in Australia. They're already planning to be in London, same time, next year.

BLACK WOMEN PUBLISHERS

Bogle L'Ouverture – Publisher: Jessica Huntley. Publishes fiction, non-fiction, poetry and children's work by Black and Asian writers. Mainly Caribbean.

Brown Skin Books – Publisher: Vastiana Belfon. Brown Skin Books publishes high-quality sensual fiction by women of colour. www.brownskinbooks.co.uk/

Tamarind – Publisher: Verna Wilkins. Tamarind publishes multicultural children's books for our multicultural society. www.tamarindbooks.co.uk

SAKS Publications – Publisher: Kadija Sesay. Publishes anthologies of poetry and short stories of African descent, and *SABLE LitMag* for writers of colour.

www.sablelitmag.org

Black Amber – Publisher: Rosemarie Hudson. Publishes fiction and non-fiction by Black and Asian writers.

www.blackamber.com

Mango Publishing – Publisher: Joan Anim Addo. A University Press out of the Caribbean Centre at Goldsmiths College. Publishes fiction, non-fiction and poetry in English and in translation by writers from the Caribbean and Latin America.

www.mangoprint.com

Sable LitMag is producing a special summer issue on women's writing. This issue attempts to be as diverse as possible in terms of incorporating women of colour across the globe.

The main interview, 'The Spotlight', is on four women writers taken from *Kin*, a new anthology of short stories and novel extracts by new writers of African and Asian descent living in England. There's creative writing from women from Guyana and the Caribbean.

Book reviews are by writers from Bermuda, India, West Africa and Native America. The *ŒClassic* review feature focuses on the books of Caribbean author Nalo Hopkinson, who specialises in *Œspeculative fiction*, that is, a mixture of fantasy and science fiction.

'In Translation' contains poetry and an article on Indigenous Mexican women writers, by a Mexican journalist contacted during the PEN Congress.

Sable LitMag will produce a special women's issue every March to coincide with International Women's Day and the Spit Lit Festival of women's words, sited in London. www.sablelitmag.org

ELENA GARRO PRIZE WINNERS

New Zealander Elspeth Sandys for her *Standing in Line*, and Guadalajara resident Nuria Blanchart, with *A toda vida*, were the winners of IPWWC's 2003 Elena Garro short story competition. Each was awarded 10,000 Mexican pesos / \$US1000 for her unpublished collection. The stories will be published in English and Spanish.

Mexican reporter, playwright and novelist Elena Garro (1920 – 1998) was detained by Mexican authorities in 1968, then released and placed under "arraigo" – deprived of her passport. She left anyway, for New York, Spain, and Paris, only returning in 1993.

A trailblazer for Mexican women writers, Garro won the 1996 Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz Award. Her best-known novel was *Los Recuerdos del Porvenir (Recollections of Things to Come)*. She wrote a novelised

account of her life and marriage to Octavio Paz.

Elspeth Sandys, receiving her award at the 2003 Congress in Mexico City, commented: "The opportunity to receive the prize... in person far exceeded my expectations. Meeting and interacting with writers from Japan, Italy, Macedonia, Bolivia, Afghanistan, Vietnam - to name only some - provided me with the means to forge cultural links between these countries and New Zealand."

Elspeth acknowledged the help of New Zealand PEN and IPWWC. Nuria Blanchart is already a published author, writing for *El Informador* and anthologies including *De tanto contar* and *Periplo. Entremiradeas*, her book title, is published by Luciernaga Press, Guadalajara.

SAREDA MILOSZ WINS LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Former San Miguel PEN President Sareda Milosz has won the second annual Stirling Dickinson Lifetime Achievement Award, given by the trustees of the Michael Paul Wein Charitable Foundation in recognition of twenty-three years of volunteer service to the San Miguel community.

The award included a \$1,000 contribution to local charitable organisations of Sareda's choosing. She has split it between the Scholarship Fund of San Miguel PEN and the Women's Auxiliary of the American Legion.

Sareda Milocz arrived in San Miguel in 1981. After editing *Atencion San Miguel* for about ten years she started her own bilingual newspaper, *El Independiente*, which continued for five and a half years – until illness forced her to stop working full-time.

A member of San Miguel PEN for almost twenty years, Sareda was its Vice-President from 1996 to 2000, and President from 2000 to 2003. The PEN Scholarship Fund, benefiting San Miguel children of limited resources, is a program initiated during her administration.

STOP PRESS, JUNE 2004 – IKBAL BARAKA WINS IN EGYPT!

We congratulate Ikbal Baraka of the Egyptian Centre, on winning the Egyptian State Prize for Excellence in Literature for 2004.

The prize is determined by a committee of prominent intellectuals among whom is Dr Fatma Moussa, deputy chair of the Egyptian PEN Centre.

The third edition of her book *The Veil* (on the veil worn by women in different places and centuries) will be in the market very soon. Ikbal Baraka is looking for translators who could prepare English and French versions of the text for publication.

BOOKS

AHLAM AND THE SCAVENGERS OF CAIRO [in French]

Fawzia Assaad (Suisse Romand Centre)

My next book will be in Swiss bookshops from May 18 and in French bookshops from June 10 of 2004. It will be marketed as a novel but it's also a factual account. The title is *Ahlam and the Scavengers of Cairo*. It tells the story of the garbage of the megalopolis of Cairo, and of a scavengers' daughter whose name, Ahlam, means "dreams". A venture in development dating from the 1970s, undertaken by the NGOs of different countries, the World Bank and the specialised arms of the United Nations together with the Egyptian middle classes, aims above all to empower girls to free them from the heavy yoke of patriarchal control. It's also the story of a city of trash transformed into a capitalist industrial society, recycling 90% of Cairo's rubbish and under threat from foreign-owned companies.

DARK DREAMS: AUSTRALIAN REFUGEE STORIES BY YOUNG WRITERS AGED 11-20 YEARS.. [in English]

Edited by Sonia Dechian, Heather Millar and Eva Sallis (Melbourne Centre)

Novelist Eva Sallis heads Australians Against Racism – people working on behalf of asylum-seekers locked in detention camps and released under the insecure conditions of temporary visas. This story collection published by Wakefield Press, Adelaide, is the response of Australians Against Racism to the demonisation of asylum-seekers.

A writing competition targeted young people in order to challenge and change the way Australian people think about asylum-seekers, whom Australia is bound by UN Charter to protect. A generation of young writers went out to meet and interview refugees in the community. They went with the key phrase "Australia IS Refugees" ringing in their heads. They found that the stories of the refugee experience could open minds that were closed before – and good writing spreads that light further. It's a compelling read.

ANOTHER COUNTRY: AN ANTHOLOGY OF REFUGEE WRITING [in English]

Edited by Rosie Scott and Tom Keneally (Sydney Centre)

The first edition of this anthology published by Sydney PEN sold out immediately. The collection has been reprinted.

The introduction explains: "There were writers imprisoned in Australian detention camps, living in harsh conditions, always with the fear of deportation at the back of their minds. With PEN's commitment to opposing censorship and unjust imprisonment of writers all over the world it seemed imperative for us to look at what was happening in our own backyard."

Powerful contributions come from the few women writers, most of whom wanted anonymity. Women, a minority in the camps, are often too busy trying to keep their families alive and together, to write.

NB: During the difficult process of contacting writers in the camps, it was without exception women refugee advocates who answered the call, typing, editing and sending poems and stories. In conditions where self-confidence is systematically dismantled, theirs was a rare gift of faith to the writers.

INTERNATIONAL PEN WOMEN WRITERS COMMITTEE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD IN MEXICO CITY

ON 23 NOVEMBER 2003

Martha Cerda (Guadalajara PEN Centre), President, in the chair

Present were (in alphabetic order of Centres):

Kadiya George, African Writers Abroad; Vera Tokombaeva, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan; Tsung Su, Chinese Writers Abroad; Gloria Guardia, Colombian / Panamanian; Ekbal Baraka, Egyptian; Sarah Lawson, English; Tiina Pystynen, Finnish; Karin Clark, German; Barrou Kofi Apreko, Ghana; Mari Kotani, Japanese; Berivan Dosky, Kurdish; Hevi Merwari, Kurdish; Hyam Jared, Lebanese; Alfred Msadala, Malawian; Judith Buckrich, Melbourne; Remi Raji, Nigerian; Helen Fiori, Salta, Argentina; Iride Rossi de Fiori, Salta, Argentina; Lucina Kathmann, San Miguel de Allende; Mike Butscher, Sierra Leone; Kristin T. Schneider, Swiss German; Chiara Macconi, Swiss Italian; Ngoc Anh, Vietnamese Writers Abroad; Nguyen Viet Duc, Vietnamese Writers Abroad; Kathy Barazetti, International PEN.



International PEN Vice-President Nadine Gordimer, the South African Nobel Prize winner, was active at the Congress, especially in demanding justice and safety for women in the US-Mexican border cities such as Ciudad Juarez. She appears here with Afghan Centre delegate Safia Siddiqui and Homero Aridjis.



The Congress of the Americas invited large numbers of indigenous writers and performers.

Second from left, young poet Maria Enriqueta Lunez Perez from San Juan Chamola; (in floral poncho) Agustina Mondragon Paulino, a Mazahua writer; and (in figured red silk) the extraordinary Tojolab' al singer Maria Rosalia Jimenez Perez. With them are International PEN President, eminent Mexican poet Homero Aridjis (in dark shirt), and his wife Betty Aridjis.

1. Reports were heard from several parts of the world.

Kadija George (African Writers Abroad): AWA, founded 10 years ago by Vincent Magumbe for the "African Diaspora", focuses on (1) arts and education, and (2) women's writing. There is a storytelling program for schoolchildren from 7 to 17. UK's African women were not writing long works but its Caribbean women were; research is being undertaken to find out why. AWA's website www.sable.litmag.org starts in January. *Sable LitMag*, a quarterly magazine published by Kadija George, is not specifically for "black" women but for "women of colour", as the UK is so racially diverse. AWA will take part in a Women's Literature Festival in March and hold a

symposium of Black women publishers. AWA has honoured African women writers Buchi Emecheta (Nigeria) and Grace Nichols (Guyana).

Gloria Guardia (Panama and Colombia) brought greetings from Spanish-speaking women writers.

Vera Tokombaeva (Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan) wrote an article about the situation in Kyrgyzstan. Vera faced a widespread notion that fiction was not needed, and that women were only mothers and housewives. Publishers were not keen to publish her article. There is no persecution of writers now in Kyrgyzstan, but the literature of the central Asian republics of Kyrgyzstan, Tadjikistan, and Uzbekistan has largely disappeared, a great tragedy for the region.

Tsung Su (Chinese Writers Abroad; representative of IPWWC to UN Commission on the Status of Women) The 1995 World Congress of Women in Beijing was a watershed in the women's movement. The "Platform for Action" blueprint cited twelve areas of critical concern, e.g., violence against women, poverty, education, information and media. Information technology was this year's theme. UN conventions and treaties banning violence against women are sometimes contravened by cultural conventions, like female genital mutilation and 'honour killings'. There was also the issue of 'comfort women', with lawsuits against the Japanese government. Discussions at the UN in the early 1990s have died down now. We are not a lobby group.

Hevi Berwari (Kurdish) Through translator Berivan Dosky, Hevi sketched the history and background of the Kurds. Kurdish women are active in changing society, and more visible than in neighboring Iran, Iraq, and Turkey. They can be tribal leaders, and have made their mark as political leaders in Kurdistan's past (before Islamization). There are many Kurdish women writers not known elsewhere, including a great 18th-century woman writer, and Mastura in present-day Iran.

In the 1920s Kurdistan was divided up among four countries. Regimes in all four have targeted women. Iraq committed "ethnic cleansing" in 1988. The fate and whereabouts of 182,000 people, mostly women and children, are still unknown. A Kurdish town in Iraq was chemically bombarded. When the Kurds had control over safe havens in 1991, prisons were opened to reveal many incarcerated women, some with children sired by Iraqi rapists.

Since 1991 the Iraqi regime has not controlled the Kurdish area. For the first time there are women in government—in parliament and as minister. They are fighting to participate in all areas of society. In the post-Saddam government the first woman minister is a Kurd. There is an active women's movement. Women writers in Iraqi Kurdistan campaign against 'honour killings' and violence against women. A law rating 'honour killings' as a not very serious crime has been abolished. Kurdish writer Leila Zana is in prison in Turkey. There is less progress in the Kurdish areas of Turkey, Syria, and Iran.

Iride Rossi (alternative publisher - Salta, Argentina) An academic women's group in Salta has organized a publishing house for people without access to large, mainstream publishers. They publish through the university they work for; the university supplies paper and ink. They pay the university back from sales, plus a top-up from PEN. The group has a small office with an old printing press and other equipment; members do the whole printing process themselves. Good provincial artists volunteer their work for book covers. Product: 103 titles, 70,000 copies!

They deal with two areas: contemporary writers, both men and women, and historical writing of women from the colonial period who died without being published – many or most were cloistered nuns. The task: to find the women of the past, promote the women of the present, and project the women of the future.

Mari Kotani (Japanese, Chair of its WWC). She won a 1996 lawsuit about “textual harassment”. It was alleged that Mari Kotani’s husband had written a book with her name as a pseudonym. Her publisher lodged a strong protest. She sued and the judge ordered the three defendants to publish an apology on their website and pay damages. Japanese PEN Club established a Women Writers’ Committee. She has translated *How to Suppress Women’s Writing* by Joanna Rus. The Japan Centre is to have a symposium on nationalism and gender.

Martha Cerda (Guadalajara) reported on her presidency. In 1994 Martha Cerda founded the Guadalajara Centre. She organized a meeting of Latin American women writers in 1995, and again in 1998 on censorship and self-censorship. In Moscow in 2000 she was elected IPWWC President; Lucina Kathmann was named Commissioner for Human Rights so that Martha could work exclusively on literary projects. The three volumes of *Nuestra Voz, Our Voice, Notre Voix* (published by Salta) contain work by women from all over the world.

A conference for small publishers in Guadalajara published its papers in two volumes. In 2002 an anthology of Mexican writing was published in a bilingual edition with Cremona and the government of the state of Jalisco.

Martha organised the Elena Garro Prize for women writers in Spanish and English (2003). The winners are a Catalan writer resident in Guadalajara, Nuria Blanchart, for her short story collection *A toda vida*, and Elspeth Sandys of New Zealand for hers, *Standing in Line*. Each winner receives 10,000 Mexican pesos plus a diploma, to be presented at the Congress’s farewell dinner in Chapúltepec Castle. The Office of Publications and the Secretary of Culture of the State of Jalisco will publish the books.

During Martha’s term, 11 books have been published in 4 languages - English, French, Italian, and Spanish; one short-story contest held, and three women writers’ conferences in Guadalajara, at which a total of 200 people participated. Still, though leaving she felt she had only just begun. She wanted a budget for research among women writers in PEN Centres to find out how many and how active they are. She urged the Committee to keep working together and making alliances with, e.g. Cremona, Jalisco, Salto, etc. She wanted to continue the work begun before her presidency and the Elena Garro Prize. She commended Lucina Kathmann’s work on Network. Martha Cerda thanked Jane Spender of the International PEN office, Lucina Kathmann, the publisher Luis Mario Cerda, Iride Rossi de Fiori of Salta, Manuel Bertini and the publisher of the Secretary of Culture of Jalisco, and the Women’s Committee for its support.

2. Election of new president. Judith Buckrich (Melbourne Centre) was elected by show of hands. In accepting, she talked of building on former work and working with women writers in the Australia and Asia region, despite the variety of cultures and languages. She would like to hear from anyone interested in helping to organize regional groups. She invited us on a visit to the house of Frida Kahlo the following morning.

3. Kathy Barrazetti (International PEN office) suggested a message of support to the women of Ciudad Juárez [northern Mexico; more than 300 women have been murdered there during the past few years with little apparent interest by local police]. A collection was taken to publish a newspaper message of solidarity with the women of Ciudad Juárez and support for the commissioner appointed to investigate the situation, the poet Guadalupe Martín, of Guadalajara PEN.

4. Eqbal Baraka (Egyptian) stated that wearing a veil is not obligatory in Islam. It is mentioned in both Old and New Testaments. In the 7th century women everywhere wore a veil. Islam continued the tradition. The veil has returned for political, not religious, reasons since 1970 and the rise of fundamentalist movements in the Mid-east. Ekbal has written a big book on the subject and is trying to secure translation into English and French.

5. Remi Raji (Nigerian) studies gender studies, specializing in African women's poetry; he has put Lucina Kathmann in touch with African women writers. Nigerian writing is well known, but the writers are mostly male. A Nigerian anthology has appeared with 50% women contributors; this is a great departure. If Nigerian PEN sends only one delegate to the next Congress, it will be a woman.

6. Mike Butscher (Sierra Leone). He brought greetings from his Centre. Its President is a woman of 83, a distinguished writer of 10 books and a "paramount chief". Sierra Leone is a young Centre and very active. After ten years of war, they are busy with reconstruction. There are many good Sierra Leone writers – most are not in the country. Sierra Leone PEN is not trying to identify them around the world. They are about to publish their new literary magazine Penpoint. For financial reasons Sierra Leone sends only one delegate; maybe next year, a woman.

7. Nguyen Viet Duc (Vietnam) spoke of a woman writer in Viet Nam, and her book about the impact of rice on society and politics there.

The meeting concluded. Next meeting will be at the Tromso PEN Congress, in Norway.

Sarah Lawson, Secretary

DRAFT STANDING ORDERS FOR THE INTERNATIONAL PEN WOMEN WRITERS' COMMITTEE

To be adopted by the GM of the IPWWC on 5 September 2004 at Tromsø, Norway on confirmation by the Assembly of Delegates of International PEN.

1. The International PEN Women Writers' Committee (IPWWC) is a Standing Committee of International PEN, established according to the Constitution of International PEN.
2. The aim of the IPWWC is to support women writers in all PEN Centres and women writers experiencing difficulty because of their calling as writers in all countries.
3. The IPWWC membership consists of those Centres of International PEN which have formed their own Women Writers' Committees or otherwise affiliated themselves to the IPWWC Standing Committee. Together they form the Member Centres of the IPWWC General Meeting.
4. The General Meeting (GM) of the IPWWC shall be convened at least once a year. The call for a GM shall reach the Members at least four months in advance, together with a proposed Agenda for that meeting. The Chair of the IPWWC issues the Call and the Agenda for a GM. The location of a GM shall be decided as far in advance as possible and shall either coincide with a Congress of International PEN, or shall be selected together with a volunteer Host Centre, with due consideration for geographical and other circumstances.
5. At a GM every Member Centre shall have one vote. A quorum for all meetings shall be half the number of Member Centres plus one.
6. The IPWWC shall be directed from the centre at which its Chair is a member. It shall inform the London Office of International PEN of its activities at all times.
7. Member centres of the IPWWC may independently organise events related to the Committee's aim and raise funds for these, but they shall inform the IPWWC Chair and the PEN Secretariat of these activities.
8. The Chair of the IPWWC shall be elected by the Member Centres of the IPWWC for a period of three years. Any by-election shall be for the remainder of this term of office. The Chair shall represent the IPWWC between General Meetings. The Chair shall propose the Agenda for all meetings of the IPWWC, and shall conduct the affairs and procedures of these meetings, subject to the approval by the GM.
 - a. When an election for Chair is foreseen, nominations shall be invited not less than three months before the GM which has this item on its Agenda.

- b. Nominations, together with biographical details and a Declaration of Intent, shall be circulated to all Member Centres not later than six weeks before the GM.
- c. Every Nomination shall be seconded by at least two Member Centres.
- d. The International PEN Secretariat is in charge of this procedure, and shall fix conditions for any balloting procedure.
- e. Postal balloting shall be allowed. Proxy voting shall not be allowed.
- f. The Chair is elected by the GM, and shall take office when the Assembly of Delegates of International PEN has confirmed the election.
- 9. The GM shall decide on all matters within the competence of the Standing Committee according to the Constitution of International PEN.
- 10. These Standing Orders may be changed through a decision by a simple majority at a GM, and if confirmed by a second decision at a following GM, shall take effect immediately.

Drafted by Judith Buckrich (Chair, IPWWC) and Judith Rodriguez (International PEN Board member), Melbourne, Australia, 20 March 2004.

THE 48TH SESSION OF THE U.N. COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

March 1 – 12, 2004, reported by Lucina Kathmann (San Miguel de Allende Centre) and Tsung Su (American Centre)

This year, the sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) focused on two themes:

- 1. The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality, and**
- 2. Women's equal participation in conflict prevention, management and resolution, and in post-conflict peace-building – women in peace processes.**

The Reports from Lucina Kathmann and Tsung Su, each inspiring, cannot be reproduced here in full, and are lightly edited in the excerpts that follow.

LUCINA: Background: last year the Commission failed to arrive at consensus. This year's 900 NGO representatives (the largest ever except for Beijing + 5 – next year we will be a horde) came with strategies designed to avoid a repeat of the US government-inspired political obstruction of the 2003 session.

Both Tsung Su and Lucina remarked on the presence of men, a rare sight in previous years; many work in Africa round the AIDS issue, but others – from everywhere – are relating concepts of gender to all sorts of issues. Some African male participants openly discussed their personal experiences in understanding women's issues and coping with traditional cultural bias.

TSUNG SU: Many panels, discussions and workshops highlighted the crucial role both men and women play in achieving women's human rights and gender rights.

Panels on **trafficking and prostitution** underscored the male sense of sexual entitlement contributing to the sex trade of underage girls in southeast Asian countries with patrons from the West. A refreshing note: under Swedish laws, sex buyers – not the workers – are legally liable for punishment. The UN Optional Protocol (2000) spells out that trafficking of persons for sexual purposes is against international laws and conventions.

Both the UN and NGOs over the years have stressed the importance of eradicating root causes of **violence against women**: poverty, ignorance, underdevelopment, lack of opportunities in life, and armed conflict.

A panel of experts discussed the plight of girl soldiers in Angola (used commonly by fellow soldiers), Colombia (child combatants and informants violated, killed, maimed), Sri Lanka and the Philippines. They also mentioned schoolchildren subjected to atrocities in Congo (DRC) and Sierra Leone, and girls of 10-12 cheaply available for sex.

UNIFEM and other NGOs work for progress. **Initiatives** include: a program entitled "Equal Win" started in Malaysia to educate men and women in gender equality; local celebrities speaking out on women's issues; men involved through teaching of role reversal and empathy, a 3-7 day program adopted by African NGOs. Men from Zambia, Kenya, Ethiopia and other parts of Africa formed a Travelling Conference to raise awareness of gender-based violence and support women's rights.

Internationally, **the Rome Statute (1998) of the International Criminal Court** recognises that sexual violence as part of widespread or systematic attack on a civilian population constitutes the "crime of genocide and crime against humanity". Of the first 18 judges of the ICC, 7 are women.

On promoting women's role in peace-making, many NGOs (e.g. Hague Appeal For Peace) believe a culture of peace and justice starts with educating the very young in the "soft power" of communication, negotiation, and conflict-resolution by non-violent means.

LUCINA: There was emphasis on the UN Security Council's Resolution 1325, which mandates as international law the participation of women in all phases of peace processes. Official panels and side events show clearly that this is not being done. The majority of the negotiators do not even know about 1325. Typically, antiwar forces are full of women, but when peace is worked out behind closed doors, the women are left outside or have only token representation. Lack of security during demobilisation, and damage and corruption in the wake of conflict point the need for openness and participation by both men and women.

TSUNG SU: Women played key roles in post-conflict reconciliation and reconstruction in Timor, Somalia and Rwanda.

A mock-trial, entitled "**1325 On Trial: A Tribunal Investigating The Implementation of UN SCR 1325 Highlighting the Role of Men**", featured opening statements by opposing "counsels", and testimony both in defence and criticism by witnesses – representatives from UNIFEM (Nepal, Colombia, Sweden, USA and Iraq). The audience voted overwhelmingly in favour of the plaintiff – i.e. supporting the contention that UN and member states FAILED to implement 1325 robustly – still, the Resolution itself was never faulted as a positive instrument to promote women's rights and peace-making power.

LUCINA: I personally found the focus on the positive work of peace thrilling. There were workshops on conflict resolution, on mental health many years after...and there HAS been considerable work on peace in all its phases, e.g. documentation of cases where armed conflict has been prevented, using as an important technique women informants who tell when there are sudden migrations of men or weapons build-ups.

I took the floor to complain of the miserable participation by NGOs from Latin America. The problem is linguistic as well as economic – the problem International PEN had a few years ago – with representatives discouraged by how little of the proceedings they can understand. (Official sessions have translation but are only a tiny part of the conference work.) After my complaint, Latins mustered in a lively caucus that met every day with wonderful speakers and did a lot of work to rectify the imbalance.

Personally making introductions and translating for a man with poor English sent by the Maryknoll Sisters, resulted in his speaking, again with my translation, on a panel – a fine intervention about the postwar mental health situation in El Salvador.

FROM BARCELONA: PLANNING THE WWC'S NEW PARTNERS PROGRAM

by Tiina Pystynen, the Human Rights Commissioner of the IPWWC

After the Mexico City Congress Sara Whyatt, Melissa Miller (Melbourne WiPC) and I started discussions about how IPWWC could improve its cooperation with the Writers in Prison Committee. Perhaps we could find new ways of helping writers in prisons? That the subject of our women writers' meeting at Barcelona, in May.

Lucina Kathmann had started working for detained women writers. That work continues, but she also told us that the ways women are threatened can be quite different from the oppression men meet. In many cases women meet opposition and threats from their own families. Lucina has worked, for example, with a woman whose husband burned her first novel.

We found out that there is another demanding mission: working with women who are on the case list, but not detained. Sara told us that a number of women live under threat or harassment, but WiPC's resources are not sufficient to provide us the kind of detail we need to campaign. Sara wished IPWWC to research such cases.

We started planning a new Partner project among detained women writers and those who are other ways threatened. Melissa Miller suggested that one aspect of the partnership could be simply keeping up a correspondence, as a means of supporting women writers. It could also prove to be a way of collecting information about these cases.

Women at our meeting supplied ideas. Kristin Schnider (Swiss German PEN) emphasized cooperation with the London office. We mustn't harm people we are trying to help. As Sara Whyatt wrote, "We need to liaise so as to ensure that we don't create confusion within PEN or, more importantly, with the individual concerned."

Chiara Macconi (Swiss Italian PEN) stressed the importance of language. We should help each other to translate our letters so that we can really start meaningful dialog with prisoners or harassed writers.

To start, we must find the cases that need our Partners program, information about them, addresses, languages needed; and a list of members who would be interested in the work. We need a coordinator who could try to link women through the Partners program, keep track of Partnerships and report regularly both to IPWWC and WiPC. Melissa Miller undertook to coordinate.

Maria Modig (Swedish PEN) suggested starting with Turkish Asiye Güzel Zeybek, who is now living in Sweden and waiting for re-evaluation of her case. Leyla Zana was also mentioned.

Fatma Moussa-Mahmood (Egyptian PEN) reminded us that prisoners have wives and families who also need support. Could this Partners program also work for them?

Melissa Miller spoke about eventually extending Partners work to women writers who are not overtly threatened or imprisoned, but whose writing is affected in other ways. It will be another demanding challenge to IPWWC to start research on the obscure areas of repression of women writers - censorship on women's issues, literacy, social/cultural contexts. Would it be possible to create a network to gather information about all the different ways women are silenced?

Lucina Kathmann declared that everywhere in the world there are women writers. "The women are there and they are ready, perhaps not in number, but they exist. What doesn't exist is a proper publishing industry," said Lucina.

And what about creative writing programs for girls in countries where not many women writers are published? Some time ago Swedish PEN Women Writers Committee had such a project. Could IPWWC start that kind of work as well?

We decided to start small and develop gradually. If you are interested in this Partner program, please, send Melissa Miller mjmill8888@yahoo.com your e-mail address so that we can inform you of our plans and you can tell us your ideas.