

# Annual Report 2016

Bank: ABNAMRO Amsterdam 43 02 74 033  
IBAN: NL 97 ABNA 0430 274 033  
BIC: ABNANL2A

# Preface

This 2016 annual report of the PEN Emergency Fund (PEF) is the last to be drawn up by the two executive board members Rudolf Geel and Jan Honout, who held their positions during that year. The latter has served as treasurer for more than thirty years; he took up the post in the early 1970s, when the fund was still being run by its founder, A. den Doolaard. Subsequently he worked with Gerrit Borgers and Henk Bernlef, who was succeeded by Rudolf Geel as chair in 2002. Geel is now taking leave of his post as well.

The fact that the fund has, from the very start, done little other than provide help to writers in extremely critical situations does not alter the reality that, throughout the years, major changes have occurred in the circumstances under which and the way in which this was carried out. Those changes are worthy of mention. Not only as a means of outlining its history, but also in order to signal developments that could be essential to the fund in the future.

The aim of this report differs from that of previous ones in another respect. In the very first annual reports, most of the cases involving the granting of aid were described extensively, and this included the names of the recipients. In recent years the cases have been made anonymous, while an attempt was also made to phrase the descriptions in such a way that the identities of the writers concerned could not be deduced from them. Because the annual report is distributed widely at PEN conferences, there is a huge risk that readers of the case descriptions will include individuals - members of security forces from a repressive country, for instance - who are, for understandable reasons, not meant to see this. Particularly on the part of the Writers in Prison Committee, concerns as to the danger of reporting too extensively on these cases have been repeatedly expressed. We believed that we should act on this advice by omitting descriptions of cases entirely. In this annual report we will be limiting ourselves to the general indication of regions in which there has been an emphasis on help throughout the year of the report, as is evident from the respective figures in the financial section of the report.

## A. den Doolaard

The idea of creating a special 'writers-in-need-fund' started with the Dutch writer Bob Spoelstra (pen-name A. den Doolaard), who played a prominent role in PEN International for many years and was appointed vice-president. Since its founding PEN has been committed to the fate of writers in countries where the right to freedom of expression is violated by regimes. Den Doolaard delicately pointed out that at least one element was missing from this commitment: the furnishing of material assistance. And it was precisely this, he argued, that many writers who were restricted in their freedom of work needed. Not being able to write, being boycotted, imprisoned or having to flee does, after all, mean not being able to earn an income. Not only for oneself, but for one's family too.

In order to bring about a change in this and to increase the strength of PEN as an organization, Den Doolaard conceived the PEN Emergency Fund (PEF) around 1970. He chose the legal form of a fund governed by Dutch law. By doing so he wished to prevent internal political and personal vicissitudes within PEN International from influencing policy on financial support. Entirely in accordance with the spirit of the times, and mindful of the idealism within PEN, Den Doolaard opted for the solidarity model, assuming that writers in free and prosperous countries would want to support their less fortunate colleagues by contributing to a fund.

On that basis the PEF was able to make a start, albeit on a relatively modest scale. In the early days activities were primarily aimed at Eastern Europe, where the various Communist regimes then shared the practice of using censorship as a means to silence political opponents and free thinkers. At that time, though, only those writers and poets whose work was published by established publishers, and who preferably also had some reputation at home and abroad, were eligible for support. Those were understandable criteria, since the PEF could certainly not be considered wealthy. Because funds were scarce, a selection had to be made. And with this the quality of the author in question did play a role. His or her reputation could moreover be an advantage in situations where the press was brought in to increase pressure on the authorities.

# Couriers

Donations for writers in need, made in kind and in cash, were delivered and handed over personally by couriers from the Netherlands in the early days. Sums of money could be used as the recipient saw fit, to buy food or to pay the doctor. Not only for the writers themselves, but for family members too.

Den Doolaard was not only a single-minded administrator of PEN, who wished to ease the difficult circumstances under which many writers lived; he was also a romantic. And during the years of the occupation of the Netherlands by the Nazi's, he had learned a few tricks about international espionage while serving as a member of the Dutch intelligence service. To a boycotted Czech author, for instance, he mailed one half of a playing card that had been cut in two. The other half was given to a courier who, in this case, was a Dutch author of children's books whose work had been translated frequently and was very popular in Czechoslovakia. She was hand-delivering her new manuscript to the Prague (state) publisher and, *in passing*, would be visiting a colleague who was having problems. When the two met and the two halves of the card fit, each knew that this was the right person.

Professor of Dutch literature Gerrit Borgers, who succeeded Den Doolaard, had little affinity with such 007 practices. But when Borgers made way for Henk Bernlef, the founding father of the PEF used the opportunity to convince the new chair that strict caution was still necessary. On his first PEF courier trip to Eastern Europe, therefore, Bernlef was given his half of the famous playing card by Den Doolaard. On arriving at his destination and producing that snipped-off nine of spades, both writers had a good laugh, after which Bernlef likewise realized it was time to abandon this archaic system.

The use of couriers was not only outdated; it was also laborious, time-consuming and costly. It even became unnecessary when organizations such as the Western Union, with its offices and agencies throughout the world, made it possible to send money rapidly and safely to almost any city or village on the globe. Henk Bernlef was able to remain in Amsterdam, and Jan Honout effortlessly made his payments via Western Union. But that, too, came to an end. The events in

New York on 9/11 led to a new development: that money transfers, which proved to play a significant role with payments among terrorists, were placed under the supervision of organizations such as the CIA. And that's where an institution making frequent transfers to countries in the Middle East, in Africa and to China quickly came under suspicion. It evidently made no impression on the intelligence agency that the PEF's transactions solely involved humanitarian aid to writers. Eventually, the PEF ended up on a blacklist and was unable to make transfers via Western Union or other such organizations anymore. Payment orders by the PEF were simply refused.

# Henk Bernlef

Henk Bernlef's appointment as the new chair in 1987 signified a modernization of the organization's structure. Although Bernlef (alias for Hendrik Jan Marsman), like his predecessor Gerrit Borgers, shared the responsibility for practical tasks with his treasurer, he carried out a substantial expansion of the board. Mainly in order to broaden the fund's base within PEN, the board was augmented with members from a considerable number of diverse, preferably wealthy, PEN centers. He hoped that this would not only play down the fund's 'Dutch image' but also lead to an increase in contributions to the fund by those centers. In addition to creating a 'new style' board that met twice annually in Amsterdam, Bernlef established an advisory board, for which he managed to acquire the participation of well-known writers, including Harold Pinter, Kurt Vonnegut and Nadine Gordimer. Aside from the mention of their names on the fund's stationery, no request was ever made for these advisors to render services. When it became clear that the new board members were scarcely producing extra income for the fund, while the travel and hotel expenses incurred in connection with the biannual meetings of this international group demanded a disproportional segment of the budget, this innovation was also gradually phased out.

Bernlef had greater success with his endeavor to give the PEF new verve by attracting new sponsors, among them Oxfam Novib and Stichting Lira. This made the PEF less dependent on individual gifts and contributions from the various PEN centers. And that was urgently necessary. Because not only the numbers of requests were increasing as a consequence of the worsening international situation, but the sums of money required per case were rising as well, the fund was in danger of collapsing beneath own success. The writers-in-need fund did come unpleasantly close to the danger zone. And to make matters worse, contributions from the individual PEN centers were declining rather than rising.

Without the sponsors that Bernlef had managed to engage, the PEF could not have survived. Under his direction, furthermore, collaboration with the Writers in Prison Committee of PEN International was reinforced. Through the use of their London archive, the professional researchers of this committee make an initial selection from the many requests for support.

Approved applications are passed on to the PEF which in turn, with only a few exceptions, makes payments.

Thanks to its simple structure, the PEF is able to work extremely rapidly and decisively. And in that respect it differs from nearly every other organization involved with helping writers and journalists. The decision-making process at other NGOs usually takes much longer, while the payments granted do not exceed those of the PEF. In addition to this, the PEF does maintain professional standards, but employs no professional officials to carry out its work.



# Journalists

With the rise of political and social tensions in the world, a new category of writers in need emerged: journalists. Partly because the persecution of renowned authors, such as Salman Rushdie, generally produces more protest and negative publicity than the imprisonment of troublesome journalists, the authorities' focus gradually shifted in this direction. Not that the persecution of dissident literary writers and poets came to an end. But the group of potential 'customers' needing the fund rapidly expanded to include journalists who had to flee, or who were put in prison and tortured, even killed.

Among members of the board, a discussion arose concerning the issue as to how responsible it is to spend, on journalists, part of the fund's financial means which have been collected primarily for aid to literary writers. Staff members of the Writers in Prison Committee were also asked for their opinions on the matter. A conclusion that was satisfying in all respects could not be reached. On the one hand, the distinction between writing journalists and writers was considered artificial; on the other, it had to be acknowledged that certainly not all journalists can rely on a degree of literary talent. This led to the tentative working agreement that the overriding factor in the assessment of a request would sooner be placed on the danger that a writer faced due to the practice of his or her profession, rather than on the form of the publication - book, magazine or newspaper.

In such demanding times Bernlef's success in finding new sources of money, such as Oxfam Novib and Lira, was a stroke of luck. Thanks to their fixed annual contributions, the fund's continuity was rescued. Fortunately, there were also several anonymous private donors who, through the intercession of Bernlef, helped to reinforce the PEF's funds. That was urgently needed, since contributions from PEN centers had been decreasing little by little. Mutual solidarity in the world of writers was being demonstrated less and less through the PEN centers' contributions to the fund. With only a few welcome exceptions, a similar lack of response followed Bernlef's repeated calls, during PEN International conferences, for each center to provide a very modest contribution, so that he would be able to point out, in his talks with potential sponsors, that writers did not simply look for handouts from others but also *looked out for each other*. That, however, remained wishful thinking unfortunately.

# Bloggers

Not only do journalists who are in acute danger due to their publications come to the PEF for help; lately there have been an increasing number of requests from bloggers as well. While, generally speaking, sufficient information is available where journalists are concerned - in the records of the Writers in Prison Committee, or on request from sister organizations such as the Committee to Protect Journalists - this category remains much more diffuse. What to do in the case of a young woman who has written a critical blog about political affairs in her country and who thereby has difficulties with the authorities? Is she eligible for support if nothing more is known about her? The Internet and social media are often chaotic and far from reliable. That doesn't make the task of the WiPC any simpler. At times it is impossible for them to gather sufficient information for a fair assessment of a blogger's application for support.

Nevertheless, blogs constitute a new medium which has a wide audience, and there are bloggers willing to risk their lives in order to tell the truth. Requests for help from this group can be expected to rise. But how should a fund whose financial means are already under pressure respond adequately to such demands? The future board will need to find a solution to this problem. Reverting to the original situation, in which only professional authors - known writers and journalists - receive help, is no longer an option and makes no sense.

# Rudolf Geel

After fifteen years Henk Bernlef resigned as chair, and Rudolf Geel assumed the position. Writer and linguist Geel was able to draw on ample experience at PEN, which he began to acquire in 1986. He was first appointed secretary, then chair of the Dutch PEN center. In 1989 he organized, jointly with Jan Honout and Hans van de Waarsenburg (who unfortunately died at a young age), the well-attended PEN Conference in Maastricht.

Although both main sponsors continued to provide their contributions in the early years of the new board, the new chair launched a campaign to attract new sponsors. This involved approaching organizations that could be expected to 'have a heart' for freedom of expression. It had success, since the Democracy and Media Foundation in the Netherlands instantly decided to make an annual contribution, for three years in succession, after which a subsequent term could be requested. A second new major sponsor was found in the relatively new Gieskes-Strijbis Fonds, which likewise granted the PEF a generous contribution for three years.

These new major sponsors were particularly welcome, because one of the traditional main financial backers, Oxfam Novib, found it necessary to withdraw its support, largely as a consequence of internal cutbacks that were inevitable when the Dutch government substantially reduced its subsidy of this organization.

The continuity of the fund seemed, in any case, to be ensured for the coming years when the considerable sum left on the account of a Dutch cultural fund, which had been dissolved due to redundancy, could be transferred to the PEF.

# Experiment

When Gieskes-Strijbis became a new sponsor, leeway for an experiment was created. The standard approach to aid, which had developed gradually, nearly always involved the bestowal of a single financial injection of €1,250 per case. Although it has happened that, in exceptional situations, an extraordinarily distressing case has been offered support a second time, that was not the intention. With the increased means there came more room to expand the options for aid, while maintaining the usual one-time-only subsidies. In consultation with our partners at the WiPC, it was decided that a limited number of writers would be granted €500 per month for a period of ten months. The idea was to give them the opportunity to continue practicing their profession as writers rather than seek work in order to make a living.

It can be acknowledged that this type of support has, in a number of cases, been successful over a longer period of time. Because their social security had been guaranteed for nearly a year, the writers concerned were able to dedicate themselves to long-term projects and be free of other obligations. All that the PEF requested in return was that each author submit a thorough writing plan and then, every two months, a progress report as well. While some did adhere to this agreement, it was disappointing to see that various writers were willing to accept the monthly payments but failed to submit either a progress report or a final report, let alone the manuscript on which they had been working for nearly a year. Not without deep regret, the decision was made to end the experiment after it had been assessed, on the whole, as a failure.

# Trendy?

After three years the generous support of the Gieskes-Strijbis Fonds came to an end. The fixed policy of this fund is to support projects for no more than three years in succession. But exceptions to this rule can be made. With our - futile - pleas to become eligible for such an exceptional status, we encountered a worrisome phenomenon: providing aid to writers and journalists is regarded as throwing money into a bottomless pit. What exactly, it was asked, are the concrete results of your efforts? What successes can the PEF show? Can the relief of the dire material need of a writer whose work is being boycotted be regarded as a success? Can a writer's escape from a country where his life is in danger be deemed a success? The board members of the Gieskes-Strijbis Fonds could not be convinced of this. Added to this was the fact that we, for the sake of their safety, were not able to provide names or images of writers whom we were able to help, partly thanks to the contributions of this fund. That, in turn, prevented the board of the Gieskes-Strijbis Fonds from giving, in their own report, any extensive description of the results of their aid to the PEF.

Human traits are certainly not foreign to board members of funds. They, too, want to make an impression with the appealing results of their efforts. And it is simply easier to achieve those results with spectacular scientific research, or the development of new medicine for a terrible illness. The feats accomplished in such trendy areas reflect well on the moneylender, who is generally not indifferent to this. Of course it can be understood to some degree. Nonetheless, it remains lamentable that there is not enough consideration for contributions to science and progress made by means of defending and stimulating the free exchange of information and the fight against corruption. For those are the very issues on which the writers supported by the PEF take a stand - usually in the line of fire.

What is a world, after all, without the free exchange of opinions, without a free press that controls leaders, a world without newspapers or weekly magazines? Organizations like the PEF are, unfortunately, not able to provide all the help that is needed. The search for new financial backers cannot stop; it requires perseverance.

# PEN centers

As mentioned previously, the PEF was set up as a solidarity fund. Although the enthusiasm with which PEN members made contributions in the early years could be called reasonable, it soon became clear that the solidarity cornerstone alone would not be enough to keep the fund going. The fund was proving, in fact, to fill an unexpectedly great need. The number of applications for support grew so rapidly that it was in danger of collapsing as a result of its own success. Faced with a considerable gap in his budget, Henk Bernlef launched a campaign to reinforce the fund's income. The first, obvious step was to induce centers to donate more money to the fund. But no significant amounts could be found here. First of all, there was a steadily declining number of centers with sufficient financial resilience to support the PEF. Furthermore, various wealthier and larger centers had developed their own aid programs in which they invested the funds previously donated to the PEF. The fact that the general safety net, which worked very effectively, suffered as a result of this was often somewhat easily overlooked.

Another influential factor was - and, in many cases, continues to be - the fact that many writers in the free world have themselves been faced with serious financial difficulties as a consequence of the decline in the book market. Little remains of what was already a small group of wealthy bestseller authors who have supported the PEF over the years. The repeated passionate pleas for greater support from the centers, made by Bernlef and Geel at international conferences, did win the approval of the PEN International board. And there was never a lack of applause from the audience. But despite an occasional success - at which point the relatively small, but very active center of San Miguel d'Allende cannot go unmentioned - the drop in support could not be stopped. The conclusion was inescapable: PEN centers, and the individual writers who were part of this, were themselves not capable of producing the finances needed to sustain the PEF. Bernlef therefore decided to seek help outside the PEN community. Geel continued to follow that path; and thanks to a professional approach, he reaped many a success with this. In the year of this report, too, fund-raising has been a major activity of the board. It is, however, still too early to state the results of this.

# Succession

After an extensive search, we have found two new executive board members who will take over our work. The position of chair will be held by the Dutch poet and writer Job Degenaar, who for many years has attended the international conferences and the meetings of the WiPC as a board member of PEN Nederland. We are convinced that Job is the right person for the task of carrying the fund forward. He has proposed Wim Jurg as treasurer. Jurg has held, among other positions, that of treasurer for PEN Nederland and has a great deal of administrative experience. The way in which they will further organize board of the PEF will no doubt be discussed in the 2017 annual report.

# Financial

The board intensified its search for new sponsors, but had little success with this. Even one of our regular benefactors, the Appeal Fund for Prisoners of Conscience, in Great Britain, had to withdraw support due to an unexpected decline in income. Fortunately, in the Netherlands, the Democracy and Media Foundation raised its contribution substantially, after which the likewise Dutch institutions Niks voor Niks ('Nothing for Nothing') and Lira did the same.

Although contributions have been made by several PEN centers other than the Dutch, from the survey of donating centers we must inevitably draw the conclusion that the Fund, which since its founding has been intended as a solidarity service by and for writers throughout the entire world, receives 95% of its financial backing from Dutch sources. It is not incomprehensible, and in a certain sense it should be applauded, that various centers have, separately from the Fund, begun to support writers facing difficulties. But it would be wrong to assume that, because it is based in the Netherlands, the PEN Emergency Fund is merely a Dutch fund. At the time of its establishment, the legal form of a fund governed by Dutch law was chosen in order to prevent political influence by PEN International from affecting decisions. Perhaps it is time to reassess the fund's current status in consultation with other interested centers. If only for the sake of preventing a general safety net, on which basically any writer in need can rely, from becoming obsolete because individual centers base their focus so much on their own cases and their own honorary members who face problems. Should such an evaluation not take place (and this conclusion was reached last year as well) the end of the Fund will be unavoidable within a few years.

But it hasn't come to that yet. One positive factor in the PEF's financial situation: the Democracy and Media Foundation has more than doubled its contribution in 2016. Whether that policy will continue in 2017 remains unclear at this time when the report is being written.



Account

## 2016

Income	50.128
Expenditures	52.677
Balance	- 2.549

<b>Income</b>	<b>50.128</b>
<b>Donations from PEN-Centres</b>	<b>8.662</b>
Finland	500
Netherlands	7.892
San Miguel	271

<b>Donations from institutions and persons</b>	<b>40.000</b>
--	---------------



Democratie en Media	25.000
Lira	10.000
Niks voor Niks	5.000

<b>Intrest</b>	<b>1.466</b>
----------------	--------------

2016

**Expenditures** **52.677**

**Grants** **31.250**

Angola	1.250
Azarbeidzjan	1.250
Bangladesh	1.250
Egypt	2.500
Ethiopia	1.250
Georgia	1.250
Honduras	6.250
Iran	1.250
Iraq	3.750
Kenya	1.250
Nepal	1.250
Nigeria	2.500
Syria	3.750
Turkey	2.500

**Costs:** **21.452**

Congresses	3.938
Bank and administration	717
Fundraising	9.238
Board & Representation	7.559

# Farewell

Throughout our long period on the board, we the undersigned have enjoyed working together with many colleagues and seeking ways to strengthen the Fund. Many friends have been made. For that we are grateful. We wish all those who read this a satisfying and successful continuation of their important work for PEN. We still hope to attend many PEN gatherings in the future. May you all fare well!

*Rudolf Geel*

*Jan Honout*