

PEN Emergency Fund / Annual Report 2017

Foreword

'When the man finds himself alone in his homeland and feels fear for his life and freedom...'

Reading the annual report of a fund that helps those in need makes none of us cheerful. Yet it does give me some satisfaction to state that the PEN Emergency Fund has proved capable, also in 2017, of providing financial aid to nearly thirty colleagues in dire straits with the purpose of easing their situations to some degree. In most cases this involved urgent support related to medical assistance, fleeing to another country and financial aid for vital necessities once a writer had arrived in that country.

Objective

The foundation PEN Emergency Fund, also known as *Stichting Fonds Schrijvers in Nood* (the Writers-in-Need Foundation), founded on 13.01.1971, has the following objective in its statutes, which were most recently revised on 12.06.2017: *'the granting of monetary assistance to writers, anywhere in the world, who for political or ideological reasons have been deprived of their physical freedom or are, in some other way, in critical need and require temporary financial support.'* Such authors might include, for instance, those who have had to flee as a result of activities as a writer or journalist, those who are or have been in prison, were assaulted there, need medication and/or urgently require money in order to flee to a safer country.

Recent History

In 2015 and 2016, the board that became active in 2017 was already able to 'work with' the previous board. That meant: useful lessons in assessing requests, according to the criteria set by the statutes for granting financial aid, and access to financial information. It was also given advice with regard to subsidy sources and participated in decisions on granting (or not granting) support to authors.

Meanwhile the new board-in-the-making sought diligently for a new advisory board, in view of the fact that the former advisory body no longer functioned, largely due to the advanced ages of its members; and in order to gain experience, it was already providing an oral account of the annual reports within the context of the PEN conferences in 2015 and 2016.

Introduction of the new board

The new board was officially appointed as of 1 January 2017. The Executive Board includes Job Degenaar (chair) and Wim Jurg (treasurer). Professor emeritus, author and former chair of PEN Nederland René Appel gave his commitment to be a member of the new board.

The transition was, of course, accompanied by the usual formal modifications: notarized adaptations to the partially outdated statutes, changes in bank matters and in the registration at the Chamber of Commerce.

The entire board of the foundation has met twice formally; the Executive Board has held ongoing consultation.

The following individuals have been appointed to the Advisory Board: Eric

Lax (USA), Joanne Leedom-Ackerman (USA), Larry Siems (USA), Eugene Schoulgin (Sweden/Turkey), Tienchi Martin-Liao (China/Germany), dr. David Van Reybrouck (Belgium) and dr. Rudolf Geel (Netherlands).

Executive Board

The day-to-day work, carried out by the two-man EB, takes place in close collaboration with the protection team of PEN International in London, which compiles the dossiers. Due to the nature of this work, it remains behind the scenes. Naturally, we wish to continue our excellent collaboration with PEN International. When important decisions and discussions arise, the third member of the board is also included.

The fund's lack of visibility

In previous years the fund had a poorly functioning website; information about its non-profit status could only be found via a special portal [ANBI being the Dutch abbreviation for this status], and colleagues from abroad had insufficient information on how to transfer money to the fund. The frequently heard complaint about the fund's lack of visibility was taken seriously by us, which is why we have given priority to resolving this issue rapidly. People cannot be blamed for not knowing how to transfer money.

Among the results: flyers containing the necessary information were produced and distributed during our annual speech at the PEN World Congress in Lviv (Ukraine) and during a reading at the ICORN/WIPC conference in Lillehammer. This was also done on other occasions when an interest in persecuted writers could be expected, such as at the general

meeting of PEN Nederland and during several local activities. PEN International has added us to its website as part of the global campaign 'Make Space', which was launched during the WIPC conference in Lillhammer.

Priority was moreover given to the renewal of contact with PEN International, the creation of a new logo and the construction of a bilingual (English/Dutch) website, which provides all relevant information to those wanting to support the fund. The website then went online in January 2018.

As of February 2018 I am able to say that, where this is concerned, we have made a substantial leap forward. We now have a clear logo, a well-functioning website (www.penemergencyfund.com - with a 'redirection' should anyone use the extension '.nl'), which includes all necessary information, also with regard to our non-profit status. Furthermore, PEN International has dedicated a separate webpage to us, and PEN Nederland has cooperated on improving our visibility through calls for support on their website in recent years. PEN Nederland moreover enables us to 'hitch a ride' with a request for a monetary contribution when PEN members are asked to pay their contributions.

Subsidies and fund-raising

With regard to sponsors there has been an ongoing decline for years. This is partly a consequence of the economic crisis, which has now passed, and a sharp increase in requests for charitable funds. The need in the world has not grown any less dire as of 2017. In addition to this, a fund like ours has to deal

with the issue that a subsidy provider cannot, in our case, 'score points' in the media with photographs, names and facts. The work takes place behind the scenes; information about this must therefore remain undisclosed in order to prevent the recipients of aid from being endangered. Their names are known only to the researchers at PEN International and to us.

On submitting our project proposals to the sponsors Democracy and Media Foundation and the Lira-fonds, we received substantial financial support in 2017. In comparison to the income that the fund received in 2016, the total sum was considerably less. Fortunately, thanks to the many donations made by members of PEN Nederland and several gifts from PEN centers abroad, we were able to receive an amount that compensated for this.

Unfortunately, despite its enthusiasm about our activities, the Democracy and Media Foundation has had to make the decision, after years of supporting our emergency fund, to end its subsidy to us as of 2019, due to the organization's wish to give a chance to other initiatives related to freedom of expression. Our quest for new sponsors will continue unabated in the years to come.

Western Union

In the past the fund made frequent use of organizations such as Western Union and Moneygram, which can deliver money anywhere in the world. After 9/11 it became apparent, however, that a great deal of money intended for terrorist purposes was being sent abroad via these organizations. Seeing that the fund repeatedly made transfers of money to war zones, payments via

this system became increasingly problematic, despite the humanitarian nature of these transfers. For that reason it was decided that gifts could only be made via the bank account of the writer receiving the aid, his family or friends. In 2017 this has not resulted in any major problems. Despite the many requests, transfers of money has been done quickly in most cases.

Concrete results in 2017

In 2017 the fund was able to provide immediate emergency aid to twenty-nine writers/journalists. For some the emergency aid was sufficient, but a considerable number of writers (thirteen of them) made an appeal to us while anticipating longer-term protection from the rapidly growing organization ICORN (International Cities of Refuge Network), the international association of cities where refugee writers can seek temporary shelter. (The cities of Amsterdam and Rotterdam are members of this in the Netherlands.) All requests were approved this year, due to the fact that they complied with the criteria set in the statutes.

Distribution of financial aid per country

The global distribution of aid to writers and journalists unintentionally is reflective of the countries where writers and journalists are most at risk.

Six colleagues came from Turkey, four from Iraq, three from Uzbekistan, two from Syria, two from Russia, two from Eritrea and one from each of the following countries: Yemen, Egypt, Bolivia, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Palestine, Cameroon, Nigeria, Iran and Honduras.

Several cases

In order to give an impression of the great distress undergone by colleagues, I will offer a glimpse of six out of the twenty-nine cases.

Middle East /North Africa

A journalist is living outside her home country, because she has been seriously threatened various times, both in the past and currently. This happened as a result of her outlook being different, in many respects, from that of the government. On seeing that her close colleagues were among those arrested following a failed attempt to overthrow the government, she decided to flee the country. Her pension has been taken away from her, and she therefore needs money immediately to cover her day-to-day expenses abroad.

Central Asia

Due to his associations with a political opposition party, a writer/blogger was imprisoned for many years and, between his detentions, took cases to court. He was released from prison early - destitute - because of his seriously neglected health following years of imprisonment, since the authorities feared that he would not survive his detention. The fund granted support for immediate medical assistance.

North Africa

A writer recently wrote a book that was critical of Islam and, shortly thereafter, was shot by a masked man with a gun. The attack failed. For his escape to a neighboring country and to cover his day-to-day expenses there,

he received financial assistance.

Central Asia

A critical journalist was raped in her hotel room. Although the direct relationship between her publications and the incident cannot be proved, the fund decided nonetheless to provide support for psychological help, partly owing to the fact that no other fund was available to assist her.

Central Africa

A journalist now living in exile in a neighboring country published articles that were critical about her government, which then accused her of producing fake news. In her home country she would be persecuted. She and her relatives received death threats there. In the neighboring country where she now lives, she and her husband have no work. She has a baby and needs money immediately for the coming months in order to pay rent, medical expenses and costs of living for the child. The fund has accepted her application.

South America

A publisher/journalist who took a critical stance toward the president of his country received a great number of threats and intimidations from his government. As his home country declined increasingly into a dictatorship, he fled to a neighboring country, where he is presently unable to support himself and his two children, who have gone to live with relatives elsewhere. The fund was able to provide him with financial aid.

'Help the Fund to survive!'

At the most recent PEN Conference in Lviv, Vice-President of PEN International Eugene Schoulgin made the appeal: 'Help the Emergency Fund to survive!' For the time being, we have managed to do so: despite its diminished reserves, the fund has been able to carry on its policy as in previous years.

Word of Thanks

To all those who supported us in 2017, we are very grateful for their gifts and look forward to 2018 with confidence. The Democracy and Media Foundation and the Lira-fonds have given us financial strength, allowing us to show greater restraint in drawing on our own reserves. I should also like to thank Rudolf Geel and Jan Honout, for the instructive talks, and the hard-working investigators at PEN International, among them Cathy McCann, Patricia Diaz, Aurelia Dondo, Nael Georges, Laurens Hueting and Basim Mardan, who operate behind the scenes and with whom we collaborate closely.

Furthermore I thank Joanne Leedom-Ackermann, Lucina Kathmann and Eugene Schoulgin for their support of the fund. Many thanks as well to PEN Nederland and its many members for their unconditional support, to Alexis de Roode for his help in setting up the website and creating the logo, to PEN Vlaanderen, PEN Finland, PEN San Miguel d'Allende and to several private individuals for their financial support.

Together they make up the genuine pillars upon which this fund rests, and by which it can develop further in the future in order to uphold the bridge that reaches colleagues in need. And last but not least, I owe a considerable debt of gratitude to my colleague Wim Jurg, for his active commitment to the

fund and for his knowledge and skill with regard to finances and accounting, and likewise to René Appel, whom we could always consult when faced with important decisions and who was willing to share his practical insight (and humor) with us in these matters.

We have the greatest confidence in the future of the PEN Emergency Fund.

'When the man finds himself alone in his homeland and feels fear for his life and freedom, he certainly will remain grateful for any voice resigning order to give him a little support and encouragement, even if it's just the only sound; at least he feels that he is not alone in his ordeal, and you are this sound that kept me hanging by a thread of hope. Thank you, thank you.'

(quote from an author who was helped by the fund in 2017)

Job Degenaar, chair

(February 2018)