

## FOREWORD

In the pandemic year 2020, during which a vast social, economic and cultural downturn occurred throughout the world, the position of writers, journalists and publishers has proved to be easy prey for regimes that pay little heed to human rights. Among various authors in need, the poorer circumstances caused by the Covid-19 pandemic played a destructive role, not only due to the fact that medicines and food became scarcer and more expensive in many undemocratic countries. In a 'surveillance state' dictatorial governments can also misuse the Covid-19 crisis to isolate and silence critics. The virus has resulted in a loss of privacy and intensified oppositions to governments, consequently heightening conflicts, accelerating arrests of activists and increasing the likelihood of their ill-treatment in prisons.

The Covid-19 virus has scarcely affected the fund's operation, since its work mainly took place behind the scenes. Computers, e-mail activity and banks were all functioning normally. The frequency of board meetings was reduced, and consultations were done mainly via e-mail. In the run-up to PEN International's 100th anniversary and the fiftieth anniversary of the PEN Emergency Fund in 2021, the year 2020 was brought to a proper conclusion in our view.

We owe thanks to PEN International, the Priority Team Writers at Risk with which we again had an extraordinarily good collaboration, to the board of PEN International and its members, who have been providing liberal support to the fund for fifty years now, to several private individuals from the literary world and its environs who made generous gifts, to the LIRA Fonds and, not least, to PEN Finland, PEN Switzerland (French-speaking), PEN Slovenia and PEN San Miguel d'Allende (Mexico), all supporting us in 2020.

## **OBJECTIVE**

The foundation PEN Emergency Fund - also known as Stichting Schrijvers in Nood (Writers in Need Foundation) - aims to *'grant monetary support to writers/journalists, anywhere in the world, who for political or ideological reasons have been robbed of their physical freedom or are otherwise in dire circumstances and need temporary financial assistance.'*

## **BOARD**

The board consists of four volunteers. Serving on the Executive Committee are Wim Jurg (treasurer) and the undersigned. The assistance of the other board members, René Appel and Paulien Loerts, is called upon when important decisions need to be made, as for instance with policy matters. The entire board of the foundation meets at least twice annually; the Executive Committee holds ongoing consultations. Should it be necessary, advice can be obtained from the Advisory Board, whose

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

## **INCOME**

Despite pandemic-related circumstances which prevented direct contact with (potential) donors – conferences, seminars and other gatherings were cancelled – the fund received very welcome donations in 2020 from the LIRA funds, from members of PEN Nederland, private individuals and four PEN centers abroad. For the first time in years, the fund suffered no losses.

## **SUBSIDIES AND FUND-RAISING**

For years now we have noticed a downward trend with respect to the granting of subsidies. This is partly the consequence of a marked increase in requests being submitted to charitable funds. Furthermore a fund such as PEN Emergency Fund is cursed with the shortcoming that it cannot allow a subsidy-granter to 'score points' by way of photographs, names and facts, since its work takes place behind the scenes. The publication of information could, in fact, pose an immediate danger to the lives of authors whom we help. Their cases are known only to the investigators at PEN International and to our organization.

In 2020 Lira Foundation was the main granter of subsidies. We are continuing unabatedly to seek new sources of long-term financial support.

## **PROCESS AND ALLOCATION**

In nearly all of the cases, the requests are submitted via PEN International's Protection Team Writers at Risk, comprised of experienced researchers with whom we collaborate closely. They compile the dossiers for us. Among these applicants are writers who await long-term placement with ICORN, an organization which now has seventy-four shelters for refugee writers, chiefly in Western Europe. The fund grants assistance to professional writers, journalists, editors and/or publishers, anywhere in the world who, in dire straits due to what they wrote or published, need money urgently. The relief is granted once only to each author. In exceptional instances a supplement may follow if the situation remains dire.

The construction is simple, clear, inexpensive and effective. The work of the board is done on a volunteer basis. No buildings need to be maintained. Every cent donated to the fund goes to the authors in need, sometimes on the very day of the request. Because we have only a small number of board members, the fund can – and this is our great strength – act immediately if necessary.

In 2020 the awarded grants almost all amounted to 1500 euros per author. Several urgent cases involved, as an exception to the principle of

a once-only gift, the granting of a supplemental amount. These cases concerned authors whose situations had not yet improved.

The thirty-two grants in 2020 (see financial report) reflect where writers and journalists had major problems during this year, yet it does not serve as a basis to conclude that other countries were free of such problems.

At least nine authors came from the war zone Syria, four from Palestine, three from Zimbabwe, two from Iran, Egypt and Eritrea and one from Sri Lanka, Uganda, Turkey, Nicaragua, Azerbaijan, Iraq, Somalia, Cuba, Algeria and Sudan.

A number of cases related to financing medication and living expenses after physical and/or psychological abuse, which may have occurred during a prison term. In many instances the authors had already fled to a safer country and needed money for medication and the cost of living, sometimes while awaiting longer-term placement with ICORN. In a few cases the surviving relatives of an author were given financial assistance.

## **PRIORITIES**

As in previous years, the work done behind the scenes in order to support writers in need had the highest priority in 2020. Furthermore, the distribution of information, both nationally and internationally, was an important aim with a twofold objective: to make writers in need aware of the fund's existence and to attract potential donors. Because of the pandemic this mainly took place digitally, via e-mail, online media and online conferences, and via printed flyers in Dutch and English. Also

in 2020 we have continued to pursue our third priority, the search for new sources of income that will provide the fund with long-term financial security, but this has not led to direct results so far.

## **JUSTIFICATION OF POLICY**

The Covid-19 virus hindered, to a large degree, the distribution of the printed version of our 2019 Annual Report. However, the roughly 100 representatives of PEN Centers who were present at the digitally held PEN International Congress (2-6 November) were given a Delegate Pack (in English, French and Spanish) which contained an extensive justification of our policy in 2019. During PEN Nederland's general members' meeting, held on Zoom on 20 November from De Balie in Amsterdam, a justification was given, in accordance with the statutes, for the board's policy in 2019 as well as that concerning the first three quarters of 2020.

## **FIVE CASES**

The following examples of cases, which have been made anonymous and cannot be traced back to the authors concerned, provide an idea as to the types of situations faced by the writers/journalists who appeal to us for help. These demonstrate, painfully, the need for the fund.

## Case 1

A journalist working for various newspapers reported shocking accounts made by victims of human trafficking, in which high-level government officials were among those allegedly involved. Since then she and her children have been threatened. She fled the country, but due to the abuse of her two underage daughters, who were living with her ex-husband, she returned and went into hiding with her daughters at a secret address. After participating in protests against the incumbent president, she was arrested, detained for several days and maltreated. When her family and ex-husband discovered her address, she wanted to flee to a safer neighboring country with her daughters and decided to start a legal procedure against her former spouse, who, supported by her own pro-government family, was demanding custody of their daughters. New reports written by her, from her asylum accommodation abroad, caused a surge of life-threatening responses. Because her daughters, still living with their father, were receiving threats and being molested, she again returned to her home country. On being kidnapped by paramilitary forces, she alleges to have been beaten and raped and threatened with a long prison sentence, as well as with the rape and murder of her daughters if she made this rape known to the public. (PEN International was unable to verify, independently, this latter incident.) With the help of a humanitarian organization, she eventually managed to go into hiding in a neighboring country.

She and her daughters urgently need psychological care. Via social media she is still receiving threats and fears that people from her home

country will discover her address and abduct her daughters in order to take them back to their country. She has submitted a request for refuge with ICORN. PEN Emergency Fund has awarded her the maximum amount, with which she can, for now, meet the costs of rent and doctor's fees for physical and psychological help for her and her daughters.

## **Case 2**

In 2020 the fund also awarded maximum financial support to an academic journalist/poet who was persecuted by his government and is currently living in exile under very difficult circumstances. Although he is on the list for refuge with ICORN, his placement will not occur soon due to the pandemic situation. He worked for the government's news media. As a literary translator he published a book about his country's dictatorial regime, and this was not taken lightly. He refused to serve in the army and consequently ended up spending months in prison. There he was tortured during interrogations and abused; and after torture and near starvation was nonetheless forced to serve in the army. The publication, under a pseudonym, of a book on the history of his country resulted in his subpoena once the authorities discovered his true identity. Then came a campaign of intimidation, accompanied by explicit death threats by security forces and loyalists who consider him a traitor. His health is in serious danger as a consequence of poor conditions in the prison, where he contracted, among other illnesses, tuberculosis and was denied medication. Recently his wife died. His daughter is dependent on his income.



He managed to flee to a neighboring country, where he now lives in poor conditions as a solitary refugee. At the time of his request for help, he was undergoing various operations and had a great deal of pain and other health problems. Medical aid, now scarce and expensive due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and the basic costs of living must be covered by his own funds.

With the maximum support of the fund and financial aid from several other NGOs, he is trying to get his life back on track.

### **Case 3**

A writer/teacher, who is also a prominent activist for women's and children's rights, spent a large part of her life teaching children and illiterate women how to read and write, in remote areas where patriarchal traditions and illiteracy prevail. The area where she lives is controlled by terrorist extremists. She was given a warning as a result of her views. A few months later a group of armed men assaulted her as she was on her way, by bus, to the village where she lived. They dragged her away. The kidnapping lasted two days. She was abused and given no food or water. Her kidnappers burned her notebooks, books and papers at the school where she worked. When her own publications were set on fire, they cut off her hair and threw that in the fire too. She was tortured with hot metal objects placed on sensitive parts of her body. Through the mediation of local leaders, she was set free. Now she is in a state of trauma. The fund provided her with the maximum support for medication and the cost of living.

#### **Case 4**

A condition set by the fund is that it can support a writer and/or the writer's family if they face dire need as a result of his or her profession. Serving as an example of a situation in which this mandate was applied as an exception, in a more flexible way, for humanitarian reasons, is the case of a nationally much-loved writer and journalist employed by well-known news media, who was also a mentor for young writers. For decades she worked on the development of her country, which was plagued by diseases, corruption and dictatorship, and did not shy away from tackling politically sensitive issues. As a result she had to live under permanent pressure. That took a very heavy toll on her life as well as that of her children. Several years ago she was diagnosed with cancer. She died in 2020, leaving three children behind. Her youngest daughter was still entirely dependent on her financially. In the aftermath of her sudden death, financial support was requested for this daughter's living expenses. Because no fund whatsoever could offer aid to next of kin at that point, the PEN Emergency Fund helped out with a maximum gift.

#### **Case 5**

A lawyer, also well known and admired in his country as a journalist and poet, has frequently been granted awards, including international prizes. In the past he was sentenced to two years in prison for his activities in the field of human rights and freedom of speech. From that point on he was prohibited from practicing his profession. After his release he was arrested many times. His last arrest took place when he

was reporting on a legal procedure. Several days later he was set free and fined for disobedience and resistance. Because he refused to pay the fine, he was sentenced to a year in prison. Upon making an appeal, the judge dismissed his request to be released. During his time in prison, where he was often humiliated and threatened because of his articles, he developed health risks, also with respect to Covid-19, since the inmates live together small cells, in groups of twenty or more. Frequently his food and water had moreover gone bad. He suffers from psoriasis and has lost a great deal of weight over the past year. The fund granted the maximum amount to his wife for the cost of living, travel expenses for visits to her husband and for his medication in prison.

## AFTERWORD

I consider it our responsibility to support colleagues who are being abused or even imprisoned, sometimes for decades, simply because their writings displease the government in power, and I am convinced that we can only feel free when everyone is free. PEN Emergency Fund gives us all the chance to support these writers in need. On 13 January 2021 Jennifer Clement, President of PEN International, said to Tsitsi Dangarembga on presenting her with the PEN International Award for Freedom of Expression: 'I am particularly delighted to give the award to Tsitsi today, a special day which marks the fiftieth anniversary of the PEN Emergency Fund, an international fund for writers in dire straits of which we are extremely proud.'

*Job Degenaar, chair*

(January 2021)

Translation: Beth O'Brien

PEN EMERGENCY FUND, INCOME AND EXPENDITURE IN 2020  
In euros (thousands separated from hundreds by a period)

	actual 2020 -----	estimated 2020 -----	actual 2019 -----
<b>INCOME</b>			
Contributions from private individuals	29.278	10.000	14.085
Contributions from organizations	36.154	25.000	25.813
Interest	6	-	56
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	65.438	35.000	39.954
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>			
Financial support	43.351	35.000	39.765
Communication, representation	944	3.000	2.237
International consultation	-	4.000	2.877
Management costs	1.252	1.500	2.568
Office expenses, accounting, bank fees	818	1.000	959
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	46.365	44.500	48.406
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Balance	19.073	-/- 9.500	-/- 8.452
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**SPECIFICATION**

*Contributions from private individuals*

To a large extent, from members of PEN Netherlands. In 2020 including two gifts of 3.000 and one of 20.000.

<i>Contributions from organizations</i>	actual 2019 -----	estimated 2019 -----	actual 2018 -----
Lira Fund	10.000		10.000
PEN-centres abroad	1.074		5.255
Foundation Niks voor Niks	25.000		5.000
Anonymous	-		5.000
Other	80		558
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	36.154	25.000	25.813

*Financial support*

In 2020 we were able to give 32 donations (as opposed to 33 in 2019).

Summarized by country

9x Syria, 4x Palestine, 3x Zimbabwe, 2x Iran, Egypt, Eritrea, and 1x Sri Lanka, Uganda, Turkey, Nicaragua, Azerbaijan, Iraq, Somalia, Cuba, Algeria, Sudan

*International consultation*

In general we keep the costs as low as possible, but the nature of the work does require constant international coordination, mainly with PEN International, which includes consultation during and reporting to international conferences.

It was unfortunate that in 2020 because of the pandemic we could not travel at all. The upside is that we saved money for future travelling.

*Office expenses, accounting, bank fees*

Bank fees for transferring donations are paid by PEN Emergency Fund and can be high.

Wim Jurg, treasurer  
(January 2021)

Among the supporters of PEN Emergency Fund are:

*lira fonds*

**pen**  
INTERNATIONAL

**PEN**  
NEDERLAND