



Stockholm, 11th June 2014

PEN International conference on the Russian/Ukrainian situation

hosted by Swedish PEN

Russian and Ukrainian PEN affirm their unity against the waves of propaganda destroying the language of public discussion.

At a gathering of writers held in Stockholm by PEN International and Swedish PEN, Ludmila Ulitskaya, vice-president of Russian PEN, spoke of “the lies poisoning minds which have no other sources of information” and Aleksandra Hnatiuk, from Ukrainian PEN, of “propaganda designed to create enemies.”

PEN International has been organizing meetings of writers across Europe bringing together Russians and Ukrainians with their colleagues from around the world. In times of actual and threatened violence PEN believes that channels of public discussion must be kept open. **PEN International President, John Ralston Saul**, said, *“Peace and stability is not about deals done behind closed doors, but the ability of people to talk to each other in public.”*

For three months there have been incessant acts of aggression towards Ukraine from the side of the Russian Federation. There has been the illegal annexation of Crimea, which makes us deeply worried about the rights of the Tatar population, and following it armed groups have created violent disorder in the eastern parts of Ukraine with the goal of destabilizing the country. Ukrainian PEN has talked about journalists and citizens being shot, murdered, kidnapped and tortured. Russian PEN points out that such violence is dependent upon the co-opting of language: “Words are the only means we have to construct meaning and express reality. The Russian authorities are currently using words to destroy meaning. It goes without saying that this is a crime against culture.”

PEN is particularly concerned about the tsunami of anti free expression laws emerging in Russia, which include treating international NGO’s as foreign agents; anti-gay laws; a law permitting the blocking of websites without a court order; laws against discussing Russian history; a Religious Defamation law. In the name of security, human rights are being dangerously undermined.

People wonder if we are faced by a war of interests or a war of values, or both. In either case, the only real security lies in opening channels of free expression. Those on the front lines of this situation are often the journalists, in whatever country. We admire their courage and appeal to those under pressure to remember, in Lev Rubinstein's words, that "propaganda is the collapse of language."

This statement has been written after a series of meetings of Russian and Ukrainian writers, including **Alexei Simonov, Lev Rubinstein, Andrey Kurkov, Myroslav Marynovych, Mykola Riabchuk, Leonid Finberg**, and foreign colleagues. The meetings took place in the cities of Kiev, Bled and Warsaw. The participants in the Stockholm meeting were PEN Centres of Sweden, Norway, Finland, Estonia, Slovenia and Germany.

The statement has been signed by:

John Ralston Saul, President of PEN International
Tone Peršak, Chairs Writers for Peace Committee PEN international
Takeaki Hori, International Secretary PEN International
Jarkko Tontti, International Treasurer PEN International
Carles Torner, Executive Director PEN International

Tomas Tranströmer, Literature Nobel Laureate 2012
Mario Vargas Llosa, Literature Nobel Laureate 2011 and ex-president of PEN International
Per Wästberg, former president of PEN International and member of the Swedish Academy.

György Konrad, former president of PEN International
Ronald Harwood, former president of PEN International
Homero Aridjis, former president of PEN International
Peter Englund, member of the Swedish Academy
Kjell Espmark, member of the Swedish Academy
Lyudmilla Ulitskaya, Vice-President of Russian PEN
Ola Larsmo, President of Swedish PEN
Ola Wallin, International Secretary of Swedish PEN
Kätlin Kaldmaa, President of Estonian PEN
Igor Kotjuh, Vice-President of Estonian PEN
Carl Morten Iversen, Secretary General of Norwegian PEN
Marianne Bargum, Vice-president of Finnish PEN
Thomas Rothschild, Board member of German PEN

Note to editors:

PEN International promotes literature and freedom of expression and is governed by the PEN Charter and the principles it embodies: unhampered transmission of thought within each nation and between all nations. Founded in London in 1921, PEN International – PEN's Secretariat – connects an international community of writers. It is a forum where writers meet freely to discuss their work; it is also a voice speaking out for writers silenced in their own countries. Through Centres in over 100 countries, PEN operates on five continents. PEN International is a non-political organisation which holds Special Consultative Status at the UN and Associate Status at UNESCO. PEN International is a registered charity in England and Wales with registration number 1117088. www.pen-international.org

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