



DAY OF THE  
IMPRISONED  
WRITER

pen  
INTERNATIONAL



**Name:** Tsitsi Dangarembga

**Occupation:** Writer, filmmaker, playwright, activist.

**Situation:** Persecuted, convicted

#TsitsiDangarembga #ImprisonedWriter

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## BACKGROUND

Tsitsi Dangarembga is an award-winning Zimbabwean novelist, filmmaker, playwright, activist, and founding member of PEN Zimbabwe.

Dangarembga was arrested with her friend Julie Barnes on 31 July 2020 by members of the Zimbabwe Republic Police with neither warrant nor explanation, while peacefully protesting government corruption on a deserted street in Harare. She was detained overnight and then charged in court the following day with inciting public violence.

Dangarembga was released on bail of ZW 5,000 on 1 August 2020 and ordered to attend court on 18 September 2020. She was ordered to surrender her passport to the authorities and to report to a police station every week until her next appearance in court. She petitioned for a return of her passport and also challenged attempts by the state to prosecute her in the dreaded Anti-Corruption Court, although the charge under which she was arrested had nothing to do with corruption. Dangarembga successfully obtained her passport, however her trial proceeded.

On 29 September 2022, Dangarembga and her co-defendant were [sentenced](#) by a Zimbabwe Magistrates Court in the capital, Harare, to 6 months imprisonment, wholly suspended for 5 years on condition that they do not commit a similar offence. In addition, they were fined around 38,640 ZWL or 3 months imprisonment in default. They paid the fine and on 13 October, they [filed a notice of appeal](#) against the conviction and sentence at the High Court of Zimbabwe.

Their conviction follows a long-running period of legal and judicial persecution that the two have endured since July 2020. PEN International condemns the conviction, yet another sad illustration of the lengths the Zimbabwean authorities are determined to go to punish critics of government conduct. Misuse of the administration of justice systems in attempts to suppress free speech violates Zimbabwe's Constitution and international human rights obligations.

Dangarembga's arrest and prosecution are part of a coordinated crackdown by the Zimbabwe authorities on those speaking out against alleged cases of high-level corruption in which government and state officials are suspected of culpability. [PEN International](#) has been calling for the immediate dropping of all charges against her since August 2020. She was notably featured in PEN International's [2021 Case List](#).

Dangarembga won the [PEN Award for Freedom of Expression 2021](#), and the [PEN Pinter Prize 2021](#). Her novel, *This Mournable Body* was shortlisted for the 2020 Booker Prize. She is also the author of *Nervous Conditions*, which she wrote at the age of twenty-five and for which she was awarded the Commonwealth Writers' Prize. *Nervous Conditions* was praised by Doris Lessing as one of the most important novels of the twentieth century. She is the founder of the production house Nyerai Films and the International Images Film Festival for Women, as well as the Institute of Creative Arts for Progress in Africa where she works as director.

A statement by Tsitsi Dangarembga and Julie Barnes, following their conviction on September 2022 can be found [here](#).

*“Can you cook books and feed them to your husband? Stay at home with your mother. Learn to cook and clean. Grow vegetables.”* — Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, 1988

**Name:** José Rubén Zamora Marroquín

**Occupation:** Journalist

**Situation:** Imprisoned

**#JoséRubénZamora #ImprisonedWriter**

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## BACKGROUND

José Rubén Zamora Marroquín is a renowned Guatemalan journalist and founder of three of the most read newspapers in Guatemala and Central America: *Siglo Veintiuno*, *Nuestro Diario* and *elPeriódico*. One of the most outspoken critics of the Guatemalan government led by President Alejandro Giammattei, together with his colleagues at *elPeriódico*, Zamora has focused on investigating and exposing corruption in public administration and the private sector.

On 29 July 2022, Zamora was [arrested](#) at his [home](#) and brought to jail by the National Civil Police. On the same day his bank accounts were frozen. On 30 July, the headquarters of *elPeriódico* were occupied by officers of the Public Prosecutor's Office and the National Civil Police, who [isolated the newspaper's employees](#), preventing them from leaving the building. A few weeks later Flora Silva, the newspaper's financial director, was also taken into custody. Both were arrested by the Prosecutor's Office on trumped up charges of money laundering, blackmailing, influence peddling and conspiracy to launder money.

Zamora's [arrest](#) came five days after strong accusations of corruption against several present and past government officials were published in a Sunday edition of *elPeriódico*. However, repression and threats against the journalist have been going on for [years](#). In 2003, his home was raided following the publication of the investigations [Ríos Montt investigations](#), [La Mafia y el Ejército](#), and some of his notes.

In October 2021, Zamora accused President Giammatti and Consuelo Porras, Attorney General and Head of the Public Prosecutor's Office, of fabricating a case against him in order to imprison and silence him. In September 2021, Porras was [sanctioned by the United States](#) on [charges of obstruction](#) of justice in Guatemala. Acts of corruption were also revealed in investigations by Zamora throughout various presidential administrations.

[International](#) and regional human rights and civil society organizations such as the [Association of Journalists of Guatemala \(APG\)](#), have publicly condemned Zamora's detention as a clear attack on freedom of expression in Guatemala. Most recently in September 2022, Pedro Vaca Villarreal, the Inter America Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) Rapporteur for Freedom of

Expression, in his [statement R196/22](#) expressed concern about the lack of guarantees for the exercise of freedom of expression and freedom of the press in Guatemala, and called on the government to fully and effectively guarantee these rights.

Zamora is the beneficiary of [precautionary measures issued by](#) the IACHR since 2003, upon recognition of the risks he faces in relation to his work as journalist.

*“It is time to pull our national politics out of the quicksand of corruption, impunity and drugs and transform it into a solid foundation; to build a decent, just, civilised country, where dreams, hopes and demands are answered and where we all fit, in a context of respect and plurality...As for me, I will spend my last day in jail, if necessary, as a political prisoner of Giammattei, Miguelito and the Pact of Corrupts, before I murder my conscience”.*

Rubén Zamora's speech for the Day of the Journalist in Nicaragua, 2019.

**Name:** Narges Mohammadi

**Occupation:** Writer, human rights defender

**Situation:** Imprisoned

#NargesMohammadi #ImprisonedWriter

## BACKGROUND

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Narges Mohammadi is an Iranian writer, journalist, human rights defender and Honorary Member of the Danish, Belgian, Norwegian and Swedish PEN centres. She is the former Vice-President and spokesperson of the Defenders of Human Rights Center (DHRC), co-winner of the [2013 Oxfam Novib / PEN Award](#) and winner of the 2011 Per Anger Prize and the 2009 Alexander Langer Award.

Mohammadi was arrested and arbitrarily imprisoned on several occasions over the past years. She was imprisoned at Evin Prison in May 2015, and in 2016 sentenced to 16 years imprisonment on several [counts](#), including for “taking part in assembly and collusion against national security” and “spreading propaganda against the state”, in relation to her activities at the DHRC.

In February 2020, she was served with [further charges](#) including “spreading propaganda against the system” and “assembly and collusion with intent to take action against national security”. The charges stemmed from her role in staging sit-ins, conducting educational classes and “defaming” the [governor](#) of Evin prison by accusing him of torturing and assaulting her.

In May 2021, she was handed a new [sentence](#) of 30 months in prison and 80 lashes, a few months following her [release](#) in October 2020 after serving five and a half years in prison. In November the same year, she was arrested **while attending a memorial service for killed protestor [Ebrahim Ketabdars](#) in the city of Karaj**. Mohammadi **spent over two months in solitary confinement, about which she wrote intensively, explaining its toll on prisoners of conscience in Iran and labelling it “white torture.”**

According to her family, Iranian authorities [brought](#) further charges against her in January 2022, including “assembly and collusion to act against national security” and “acting against national security and disrupting public order.” Following a summary trial in the absence of a legal counsel, Mohammadi was sentenced to an additional eight years and two months in prison, and 74 lashes. The sentence also imposes further punishments, including internal exile and a ban on giving statements to the media, using social media platforms, or participating in political groups.

Mohammadi was released on medical furlough following heart surgery in February 2022. However, on April 2022, she was [arrested](#) by Iranian intelligence officers at her home as the authorities decided to end her medical furlough and ordered her back to jail. Her family reported that she was ill-treated and insulted by the officers while being arrested.

In October 2022, PEN International learned that Mohammadi was sentenced to another 15 months in prison, followed by a two-year ban on travel and on joining political movements or parties, and three months of community service. The sentence was handed in absentia by Branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court following a summary trial. In addition, prison authorities issued a two-month ban on phone calls with her family in Iran as a punishment for her leading role in

organising protests in prison in solidarity with the protest movement that [swept](#) the country following the death of [Mahsa Amini](#).

According to her family, Mohammadi is now facing a total of 10 years imprisonment, 150 lashes, and a 12 million Iranian Rial fine (approximately £250) in addition to the restrictions imposed in October this year. She is also at risk of flogging.

Mohammadi suffers from a neurological disorder that can result in seizures, temporary partial paralysis, and a pulmonary embolism for which she is said to be denied essential medication that could prevent further blood clots from forming. In May 2019, she underwent an emergency hysterectomy, after which she was returned to Evin Prison. In June 2019, PEN [received reports](#) that Mohammadi was being denied adequate medical care and antibiotics to treat a subsequent infection resulting from the surgery. PEN also received reports that she was denied necessary medications in June 2022.

Mohammadi has written for various reformist journals, among these *Payam-e Hajar*, which was later banned for its articles promoting the rights of all Iranians, regardless of gender, religion or political affiliation. In her latest book, [White Torture](#), she documented the imprisonment of thirteen women, including Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, and their shared experiences: harassment and beatings by guards, total blindfolding and denial of medical treatment. The book also sheds light on the prolonged use of solitary confinement against prisoners of conscience in Iran.

Following the restrictions imposed in October this year, Mohammadi is not allowed to call her husband, prominent journalist [Taghi Rahmani](#), who spent 17 years in prison and then fled Iran for France in May 2011, or her children, who live in exile with their father.

*“I have faith in the path I have chosen, the actions I have taken, as well as my beliefs. I am determined to make human rights a reality [in Iran] and have no regrets. If those who claim to be spreading justice are firm on their judgment against me, I am also firm on my faith and beliefs. I will not waiver under tyrannical punishments that will limit my freedom to the four walls of the prison cell. I will endure this incarceration, but I will never accept it as lawful, human or moral, and I will always speak out against this injustice”.* Narges Mohammadi, as quoted in [Prominent Rights Activist Narges Mohammadi Rejects Prison Sentence in Stinging Open Letter](#), October 14, 2016.

**Name:** Server Mustafayev

**Occupation:** Citizen journalist, human rights defender

**Situation:** Imprisoned

#ServerMustafayev #ImprisonedWriter

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## BACKGROUND

Server Mustafayev is a Crimean Tatar citizen journalist and human rights defender, founder and coordinator of the grassroots, human rights movement [Crimean Solidarity](#) in Russian-occupied Crimea.

On 21 May 2018, Federal Security Services (FSB) officers [raided](#) Mustafayev's house in Bakhchisaray, southern Crimea, before taking him to the FSB headquarters in Simferopol, the capital of the peninsula. He was placed in pre-trial detention the following day and charged with 'membership of a terrorist organisation' under Article 205.5 part 2 of the Russian Criminal Code over his alleged links to Hizb ut-Tahrir, an organisation banned in the Russian Federation but legal in Ukraine.

On 22 February 2019, Mustafayev was further charged with 'conspiring to seize power by violent means under Article 278 of the Russian Criminal Code. He was transferred from Crimea to the Russian Federation on 12 September 2019; his trial opened in the Southwestern city of Rostov-on-Don shortly afterwards. Mustafayev fell ill several times during his trial yet was denied adequate medical care and made to appear in Court. On 16 September 2020, the Southern District Military Court in Rostov-on-Don [sentenced](#) him to fourteen years in a strict regime penal colony on trumped-up charges. Seven other men, all members of Crimean Solidarity, also received lengthy prison sentences as part of the case. The Military Court of Appeal in Vlasikha, Moscow, [upheld](#) Mustafayev's sentence in March 2022. He is not expected to be released prior to September 2034.

Born on 5 May 1986, [Sever Mustafayev](#) is married and has four children. He is being held in Tambov, Siberia, far away from his home and family in Crimea. PEN International denounces serious flaws in judicial proceedings against him, including his lengthy pre-trial detention and the fact that he is being held in the Russian Federation. Under international law, Crimea constitutes occupied territory and as the occupying power, the Russian Federation is obliged not to transfer civilian prisoners out of it. Trying civilians in military courts also violates international human rights norms. In June 2018, the European Parliament [urged](#) the Russian authorities to release Mustafayev immediately, a call [reiterated](#) by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention in November 2021.

Before being transferred to the Russian Federation, Mustafayev wrote a [moving letter](#), in which he expressed his determination to speak against the Russian occupation of Crimea, encouraged fellow journalists to write about human rights abuses in the peninsula, and notably thanked PEN Ukraine for their support.

Mustafayev is amongst 15 Ukrainian citizen journalists and human rights activists who are currently being kept behind bars in the Russian Federation and in occupied Crimea on politically motivated ground. PEN International had [repeatedly condemned](#) sweeping restrictions to freedom of expression in occupied Crimea. Following the Russian Federation's full-scale military invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the already limited civic space in the peninsula has shrunk even further, with scores of Crimean residents prosecuted merely for calling for peace, in flagrant violation of international law, which compels the Russian Federation to respect the penal

laws of the occupied territory. 'Russian standards' are being imposed in local schools, with the teaching of Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar languages, history and literature being phased out. Crimean Tatars have also been [disproportionally affected](#) by draft notices and conscripted to serve in the Russian armed forces.

In September 2022, the Assembly of Delegates of PEN International adopted a [resolution](#) condemning the Russian Federation's full-fledged war on Ukraine and urging the Russian Federation to immediately end the war.

*It's easy to break a finger, impossible to shatter a fist. United, we are invincible.'*  
Server Mustafayev