



IDENTITY ON TRIAL: PERSECUTION AND RESISTANCE

PEN INTERNATIONAL CASE LIST 2025



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ABOUT PEN INTERNATIONAL

PEN International promotes literature and freedom of expression. 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.

Founded in London in 1921, PEN International – PEN's Secretariat – connects an international community of writers. Governed by the PEN Charter, PEN operates across five continents with over 130 Centres in over 90 countries.

The Writers in Prison Committee (WiPC) of PEN International was set up in 1960 as the result of mounting concern about attempts to silence critical voices, globally. The WiPC works on behalf of those who are detained or otherwise persecuted for their opinions expressed in writing, including writers who are under attack for their political activities or for exercising their profession, provided that they did not use violence or advocate violence and racial hatred.

Over time, the work of the WiPC in documenting persecution of writers resulted in the development of PEN International's Case List – an annual record of attacks, imprisonment, and persecution of those who use the written word to express themselves. Every year, PEN members campaign and lobby relevant governments for an improvement in the conditions of persecuted writers and journalists and/or for their release, as well as for investigations into cases of torture and killings. Through writing to prisoners, where possible, or to their families, they provide encouragement and hope. PEN International and its Centres also advocate for systemic change to restrictive laws and practices, including by submitting concerns and recommendations about freedom of expression issues to various international and regional human rights bodies.

pen-international.org



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THE PEN CHARTER

PEN International is guided by the ideals of the PEN Charter, which expresses every member's commitment to protecting the free exchange of ideas and promoting the value of literature.

THE PEN CHARTER AFFIRMS THAT:

- Literature knows no frontiers and must remain common currency among people in spite of political or international upheavals.
- In all circumstances, and particularly in time of war, works of art, the patrimony of humanity at large, should be left untouched by national or political passion.
- Members of PEN should at all times use what influence they have in favour of good understanding and mutual respect between nations and people; they pledge themselves to do their utmost to dispel all hatreds and to champion the ideal of one humanity living in peace and equality in one world.
- PEN stands for the principle of unhampered transmission of thought within each nation and between all nations, and members pledge themselves to oppose any form of suppression of freedom of expression in the country and community to which they belong, as well as throughout the world wherever this is possible. PEN declares for a free press and opposes arbitrary censorship in time of peace. It believes that the necessary advance of the world towards a more highly organised political and economic order renders a free criticism of governments, administrations and institutions imperative. And since freedom implies voluntary restraint, members pledge themselves to oppose such evils of a free press as mendacious publication, deliberate falsehood and distortion of facts for political and personal ends.

WHAT IS THE PEN INTERNATIONAL CASE LIST? A BRIEF EXPLANATION

PEN International has for nearly a century monitored and advocated for writers who have suffered repression of their right to write freely and to comment on the world around them without fear of arrest, violence or even death. In 1961, PEN began to formally record these attacks in what eventually became the 'Case List' summarising who has suffered attack, where and by whom, the legal processes and the motivations behind them.

This report firstly provides a global analysis of the cases monitored by PEN International between January to December 2024, providing a summary of the wider context under which writers and those who use the written word to express themselves are challenged. This is followed by the 'list' itself, divided into regions, each starting with an overview of key events that have impacted on freedom of expression in the region, then followed by a summary of cases of writers of concern to PEN International. At the end of each regional overview is a summary of the actions that PEN International took for journalists and others, such as human rights defenders, including in collaboration with other freedom of expression NGOs, and giving links to sources providing fuller details.

The PEN International Case List's primary role is to inform its membership and others engaged in advocacy for free expression and serves to enable PEN Centres to identify where their focus could be. It does not, therefore, attempt to be a comprehensive list of attacks on writers, but an indication – a weathervane – of where the problems lie in any given year, enabling reflection on patterns and trends that can serve to inform future actions. It is up to date as of 31 December 2024, and as events can move rapidly, readers who wish to know more about a case listed in this document are advised to look for updates on PEN International's [website](#), and PEN International's [Bluesky](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) pages.

CASE LIST METHODOLOGY

PEN International works on behalf of those who are detained or otherwise persecuted for their opinions expressed in writing, including writers who are under attack for their political activities or for exercising their profession, provided that they did not use violence or advocate violence and hatred.

WHO DOES PEN INTERNATIONAL WORK FOR?

PEN International works to protect all persecuted writers, journalists, publishers, poets, editors, translators, playwrights, songwriters, editors, bloggers – anyone who works with the written word. Support for writers at risk for reasons other than writings can include those who have come under attack for their peaceful political activities, have supported minority rights or have taken part in advocacy for others whose rights have been abused.

PEN International gathers its information from a wide variety of credible sources and seeks to confirm its information through at least two independent sources, which include family members, lawyers and friends, PEN members, press reports, reports from individuals in the region in question, reports from other human rights groups, embassy officials, and academics.

Writers are frequently also journalists and media commentators, and vice versa, so PEN International will also include a person on the list whose primary role is as a writer, but who may be under pressure for their journalism. A journalist who is threatened for writing a book may also become a PEN concern, such as where crime reporters publish books based on their investigations into criminality. Similarly, PEN International will on occasion take up visual artists, including filmmakers and cartoonists.

Rather than attempting to duplicate the work of its media rights colleagues, this list features those cases that are either unique to PEN International and are not within other organisations' remit, such as writers of literature and poets, or where there is a crossover between journalism and literature. It should also be noted that the Case List can only provide a snapshot of what is likely to be a larger phenomenon: offences are often not reported, writers may self-censor, and other obstacles arise in terms of documenting the silencing of writers. This is highly likely to be the case for women writers as the full extent of censorship of women must be seen within the wider context of gender-based violence, and lack of access to education, civil, political, and cultural rights. The Case List is intended to provide an overview and an indication of global trends, and a guide to the type of challenges writers face, in which countries, and the kind of actions that other writers worldwide are taking in support of their colleagues.

FOREWORD

MATHIDA

Chair of PEN International's Writer in Prison Committee

2024 has been a year of unprecedented assault on freedom of expression across the globe, which shows no sign of abating. Writers and dissenting voices are being increasingly persecuted, literature and independent media censored, books banned, and inconvenient truths violently repressed. Corporate power and social media amplify propaganda and misinformation, often serving state interests, silencing diverse voices and undermining fundamental freedoms. In a world already polarised by war, conflict and climate change, this mounting wave of repression feeds into a political narrative that seeks to divide us even further.

As members of PEN, we shall not back down. We have pledged to use what influence we have in favour of good understanding and mutual respect between nations and people, to do our utmost to dispel all hatreds and to champion the ideal of one humanity living in peace and equality.

As we ponder the challenges that lay ahead, we must also take a moment to celebrate our achievements. Despite enormous hardships, as the PEN International Case List 2025 shows, scores of writers were released, unfair charges were dropped, repressive legislation amended, and key reforms introduced last year – in part thanks to our work. Our new [campaigning manual](#) is designed to empower PEN members, supporters, and activists in their crucial work of defending freedom of expression worldwide. We moved away from X to Bluesky, steadfast in our commitment to ‘unhampered transmission of thought within each nation and between all nations’, open debate, and responsible digital spaces.

In today's increasingly fragmented world, PEN International's mission to promote the right to read, publish, imagine and write, and the right to creativity, for all, is more critical than

ever. In the face of relentless adversity, we will continue to use our words – our pens – to defend writers at risk around the world. We will urge their protection, campaign for their freedom, and continue to provide emergency assistance whenever possible. We will do our utmost to hold perpetrators of abuse to account.

Literature plays a key role in fostering empathy, understanding, peace, and collective growth, and galvanises the voices that challenge the status quo. This is why writers should be allowed to speak and write without fear of persecution. As the very principles of international human rights and humanitarian law are being increasingly questioned by governments worldwide, we must redouble our efforts, defending the values that unite us: freedom, justice, and equality.

The challenges that we face in 2025 are immense. We stand ready to meet them.

AS THE VERY PRINCIPLES OF INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS AND HUMANITARIAN LAW ARE BEING INCREASINGLY QUESTIONED BY GOVERNMENTS WORLDWIDE, WE MUST REDOUBLE OUR EFFORTS, DEFENDING THE VALUES THAT UNITE US: FREEDOM, JUSTICE, AND EQUALITY.

GLOBAL OVERVIEW

The outlook for freedom of expression in the early months of 2025 looks particularly bleak, as governments and rulers across the world ride roughshod over the rules-based international order that has largely held since the end of the Second World War, threatening borders, deepening polarisation, and jeopardising peace. Though perhaps not quite as blatant as the global impacts of the first weeks of the second Trump administration, these trends have been in the works for some time, as illustrated by PEN International's 2025 Case List.



2024 was another year where internal and international **conflicts** – which have doubled in the last five years – took a devastating toll on civic space and cultural life in countries including the **Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, Myanmar, Palestine, Sudan, and Ukraine**, through death, destruction of infrastructure, and displacement, as well as on future generations' right to participate in and enjoy their culture. PEN International recorded at least six writers who died in the ongoing war in **Gaza**, bringing the total since October 2023 to 23. In **Ukraine**, PEN International honoured the memory of **Victoria Amelina**, killed in a Russian missile strike in July 2023 while recording testimonies of witnesses and survivors for her book about the war.

Journalists, particularly in the Americas, continued to be targeted and killed for their work, as documented by PEN International in its annual Day of the Dead campaign. Regrettably, **impunity** for attacks and killings of writers remained a challenge, including in **Brazil, Mexico, Norway, Serbia, and Türkiye**, despite some inadequate or incomplete trial proceedings. Such a lack of accountability sends an alarming message to writers in all regions.

One noticeable development in this year's Case List is the rise of **transnational repression** where governments, including **Kenya, Türkiye, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Uganda**, have colluded with other states to deliver writers and critics visiting or living abroad into what are often black holes of detention, as happened to Egyptian-Turkish poet **Abdul Rahman Youssef al-Qaradawi**, detained in **Lebanon** and extradited to the **UAE** on account of his criticism of the UAE authorities. Happily, Belarusian filmmaker and journalist **Andrej Hniet** was eventually freed from risk of extradition to **Belarus** from **Serbia**, as was Julian Assange in the **UK** after he negotiated a deal with the **USA** to avoid extradition and prosecution for his work with Wikileaks, but their ordeals highlight the chilling effect of the increasingly long tentacles of state repression.

Weaponization of the judicial system to crush dissent was a common theme. Strengthened **cybercrime laws and regulations** that risked harming freedom of expression were passed or

introduced in **Algeria, China, Cuba, El Salvador, Malaysia, Nicaragua, and Vietnam**, while **internet shutdowns** to prevent free expression around elections and protests occurred in **Mozambique, Comoros, Venezuela, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Pakistan**. **Insult and defamation laws** – which in sub-Saharan Africa are part of a colonial legal legacy that governments are in no hurry to overturn – have long been part of the arsenal of governments or their supporters seeking to quell dissent, and this year was no different. Defamation was one of the charges brought against **Professor Étienne Fakaba Sissoko** in **Mali** who was sentenced to one year in prison for his criticism of the military government, while similar charges were used to persecute writers in **Italy, Peru, the Philippines and Thailand**. The **Russian Federation** continued to abuse its 'LGBTQI propaganda' law to censor discussion of same-sex relations and to persecute LGBTQI activists and organisations, while similar laws were passed in **Bulgaria and Georgia**. More positively, the **European Union** adopted a directive against strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs), intended to protect journalists and media outlets from abusive litigation across its member states.

Misuse of vaguely worded national security or anti-terror legislation to silence journalists and writers was also common in many sub-Saharan African countries (although **Eswatini** bucked the trend), as well as in **Algeria, Belarus, China, Nicaragua, Egypt, India, Iran, Russian Federation, Türkiye, and the UAE**. **Mahvash Sabet**, a member of Iran's Baha'i minority who began writing poetry during her previous lengthy imprisonment, was serving a 10-year prison sentence for unfounded charges of 'espionage' in relation to her religious beliefs. In other countries, authorities resorted to bogus criminal charges to lock up writers, including in **Cuba, Morocco, and the Russian Federation**.

Lengthy prison terms such as these are a tool that PEN International has been fighting ever since the Writers in Prison Committee was established. While **Arnon Nampha** is serving a cumulative sentence of almost 19 years in **Thailand** in relation to multiple convictions under the notorious lèse-majesté law, **Kaciaryna Andrejeva** (real name Bachwałava) was vindictively issued with an additional eight-year sentence after completing

her previous two-year sentence for livestreaming a peaceful protest in **Belarus**. Other writers were detained, sometimes without trial or held after the expiration of their sentences, including in **Algeria, Egypt, Eritrea, India, Israel, Morocco, the Philippines** and the **UAE**.

In line with the growing threat of **mis- and disinformation**, which the PEN Charter clearly identifies as something that writers must stand together to resist, smears and stigmatization by officials were a growing problem in a number of countries, including **Argentina, Egypt, Mexico, Montenegro, Morocco, Serbia, the Philippines** (where the stigmatizing use of ‘red-tagging’ continued) and **Türkiye**. Sometimes beginning with censorship of books and book promotion, which expanded exponentially in the **USA**, and was also seen in **Argentina, Mexico, the Russian Federation** and **Türkiye**, such stigmatization was often the precursor to threats or even physical attacks; writers and journalists were threatened, including with rape and death, in **Honduras, Malta, Serbia** and **Venezuela**.

Finally, as in all walks of life, identity plays a part in persecution. Although women made up only 29% of the 2025 Case List, they were more likely to be on trial or suffer various kinds of harassment. Indigenous writers in the Americas, such as in **Canada** and **Mexico**, also featured in the Case List, while writers who were members of minorities faced persecution for expressing those identities. In addition to Baha’i poet **Mahvash Sabet** in **Iran**, Uyghur and Tibetan writers in **China** faced long prison terms. For example, Professor **Ilham Tohti**, a member of the Uyghur minority, is serving a life sentence in connection with his activism for his community, while Kurdish writer **Yavuz Ekinci** faced over seven years in prison in **Türkiye** on bogus terrorism charges for his book *Dream Divided*, which is banned for publication, distribution or sale in the country. Writers discussing themes of gender identity, sexual orientation and sexual abuse also faced repression, including censorship and harassment in **Argentina, Equatorial Guinea, Uganda, Nigeria, Türkiye**, and the **USA**.

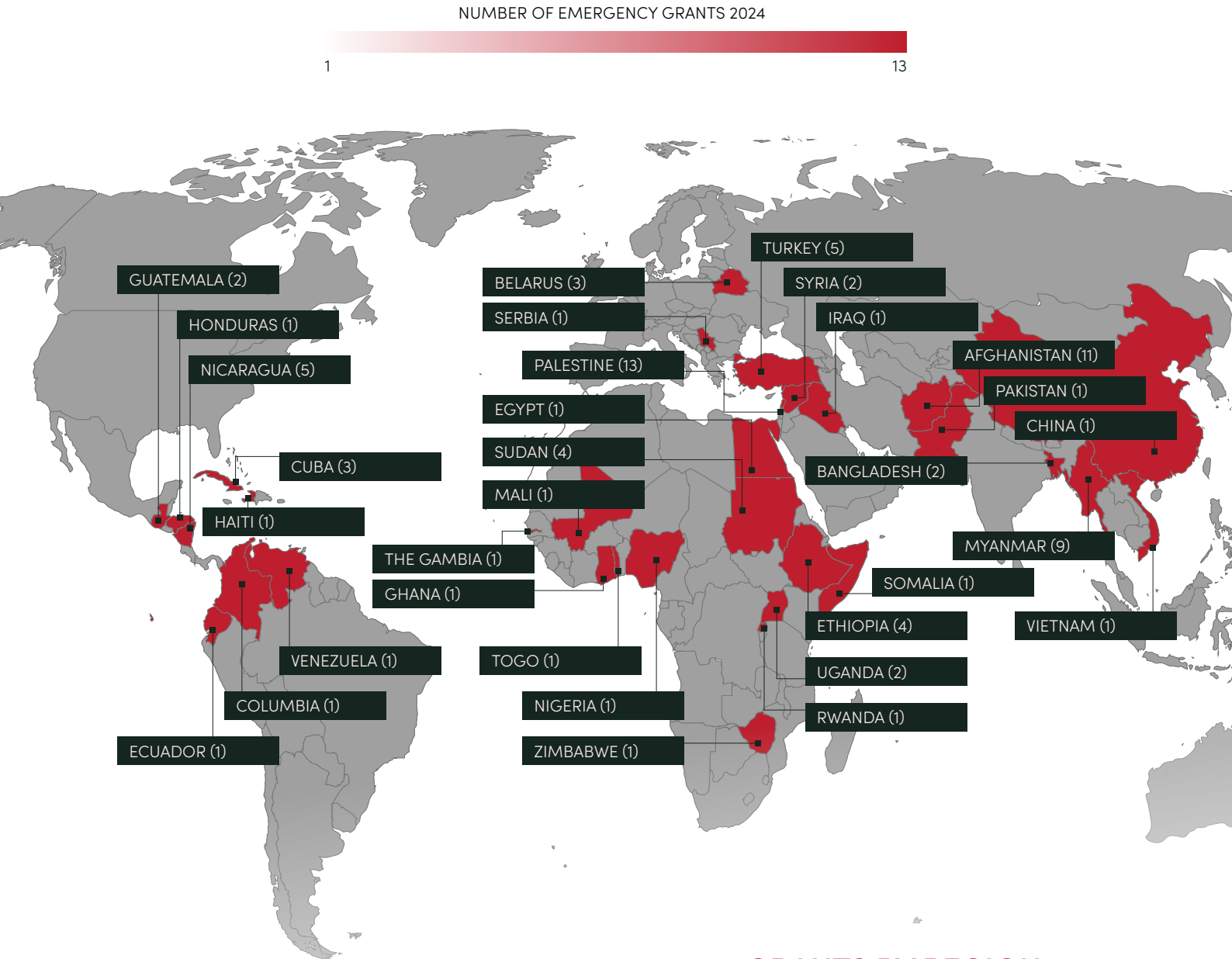
As always, the information in this Case List provides a sobering overview of what writers

risk globally in speaking out, whether in their writing or in other forms of media or in public. As in previous years, PEN International worked closely with PEN Centres, the PEN Emergency Fund (PEF), and partners, to provide life-saving support to writers and their families. This included emergency relocation and the provision of emergency financial aid through a one-off grant for a range of urgent needs such as safe passage, medical assistance and general support towards living expenses. In 2024, the largest number of the 87 grants made (a 17% rise over 2023) went to assist **Palestinian** writers trying to flee the war in Gaza (13), while the almost total repression of free speech in **Afghanistan** (11) and **Myanmar** (9) meant that the grants continued to be a lifeline for persecuted writers there. Four of the grants to Afghan writers were to women, all facing gender-based violence from the Taliban authorities. Not surprisingly, the high levels of repression in **Nicaragua** (5), **Türkiye** (5), **Ethiopia** (4), **Belarus** (3) and **Cuba** (3) required considerable support while conflict or civil unrest contributed to high demand from writers in **Sudan** (4), **Bangladesh** (2), **Guatemala** (2), **Lebanon** (2) **Syria** (2). Grants were also made to one writer from each of **China, Colombia, Ecuador, Eritrea, Gambia, Ghana, Haiti, Honduras, Mali, Serbia, Pakistan, Rwanda, Somalia, Togo, Venezuela, Vietnam** and **Zimbabwe**.

The ongoing hostility to LGBTQI individuals in some African countries remained of grave concern, and led to support for a writer and transgender woman from **Nigeria** whose ability to live a free life and build a livelihood was at risk of transphobic attacks from police and from community harassment. Support was also given to a polygender and queer writer, editor, performer, and rapper with multiple disabilities from **Uganda**, no longer able to support themselves from their creative work and facing economic hardship as a result, following enactment of repressive anti-LGBTQI rights legislation.

The numbers of grants to writers from countries in crisis and the wide geographical spread of support, alongside the information in this Case List, demonstrates the vital role of this relief work and the need for increased and sustained funding to support it.

EMERGENCY GRANTS BY REGION AND COUNTRY 2024



Every year the number of writers reaching out to us for emergency assistance increases. Sadly, our capacity is not enough to support all requests.

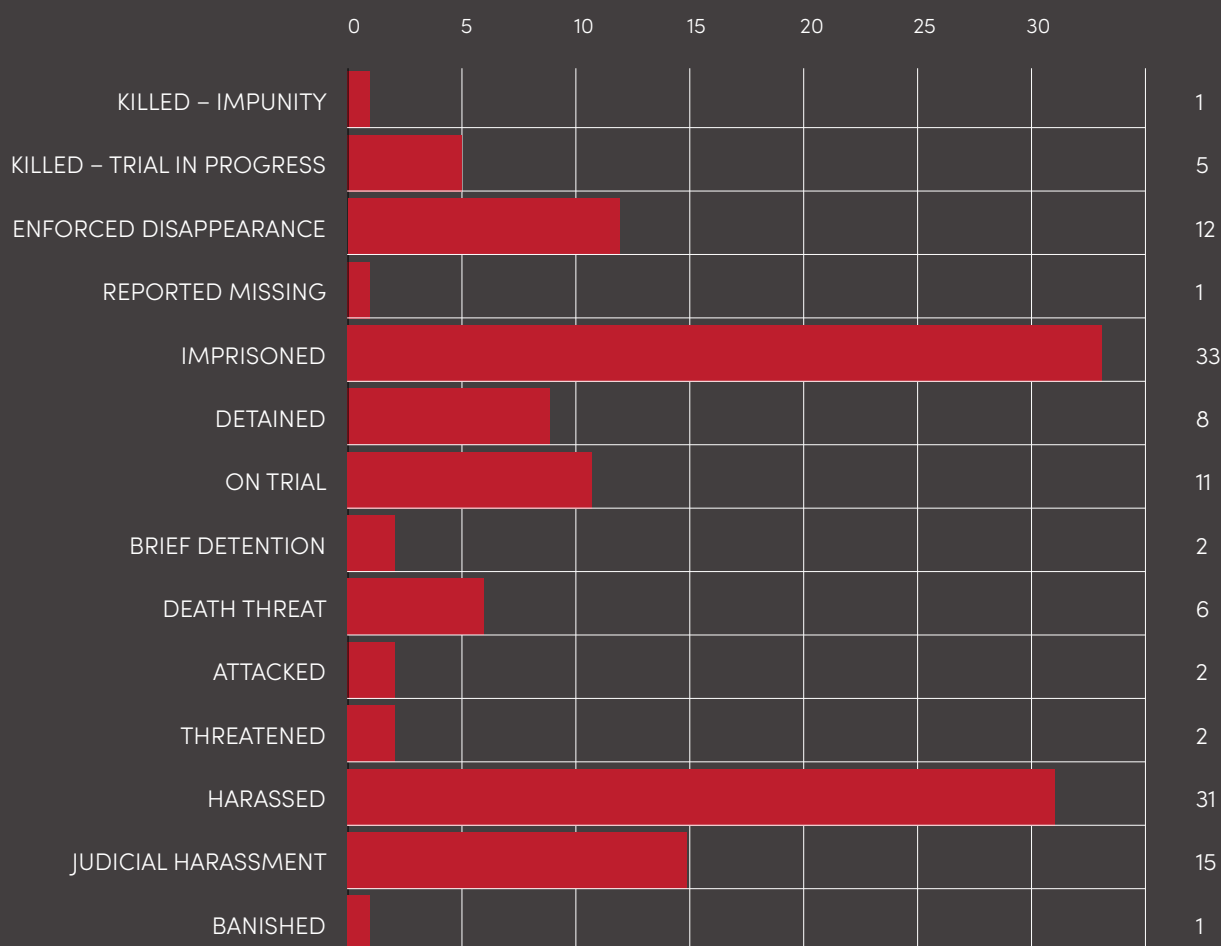
GRANTS BY REGION

AFRICA	21.2%
AMERICAS	16.5%
ASIA	29.4%
EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA	10.6%
MENA	22.4%

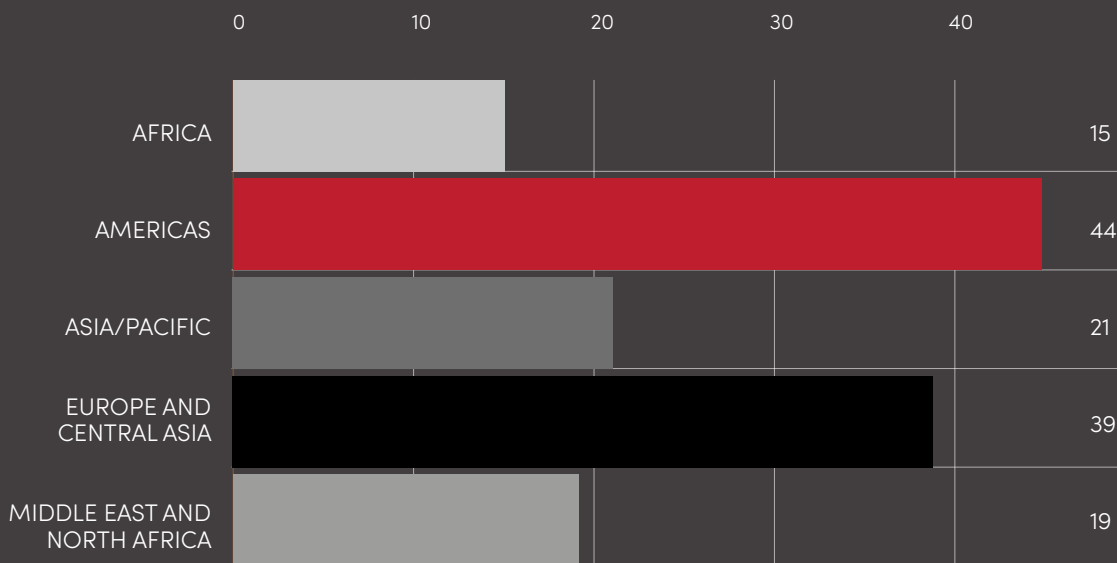
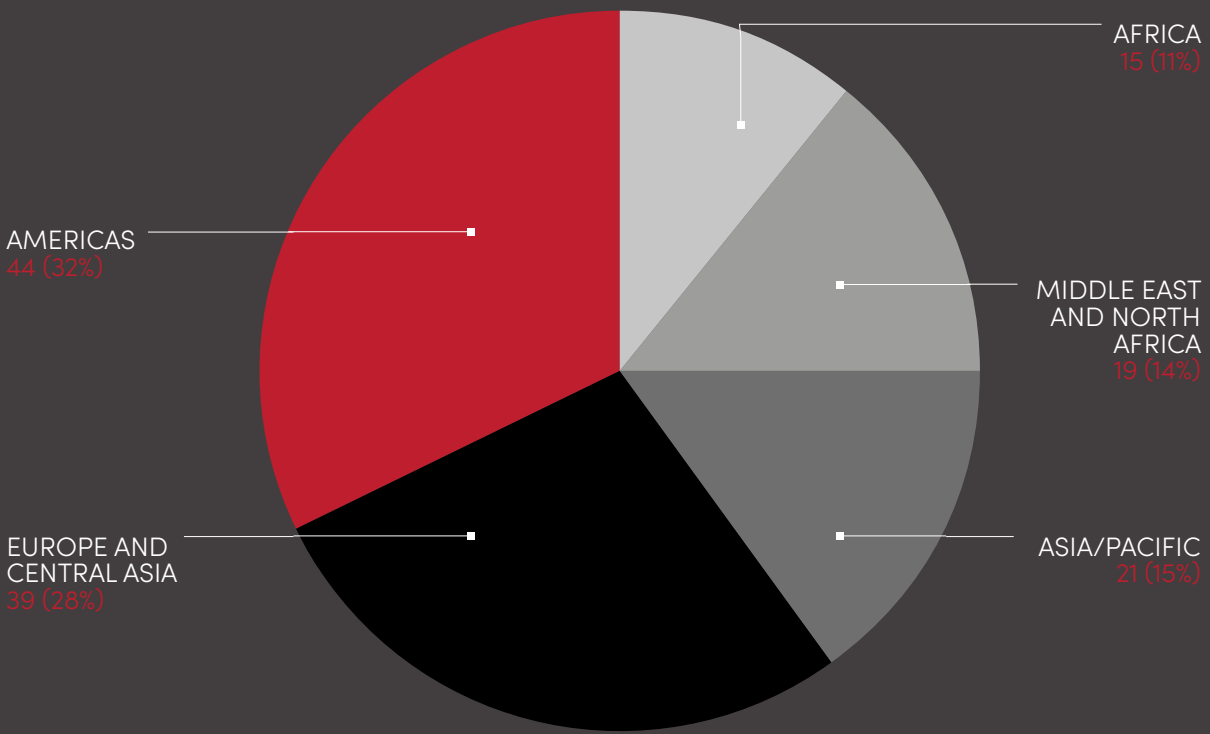
THE CASE LIST IN NUMBERS

The PEN International Case List records 138 attacks on writers that were reported in 2024. However, these figures reflect only those instances where the information is proven, and where there are no restrictions on making the details public. It should also be noted that in countries where freedom of expression is repressed it is more difficult to gather and verify information on abuses. The following data should therefore be seen as illustrative of general patterns of attacks – and where they occur – and not a definitive record.

ATTACKS ON WRITERS BY TYPE (JANUARY–DECEMBER 2024)



ATTACKS ON WRITERS BY REGION (JANUARY-DECEMBER 2024)



EXPLANATION OF TERMS USED

EXECUTED (Put to death by the state after a final conviction by a court)

KILLED (Killed in the period of this Case List and PEN is certain the individual was a writer targeted for their writing)

KILLED: MOTIVE UNKNOWN (Killed in this period, but it is unclear if the individual was targeted for their writings)

KILLED: IMPUNITY (Killing did not occur in the period of this Case List but there is ongoing impunity for the killing i.e. there has been no conclusion of the case or no investigation has taken place)

KILLED: TRIAL IN PROGRESS

DEATH IN CUSTODY (including cases where authorities are responsible for failure to provide adequate medical care, or cases where a writer unjustly imprisoned or detained died of natural causes)

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE (PEN is certain the individual was a writer and that their disappearance was carried out by the authorities or with their acquiescence)

ABDUCTION (PEN is certain the individual was a writer and that non-state actors are responsible for their disappearance)

REPORTED MISSING (Individual may have been abducted but it is unclear who was responsible. May include cases where the individual was killed, but a body has never been found)

IMPRISONED (PEN is certain they are a writer who is serving a prison sentence after conviction in relation to their writings or their freedom of expression – for example, for making speeches, and as far as we know has not used violence or advocated racial hatred. Includes writers appealing against a sentence if they are in prison)

DETAINED (PEN is certain they are a writer and is being detained in connection with their writing pending charge/trial or where there is no intention to charge them. Includes those held in administrative detention and official or unofficial house arrest. Can also include individuals in detention who are facing charges or are under judicial investigation)

ON TRIAL (Including individuals facing charges, appealing sentence, but not currently detained or imprisoned)

JUDICIAL CONCERN (PEN has no position

on the criminal charges against the writer in question but is concerned about reported irregularities in the trial or legal process or about torture allegations or the death penalty)

BRIEF DETENTION (There is no definite time limit, but it could be up to a couple of months, depending on the region and context. Will be recorded as a brief detention where they were held for over 48 hours, but the individual is released without charge. If less than 48 hours, and there is information suggesting it is intended to intimidate the writer or prevent them from continuing to write, it is recorded as harassment)

DEATH THREAT

ATTACKED (Indicates a use of force or violence causing physical damage to the individual or destruction of personal property e.g. arson)

THREATENED (including 'in hiding' where individuals have received threats intended to make them desist from writing, including threats to family members)

HARASSED (Including intimidation, brief detentions of fewer than 48 hours, and restrictions on civil and political rights, such as travel bans, tripping of citizenship, confiscation of property, dismissal from employment where it is linked to their work, censorship of work etc.)

JUDICIAL HARASSMENT (e.g. repeated arrests or summons for questioning where the period of detention is less than 48 hours or investigations open or suspended which can be reopened at any time, acting as a form of deterrence on the writer. Includes writers whose works are banned individually and collectively from sale or access, but not writers whose books are subject to removal from educational study or school libraries)

BANISHED (Writers who have been forcibly expelled by their governments or prevented from returning. Does not include writers who have fled their countries and sought asylum or other forms of protection abroad)

SENTENCED (Has reached the end of the judicial process, has been sentenced, but is not imprisoned)

CONDITIONAL RELEASE (Including suspended sentence or enforced residency order where an individual can leave their home for specified purposes)

RELEASED (including dropping of charges, acquitted, end of sentence, released from detention)

FRI, 15 NOV 2024

DAY OF THE IMPRISONED WRITER



DAY OF THE IMPRISONED WRITER 2024

Kaciaryna Andrejeva (Belarus), Jimmy Lai (Hong Kong), Jose Rubén Zamora Marroquín (Guatemala), and Alaa Abd El-Fattah (Egypt) were the faces of the Day of the Imprisoned Writer 2024, PEN International’s annual campaign on behalf of writers who are imprisoned or facing persecution.

Started in 1981 by PEN International’s Writers in Prison Committee, observed every year on **15 November**, the Day of the Imprisoned Writer campaign highlights **cases that are emblematic of the type of threats and attacks writers and journalists around the world are often subjected to, for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression.**

From 15 to 29 November 2024, the PEN movement urged justice and freedom for Kaciaryna Andrejeva, Jimmy Lai, Jose Rubén Zamora Marroquín, and Alaa Abd El-Fattah. PEN Centres, members and supporters worldwide campaigned for these writers, including by sending advocacy letters to governments and taking part in demonstrations, coordinating social media storms and press conferences, and organising panel discussions and exhibitions.

Internationally renowned writers sent letters of support to their colleagues in prison or under threat:

- **Elif Shafak** and **Olga Tokarczuk** wrote to Kaciaryna Andrejeva
- **Viv Groskop** wrote to Alaa Abd El-Fattah
- **Margaret Atwood** wrote to Jimmy Lai
- **Gioconda Belli** wrote to Jose Rubén Zamora Marroquín

For more information about the four focus cases, see the regional overviews below. To read the letters by Elif Shafak, Olga Tokarczuk, Viv Groskop, Margaret Atwood and Gioconda Belli, visit [PEN International Day of the Imprisoned Writer 2024](#).

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

AFRICA

Nduko o'Matigere, Head of Africa Region

Trends in repression of freedom of expression across sub-Saharan Africa throughout 2025 illustrate a worrying and continuing deterioration of civic space across the region. The 2024 report CIVICUS Monitor: Tracking Civic Space rates civic space in 43 out of 50 countries in the region as obstructed, repressed or closed. Cabo Verde and Sao Tome and Principe are rated as the only countries whose civic space is open, while countries like Mauritius, Namibia and Seychelles, which previously stood out as positive examples for civic freedoms, moved down to a categorisation of 'narrow'. A common thread among low-rated countries is authorities' disregard for national constitutional commitments to democratic governance, and outright contempt for their regional and international human rights obligations.

CONFLICT AND WAR

In **Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Nigeria, Mali, Burkina Faso,** and **Mozambique**, the dynamics of pervasive armed conflict and war continued to destroy the foundations necessary for the exercise of civic freedoms and human rights, including the right to freedom of expression. The UN estimates that 12.3 million people, a quarter of Sudan's population, were internally displaced at the end of the year, with a UN expert highlighting increasing risk factors and indicators of genocide in the Darfur region. An additional 2.5 million Sudanese refugees and asylum seekers were being hosted in neighbouring countries.

A resurgence of conflict in the **DRC** has led to mass casualties. Large-scale forced displacement over decades has led to almost seven million internally displaced persons to evacuate to the North and Western parts of DRC and more than one million fleeing the country to seek refuge in neighbouring countries. With reports of large-scale sexual and gender-based crimes by combatants and their allies, including rape and murder of women and girls, emerging amidst weak regional and international responses to the crisis, the renewed deterioration in January 2025 of the security, human rights and humanitarian situation in **Goma** and elsewhere in the country is bound to persist.

WEAPONISATION OF THE RULE OF LAW

The ongoing tide of rising authoritarianism across the region is intimately linked to the overall constrained civic space, particularly the relentless attacks on freedom of expression in many African countries. Repressive governments continued to weaponise rule of law and justice systems against dissenting writers, journalists, artists, social media commentators and peaceful protesters.

However, weaponisation of legislation and rule of law is by no means a new phenomenon in the toolbox of repressive governments. Paradoxically, since independence, virtually all countries in sub-Saharan Africa retain colonial era statutes originally aimed at silencing anti-colonial sentiment and expression, including critical commentary about government officials. These often vaguely-defined laws typically criminalise insult and defamation as well as prohibiting 'offences' against 'public order'; 'national security'; 'public morality'; 'disturbance of peace'; and 'incitement', among others.

Such laws are frequently used to criminalise and restrict the right to peaceful protest, while 'public morality' legislation is used to silence expression on topics such as gender and sexual orientation, deemed taboo by dominant social and cultural power systems. Furthermore, three global events: the post 9/11 so-called 'Global War on Terror' and the spread of anti-terror legislation that followed; the rise of internet-enabled crimes leading to the necessity of cyber-security policy and legal frameworks; and emergent needs to counter online and offline misinformation, disinformation and hate speech – all ironically presented repressive governments additional fiat to suppress free speech rights.

In **Eswatini**, in August, a Supreme Court judgment not only upheld the colonial era

Sedition and Subversive Act 1938, but also overturned a progressive 2016 decision that had struck down controversial provisions of the broad and vaguely worded Suppression of Terrorism Act No 11 of 2008, which authorities have used since its enactment to curtail freedom of expression by labelling dissenters, journalists, and activists as ‘terrorists’. This decision is having dire consequences for freedom of expression, as shown by the fate of **Mduduzi Bacede Mabuza** and **Mthandeni Dube**, Members of Parliament who were sentenced to decades in prison on 15 July 2024 for advocating for democratic reform during June 2021 protests.

In what would otherwise pass for relatively good news, in July 2024, President Ndayishimiye of **Burundi** assented to Law No. 1/21 of 12 July 2024, which partially decriminalises press offences by providing for fines in place of prison sentences for ‘offences’ including ‘insult’, ‘slandorous denunciation’ and ‘public outrage against good morals’. While the amendment was welcomed by journalists’ organisations, legitimate concerns about the law remain, due to the criminal not civil nature of the offences. The 13 July arrest and two-day detention of journalist **Pantaléon Ntakarutimana**, a day after the new law was passed, for allegedly publishing false information illustrates the continued threats faced by media workers despite the promise of this new legislation whose objective was to put Burundi **on the same page** with countries that uphold democracy and press freedom.

On 9 October 2024, **Cameroon’s** Minister of Territorial Administration Paul Ntanga Nji issued a communiqué forbidding all media debate on President Paul Biya’s health, following speculation that the then 91-year-old president may have died. The decree stressed that ‘offenders’ against the decree would face the full force of the law and tasked governors with forming ‘monitoring cells’ to identify those who write ‘tendentious comments’ online and in private

media, threatening them with prosecution. Despite **Nigeria** amending its Cybercrimes Act in February to remove articles that violated press freedoms, according to Reporters without Borders, authorities arrested, prosecuted or detained at least eight investigative journalists under the pre-amendment law in retaliation for their legitimate journalistic work. **Malawi** also targeted journalists using cybercrimes laws.

PERSECUTION OF WRITERS AND JOURNALISTS

PEN International supported African writers and journalists facing persecution, including threats to physical safety, arbitrary arrest and judicial harassment by authorities in **Eritrea, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Ghana, Togo, Uganda, Gambia, and Zimbabwe**; displacement due to armed conflict in **Sudan**; assault, displacement and denial of livelihood options because of their non-binary gender and sexual identities in **Nigeria** and **Uganda**; and imprisonment after writing and publishing a book critical of the authorities in **Mali**.

In **Equatorial Guinea**, writer, academic and LGBTQI rights activist **Trifonia Melibea Obono Ntutumu** has been a target of intimidation and harassment by authorities since she published her novel *La Bastarda* in 2016. The book, which explores women’s rights, gender and sexuality, is banned in Equatorial Guinea. She left her country fearing for her safety, but continues to receive threats abroad.

In **Mali**, non-fiction author, academic, activist, and publisher, Professor **Étienne Fakaba Sissoko** was arrested in March 2024, and charged with ‘harming the reputation of the state’, ‘defamation’ and ‘dissemination of false news disturbing the public peace’ in connection with his 2023 book *Propagande, Agitation, Harcèlement: La communication*

gouvernementale pendant la transition au Mali (Propaganda, Agitation, Harassment: Government Communication During Mali's Transition) which criticises the military government. He was subsequently convicted and sentenced on 20 May 2024 to two years in prison, with one year suspended, and a fine of XOF three million (about USD 4800) for 'damages' to the state. The conviction was upheld on appeal (see Mali section below). PEN International continues to [call](#) for the unconditional release of Sissoko and offer solidarity support to his family.

Journalists also continued to suffer persecution. According to [CPJ's annual prison census](#), a total of 34 journalists and media workers were held in prison across sub-Saharan Africa at the end of the year. These include 16 journalists, among them writers and poets imprisoned by **Eritrea** without trial and incommunicado for the last 23 years (see Eritrea section below). Other countries jailing writers include **Ethiopia** (6); **Rwanda** (5); **Cameroon** (5), with **Burundi** and **Senegal** jailing one journalist each. Furthermore, according to [IFJ findings](#), 10 press workers were deliberately killed in connection to their work in **Sudan** (6); **Somalia** (2); **Chad** (1) and **DRC** (1).

TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION

Beyond national boundaries, the rise of transnational repression is a major area of concern in the region. A Freedom House [report](#) identified **Uganda** as a leading perpetrator following the unlawful abduction in Kenya and forced return to Uganda of [36 Ugandan activists](#) attending a workshop in Kenya in July 2024. In October, the abduction, disappearance and refoulement of seven Turkish [asylum seekers](#) and abduction and forced return to Uganda of opposition leader [Kizza Besigye](#) in November illustrate **Kenya's** growing role in the worrying global trend of governments

colluding to enable transnational repression. Other countries in the region reported to be perpetrators in transnational repression include **Rwanda**, **Equatorial Guinea**, **South Sudan**, **Ethiopia** and **Eritrea**.

Online restrictions continue

According to [Surfshark](#), sub-Saharan Africa witnessed 17 instances of internet restrictions during the year in eight countries: **Mozambique** (8); **Kenya** (2); **Senegal** (2); **Nigeria** (1); **Chad**, (1); **Comoros** (1) **Mauritius** (1); and **Sudan** (1- an almost two-year-long instance related to the ongoing armed conflict). These restrictions aimed to limit social media and online information exchange and public debate during periods of political turmoil, particularly in relation to election disputes, conflict, and protest.

In December, talks between **Uganda** and Meta were underway to restore access to Facebook, [blocked](#) by presidential order since 2021 (except via VPN) after a fallout over deletion of ruling-party associated accounts that Meta had found violated the platforms terms. Although a positive step, Uganda's record of repression of online expression, particularly on X and TikTok under the draconian 2011 Computer Misuse Act is highly likely to continue on Facebook if restored.

REPRESSION OF PEACEFUL PROTEST

The right to peaceful protest is intimately linked to the right to freedom of expression. Following widespread youth-led public protests against proposed tax increases amidst government corruption and a cost-of-living crisis, authorities in **Kenya** carried out a brutal crackdown on perceived online and offline communicators, organisers and mobilisers of the peaceful protests. Over [60 protesters were reported killed](#) through unlawful actions by security forces and more than 1200 arrested. The second half

of the year saw 82 abductions, enforced and involuntary disappearance officially confirmed, with 29 people still missing. While some came out alive, others were found dead. Kenya's response to dissenting social media users brought to the fore authorities' systematic use of unlawful digital surveillance, reportedly with the alleged aid of the largest telecommunications company in the country, to repress free speech and violate human rights with impunity.

Other countries where authorities repressed peaceful protest include **Nigeria**, in the context of protests calling for good governance; **Senegal**, following attempts to postpone presidential elections, and **Mozambique**, in connection with disputed election results.

CHALLENGING THE SILENCING

The Case List's grim reading highlights how authorities across Africa continued to silence critical voices through the use of arbitrary arrest and detention; prolonged pre-trial detention; malicious prosecution and imprisonment; violent disruption of peaceful protests; abductions and enforced disappearances; extrajudicial killings; and arbitrary restrictions that censored online expression. Underlying these violations is an overall climate of intolerance of officials to public exposure, criticism, censure and protest over management of public affairs, as well as systemic impunity for perpetrators.

To push back on the growing repression across the region, PEN International spoke out through regional and international advocacy, including through public statements, coordinating solidarity actions and writing open letters to authorities in support of writers at risk. We highlighted our major concerns regarding freedom of expression at the African Commission on

Human and Peoples Rights and supported a collaborative project focused on promoting the protection of the right to write in five African countries as a strategic step towards strengthening our advocacy at national and regional platforms, mobilising writers and other relevant state and non-state actors to promote and defend freedom of expression.

GOOD NEWS

Mubarak Bala, the president of the Humanist Association of **Nigeria** was freed by the High Court in Kano on 19 August 2024. He was arrested in 2020 for posting 'blasphemous' content on Facebook and sentenced to 24 years' imprisonment in 2022, later reduced to five years on appeal. PEN International and PEN Nigeria joined Humanist International and other organisations and individuals in a joint appeal for his unconditional release in 2021.

Authorities unconditionally withdrew a criminal and civil prosecution instituted by the president of **Gambia** against journalist **Musa Sheriff**, president of PEN Gambia and his colleague **Momodou Justice Darboe** in retaliation for their journalistic work after public pressure and private outreach to the presidency by press freedom and human rights groups.

Similarly, PEN International was delighted that the prosecution of PEN Togo president, **Marthe Nounfoh Fare** ended after authorities withdrew frivolous charges brought against her in retaliation for a video she had posted and commented about on her TikTok account.

2025 CASE LIST AFRICA

EMBLEMATIC CASES



MALI

Professor Étienne Fakaba SISSOKO

Author, academic, activist and publisher imprisoned for his book.

Étienne Fakaba Sissoko (b.1983) is a non-fiction author, academic, activist, and publisher. Arrested in March 2024, he is serving a two-year jail term, with one year suspended, in connection with his most recent book published in 2023: *Propagande, Agitation, Harcèlement: La communication gouvernementale pendant la transition au Mali (Propaganda, Agitation, Harassment: Government Communication During Mali's Transition)* which criticises the military government. Sissoko is also the Publications Director of the weekly news magazine 'Missions'.

Étienne Fakaba Sissoko. Photo credit: Etioo via WikiCommons



ERITREA

Dawit ISAAK

Writer and journalist detained without trial and held incommunicado since 2001.

Dawit Isaak, a Swedish-Eritrean journalist, writer, poet and playwright, has been detained incommunicado without trial for over 23 years in conditions amounting to enforced disappearance. Co-owner and editor of independent newspaper, **ሰቲት (Setit)** and co-founder of Shewit Children's Theatre, he is also the author of **ባና፣ ታሪኽ ፍቅራ--መቤን ማናን (Bana: The Affair of Mussie and Mana, 1988)**, and the short story '**አተን ሰላሳ ሺሕ**' (The Thirty Thousand), he was arrested on 23 September 2001 in a massive crackdown on independent media and dissent.

Dawit Isaak. Photo Credit: Kallen/Donald Ahlsen

ERITREA

DETAINED

Collective case of writers and journalists detained without trial for 23 years.

September 2024 marked 23 years of the incommunicado detention without trial of a group of Eritrean journalists and writers, including **Dawit ISAAK; Amanuel ASRAT; Said Idris 'ABU ARE'; Temesegen GHEBREYESUS; Methanie HAILE; Fessehaye 'Joshua' YOHANNES; Yousif Mohammed ALL; Seyoum TSEHAYE; Dawit HABTEMICHAEL; Said ABDELKADIR; Sahle 'Wedi-Itay' TSEFEZAB;** and **Matheos HABTEAB.**

In September 2001, Eritrean authorities launched a massive crackdown on regime critics in which security forces arrested and detained a group of dissenting members of the ruling party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PDFJ). The politicians, popularly known as the G-15 had earlier published an open letter in which they called for peaceful democratic reforms and denounced President Isais Afwerki's abuse of power and the president's actions, which they called 'illegal and unconstitutional'. Authorities also shut down all independent newspapers, including the weeklies *Meqaleh*, *Setit*, *Tsigenay*, *Zemen*, *Wintana* and *Admas*, for publishing the G-15 statement and conducting related interviews.

Between September and October that year, more than 10 journalists – among them writers associated with the banned media outlets were rounded up by security forces and detained. Along with the dissenting politicians, they have been detained incommunicado and without trial for the last 23 years. There have been unverified reports that several of them have since died in custody due to ill-treatment and neglect.

Eritrean authorities have ignored all calls for justice for the detainees made by human rights organizations as well as human rights mechanisms of the African Union and the UN. Officials have repeatedly denied that a clampdown took place in 2001, saying that the detainees had merely been sent to perform their national service duties.

On 26 July 2023, the UN Human Rights Council's Working Group on Arbitrary Detention published an [opinion](#) on the case of one of the detained writers and journalists, Dawit Isaaq. This was in response to a [complaint](#) filed in 2022 by an international coalition of NGOs, including PEN International. The Working Group found Isaaq's detention to be arbitrary, and in violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The Working Group also referred the case of Dawit Isaaq and his colleagues to the UN Human Rights Council's Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, and the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment for their action. This opinion vindicated previous conclusions by PEN International and other human rights and media freedom organizations that the detained individuals are being held by the Eritrean authorities in circumstances amounting to enforced disappearance.

For more than two decades, PEN International has persistently [campaigned](#) on behalf of the detained writers – who are all now aged over 55 years – including through public statements, sometimes [jointly](#) with other organizations, advocacy at the UN Human Rights Council through [Universal Periodic Review](#) joint submissions, advocacy at the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR) through a [joint oral statement](#) with PEN Eritrea in Exile and contribution to

resolutions of the NGO Forum during the 77th Ordinary Session of the ACHPR held in Arusha, Tanzania in October 2023 and a follow up mention of the case in an [oral statement](#) delivered at the 81st Ordinary Session of ACHPR held in Banjul, Gambia in October 2024 . PEN International has also made solidarity appeals on behalf of the imprisoned writers and featured their cases during key PEN [events](#).

MALI

IMPRISONED

Professor Étienne Fakaba SISSOKO

Author, academic and political activist **Étienne** Fakaba Sissoko was serving a one-year prison term in Kéniéroba Central Prison at the end of the year. Arrested on 25 March 2024 by the Judicial Investigation Brigade (BIJ), on 27 March 2024, Sissoko was charged with ‘harming the reputation of the state’, ‘defamation’ and ‘dissemination of false news disturbing the public peace’ in connection with his 2023 book, *Propagande, Agitation, Harcèlement: La communication gouvernementale pendant la transition au Mali (Propaganda, Agitation, Harassment: Government Communication During Mali’s Transition)*. The book denounces alleged propaganda in the Malian government’s public information campaign.

Sissoko was [sentenced](#) on 20 May 2024 to two years in prison, with one year suspended, and a fine of XOF three million (about USD 4,800) for ‘damages’ to the state. The Bamako Court of Appeal approved his provisional release on 14 October, pending his appeal, but Sissoko was rearrested the same day in the Court precincts, after the Public Prosecutor objected to his release. On 15 December 2024, the Court of Appeal upheld the sentence.

Sissoko’s conviction and sentence as a reprisal for his book is a typical example of the Malian military government’s instrumentalization of the justice system to persecute the few voices still criticising the abuses and excesses of the military government. Sissoko has previously been subjected to judicial harassment since the 2020 military coup. In January 2022, he was [arrested](#) for alleged ‘subversive’ speech **and detained** for close to six months without trial after he publicly criticised the management of the military transition and alleged that government appointments were based on ethnicity and false academic certificates. He was also reportedly questioned about the validity of his own academic qualifications in what credible sources have told PEN International was an attempt by the Malian authorities to discredit Sissoko’s academic credentials. He was conditionally [released](#) in June that year and barred from traveling outside Mali.

On 18 December, in an [open letter](#), 11 African PEN Centres urged the Malian authorities to quash Sissoko’s conviction and release him unconditionally.

Étienne Fakaba Sissoko, born on 2 February 1983, is a prominent author of non-fiction books, as well as an economist, academic, researcher, publisher and political activist. He has written on the economic and development crisis in Mali and the dynamics of the business sector in several books.

RWANDA

REPORTED MISSING

Innocent BAHATI

The year ended with poet Innocent Bahati still missing since his [disappearance](#) on 7 February 2021 after he reportedly went for a dinner meeting with an unknown person at a hotel in Nyanza district in the Southern Province of Rwanda. Bahati did not return to the capital, Kigali, as expected. His associates tried to reach him by phone that evening but found it was off. After two days of trying to establish his whereabouts, Bahati's disappearance was reported to the Rwanda Investigations Bureau (RIB). The RIB spokesperson denied that the agency was holding him, stating that investigations were ongoing, and that no information would be revealed at the time. PEN International believes that his disappearance is in relation to his critical poetry.

In 2017, Bahati had similarly [disappeared for several days](#) after he posted a critical comment on Facebook, only to reappear in police custody. Although he was not charged with any offence, he was detained without trial and freed after three months.

PEN International's [statements](#) and [campaigns](#) to highlight Bahati's situation have often been followed by unsubstantiated remarks from Rwandan authorities, mostly reported by government affiliated news outlets. These have included claims of an ongoing investigation and promises to publish a full report 'soon' as well as claims attributed to the Rwanda Investigations Bureau (RIB) that Bahati had left Rwanda to join an armed group in Uganda. PEN International believes that these responses are typical of Rwanda's frequent use of disinformation, denial, and silence to avoid accountability. To keep a spotlight on Bahati's case, he

was featured as one of the Empty Chairs at the 90th Congress of PEN International held in September 2024 in Oxford, UK.

Innocent Bahati (age 32 years) published his poetry on YouTube and Facebook and regularly performed at poetry events in Rwanda. His poems include '[Mfungurira](#)' (Open) '[Rubebe](#)', which Bahati described as a satire about the church in a [newspaper article](#); and '[Uwenda Ngomba u Rwanda](#)' (*The Debt I Need for Rwanda*), among others.

UGANDA

JUDICIAL HARASSMENT

Kakwenza RUKIRABASHAIJA

Authorities continued to prosecute exiled novelist, Kakwenza Rukirabashaija for 'offensive communications' under Section 25 of the Computer Misuse Act although the section was declared null and void by the Constitutional Court of Uganda in January 2023.

Security forces have arbitrarily arrested and detained Rukirabashaija three times for his writing, beginning in 2020. On the third occasion, he was violently [arrested](#) in December 2021 by security forces and detained incommunicado for close to three weeks, during which he was subjected to torture, over remarks he had posted on Twitter about President Yoweri Museveni and his son who was at the time the commander of Uganda's Land Forces. On 11 January 2022, Rukirabashaija was secretly arraigned before a Kampala Magistrates Court and denied access to a lawyer. Charged for offensive communications and committed to remand custody, he was released two days later on stringent bail terms, including a requirement to deposit his passport with the authorities. Fearing for his life,

without a chance for a fair trial and in urgent need of specialised medical attention for injuries inflicted by torture, he fled into exile in late January 2023.

Rukirabashaija was named the 2021 Writer of Courage by Zimbabwean author Tsitsi Dangarembga. The award is part of the PEN Pinter prize awarded each year by English Pen.

Kakwenza Rukirabashaija, born in 1988, is the author of *The Greedy Barbarian* (Kisana Consults, 2020 and Theworldiswatching in 2023) – a satirical novel covering themes of corruption and patronage; *Banana Republic: Where Writing is Treasonous* (Kisana Consults, 2020) which recounts Rukirabashaija's detention experience, including torture, during his arrest and detention in April 2020; and *The Savage Avenger* (Theworldiswatching, 2023).

PEN ACTIONS IN AFRICA

In addition to its advocacy for the writers referred to in this list, PEN International also acted on behalf of journalists and others at risk in the Africa region, including through emergency humanitarian support to 19 writers and journalists at risk and public statements to petition authorities on their behalf, details of which can be found in the links provided below:

TOGO

Marthe Nounfoh FAURE (f):

Judicial harassment after posting a video on social media

Action:

5 July 2024: Statement: [PEN Togo president Marthe Nounfoh Fare at risk of imprisonment](#)

THE GAMBIA

Musa S. SHERRIF and Momodou

JUSTICE (m): *Judicial harassment of journalists after publishing a news story about the president of Gambia*

Action:

5 November 2024: Statement: [The Gambia: Authorities must stop judicial harassment of PEN member Musa S. Sherrif and editor Momodou Justice](#)

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

AMERICAS

Alicia Quiñones, Head of the Americas Region

Every year seems to bring a downward spiral in the exercise of freedom of expression in the Americas. Still, recent global events and extremely high levels of violence against journalists and writers are evidence of an alarming crisis in artistic and press freedom in the region. Despite the good news and celebration that many of our colleagues have improved their situation and regained their freedom, threats are becoming more frequent, more severe, more challenging, and therefore more difficult for artists, writers and editors across the continent to deal with. As a result, PEN International's public and behind-the-scenes support for them continues to be a physical and creative lifeline.

MURDER AND OTHER CRIMINAL VIOLENCE

Although the Americas is a continent without any declared wars, it has a high rate of criminal violence and of murders of journalists, in countries including **Haiti**, **Mexico**, **Colombia**, **Honduras** and **Ecuador**. PEN International's annual 'Day of the Dead' campaign documented not only the murders of communicators in the region from 1 November 2023 to 31 October 2024 but also continued to highlight the elevated levels of impunity for killings in the Americas.

Mexico remains the most violent country in the region for practising journalism, with at least four journalists killed for their work as journalists during the year (the latest of the 47 journalists killed between 2019 and 2024 during the presidency of Andrés Manuel López Obrador). In June and October 2024, in Sinaloa province, the premises of the newspapers *Adiscusión* and *El Debate* were violently attacked and media workers kidnapped in retaliation for their reporting. In October 2024, PEN International sent an open letter to the new Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum with two specific requests: to reduce impunity for crimes against journalists and to ensure the free exercise of free expression and artistic expression by preventing harassment against artists, writers, publishers and journalists.

Meanwhile, extreme social violence in **Haiti**, and the lack of governance, continues to claim the lives of journalists. Two reporters were killed in December 2024 whilst covering the opening of a hospital –attacked by criminal groups.

HARASSMENT, THREATS AND OFFICIAL STIGMATISATION

During 2024, there was an increase in threats against women and indigenous authors who often addressed important issues such as: defence of land and traditional territories, migration and human rights, as well as those writing about sexual and gender identity, putting them at risk, or leaving them no option but to leave their homes. Indigenous language poets in **Mexico**, where activism and poetry in the service of Indigenous Peoples' causes are marked by violence and persecution, have received threats, such as those against Zoque poet **Mikeas Sánchez** who had to leave her home in Chiapas because of threats to her work as an activist and poet (see Mexico section below). In **Canada**, Brandi Morin, journalist, best-selling author and recipient of PEN Canada's Ken Filkow Award 2023 for promoting freedom of expression, was arrested in January while reporting on policing of a homeless settlement in Edmonton, Canada, which included Indigenous individuals (see Canada section below).

Particularly noteworthy was the increase in actions by those in power to discredit writers and journalists by smearing them on official channels. The harassment aims to undermine the work and messages of books, academic articles, media columns, opinion pieces and press leaders. It is fuelling a wave of digital and cyber bullying, often in the form of smear campaigns on social media, and has been accompanied by the introduction of legislation to punish criticism in digital media, despite the fact that the Inter-American legal framework on freedom of expression emphasises that States must refrain from discriminatory practices that compromise the enjoyment and effective exercise of free expression.

For example, in **Argentina**, journalists, writers, publishing houses and media outlets have been publicly insulted by President Javier Milei, who accused them of being accomplices of corrupt politicians or of writing ‘lies, slander or insults’. According to the Argentine Forum of Journalists (Foepa), out of 173 attacks documented in the first year of Milei’s mandate, 69.3% came from public officials, of which the president himself was responsible for almost half (32.37% of the total – 56 attacks). This was accompanied by a decree that prevents the release of information that the President deems private, an apparent attempt to curb the flow of information and criticism of the Milei government.

In **Mexico**, former President Andrés Manuel López Obrador frequently targeted writers, editors, journalists and others who criticised his administration during his morning press conferences. For example, he labelled writers Héctor Aguilar Camín and Enrique Krauze, two influential cultural figures in the country, as ‘conservatives’ and critics seeking to profit from their accusations, placing them at risk of further attacks. Natalie Kitroeff, a journalist for *The New York Times*, facéd similar harassment when the former president exposed her personal data in response to an investigation. Breach of personal data is part of the Mexican government’s ongoing campaign to undermine the investigative work of journalists.

In **Peru**, legal harassment against journalists, investigations and books is highlighted by the number of attacks and lawsuits brought against Peruvian investigative journalists and authors of books, which attempt to weaken their resources and limit investigations. Authorities in **Cuba** made threatening statements in April 2024, warning of possible criminal sanctions for those involved in mass protests, including lengthy prison sentences and the death penalty, ignoring concerns raised by the Inter-American

Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). In the run-up to the 2025 presidential election in **Honduras**, acts of repression increased, including threats, violence and the use of criminal law as a means of intimidation.

BANNED BOOKS: AN ASSAULT ON EQUALITY, FREEDOM TO READ AND PRESS FREEDOM

The increasing censorship of books related to race and gender identity provides a clear demonstration of ongoing attempts in some countries in the Americas to rewrite cultural and social narratives and the growth of growing ‘cancel culture’. Such actions raise the possibility of stigmatisation and threats against authors targeted in this way.

The Americas holds the global record for book censorship, a reality worsening year by year. In the **United States of America** (USA), at least 10,046 books in 29 states and 220 public school districts were censored in the school year from July 2023 to June 2024, according to PEN America’s School Book Ban Index, affecting an astonishing array of books and subjects, from new picture books or young adult novels to literary classics – from *Captain Underpants* to *Roots*, from *The Handmaid’s Tale* to the Merriam-Webster dictionary (see box under United States of America section below). They overwhelmingly included books with characters of colour (44%) and LGBTQI or non-binary characters (39%).

Regrettably, this trend has spread to countries such as **Argentina**, where government officials and organisations linked to supporters of President Javier Milei and Vice-president Victoria Villarruel launched a campaign to censor books dealing with issues such as femicide,

the rescue of historically marginalised female characters or the sexual abuse of a teenage girl, calling for their removal from schools or public bookshops (see Argentina section below).

JUDICIAL PERSECUTION: BANISHMENT, DETENTION AND IMPRISONMENT

In **Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela** and **Guatemala**, authorities continued to use judicial persecution to silence journalists, artists and other critical voices in 2024.

As documented in PEN International's [joint submission](#) for the Universal Periodic Review of **Nicaragua**, between 2019 and 2024 the Nicaraguan state and its officials intensified and increased persecution of journalists, activists, artists, media, students, clergy, and political opponents, among others. Abuse of the justice system has become commonplace, including acts of arbitrary detention, banishment, and deprivation of citizenship, property and fundamental rights, as [highlighted](#) at the UN Human Rights Council in September by **Gioconda Belli**, a prominent Nicaraguan writer and President of PEN Nicaragua, now herself living in enforced exile.

On 5 September 2024, the Nicaraguan authorities [released](#) 135 political prisoners but [deported](#) them to Guatemala, subsequently removing their citizenship and social rights. Among those released were writer and academic **Freddy Antonio Quezada** (see Nicaragua section below), artists **Kevin Laguna Guevara** and **Óscar Parrilla Blandón**, and journalist **Víctor Ticay**. PEN International also fears that journalists have been subjected to enforced disappearance; the whereabouts of **Fabiola Tercero Castro**, who runs

'El Rincón de Fabi', a cultural space for the free exchange of books, have been unknown since 12 July 2024, following a police raid on her home. Amidst the high level of persecution, PEN International also provided essential support to journalists, editors and PEN members needing to flee Nicaragua to avoid reprisals for their journalistic, cultural or human rights work.

During 2024, PEN [continued to record](#) arbitrary arrests, persecution and censorship in **Cuba** against artists, writers and journalists, which was intended to silence their music, literature, theatre, visual arts, activism or academic activities. In 2024, the second phase of PEN International's 2022 campaign *Voces Presas (Incarcerated Voices)* drew attention to imprisoned artists such as **María Cristina Garrido Rodríguez**, **Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara** and **Maykel Osorbo**, calling for their immediate release (see Cuba section below). Other emblematic cases illustrating the current reality in Cuba for critical voices include journalists **José Gabriel Barrenechea**, [detained](#) on 8 November 2024; **Lázaro Yuri Valle Roca**, who was [released](#) after three years in prison on 5 June 2024 on condition he leave Cuba; and journalist **José Luis Tan Estrada**, who was summoned and arbitrarily [arrested](#) on several occasions for his journalistic work, leading to his decision to flee the country.

The climate of widespread fear and violence created an unprecedented human rights crisis in **Venezuela** [before](#), during and after the disputed presidential election of 28 July 2024. PEN International [documented persecution](#), censorship, restriction of social media, imposition of curfews and use of levels of control and targeted repression against journalists and protesters. As of 10 December 2024, the Instituto Prensa y Sociedad de Venezuela [documented](#) 566 press freedom violations and the deportation of 11 foreign correspondents, as well as the arbitrary detention of 14 journalists during the year, 11 since the election.

In **Guatemala**, despite changes in the presidency and other government bodies, the Public Prosecutor's Office continued to persecute journalists such as **Jose Rubén Zamora Marroquín**, arbitrarily held under house arrest, raising concerns of rising attacks on press freedom (see Guatemala section below). In 2024, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention issued an opinion stating that Zamora's persecution was for 'reasons of political opinion'.

LEGAL REFORMS INCREASE REPRESSION ONLINE

In **Nicaragua**, it remained impossible to practise independent journalism or publish books in freedom. In 2024, the authorities stepped up their persecution with a reform of the so-called Cybercrime Law, which increases penalties and the power to prosecute 'computer crimes' extraterritorially. The authorities also approved the General Law of Convergent Telecommunications, which empowers the Nicaraguan Institute of Telecommunications and Posts (Telcor) to require licences to operate from local broadcasters and Internet content producers.

The authorities in **Cuba** also pushed through new laws in 2024, such as the Law on Social Communication, criticised by local, regional and international media and organisations, which promotes the application of offences in the Penal Code to attack critical voices using social media, providing for crimes such as slander on 'social networks' (Article 391), becoming mercenaries for foreign armies or private military companies (Article 135), obtaining resources to finance activities against state security (Article 143) or disobedience (Article 185).

Finally, in **El Salvador**, the government of President Nayib Bukele passed two laws on cybersecurity and data protection, which both pose a danger to press freedom.

GOOD NEWS

In 2024, after almost a decade of advocacy by PEN International, with the solidarity of many PEN centres, authorities in **Honduras** overturned the sentence passed against **Cesario Padilla**, a journalist, author, and PEN Honduras member. In **Brazil**, the investigation into the murder of British journalist **Dom Phillips**, although not yet concluded, has led to the prosecution of the mastermind and those responsible for the crime. In **Canada**, charges of obstructing the police brought against journalist and author **Brandi Morin** were dropped, following campaigning by many organisations, including PEN Canada.

In **Cuba**, during 2024, we celebrated the release of musician **Richard Zamora** and journalist **Lázaro Yuri Roca Valle**, joined in January 2025 by artist **Jessica Lisbeth Torres Calvo** and rapper **Randy Arteaga**. In other good news, poet **Carlos Bucio Borja**, was released in **El Salvador** after a campaign for his release by local and regional organisations, including PEN International.

2025 CASE LIST AMERICAS

EMBLEMATIC CASES



CUBA

María Cristina GARRIDO RODRÍGUEZ

Poet and activist sentenced for taking part in peaceful protests

María Cristina Garrido Rodríguez is serving a seven-year prison sentence imposed after she was convicted on 10 March 2022 of ‘public disorder’, ‘contempt’, and ‘resistance’ for her participation in peaceful protests in July 2021. Garrido is held in poor conditions in detention, including solitary confinement. Garrido’s most recent book *Voz cautiva: poemas escritos desde la cárcel* (*Captive Voice: poems written from prison*), published in 2023, highlights the challenges she faced during her unjust imprisonment, including ill-treatment, isolation, surveillance, and depression.

*María Cristina Garrido Rodríguez.
Photo credit: selfie by Garrido Rodríguez*



PERU

Paola Margot UGAZ CRUZ

Judicial harassment of author and journalist for her work

Paola Ugaz has faced judicial harassment since 2018, with an ongoing unfounded investigation for alleged ‘illicit enrichment’ in reprisal for her documentation of corruption as well as abuse within a religious organisation. In 2024, judicial authorities ordered her telephone company to hand over Ugaz’ phone records and geolocation data, thereby lifting the confidentiality of the journalist’s communications and violating her security and that of her sources of information. This sets a dangerous precedent for journalists in Peru.

Paola Ugaz. Photo credit: Feria del Libro Ricardo Palma

ARGENTINA

HARASSED

Gabriela CABEZÓN CÁMARA

In 2024, authorities attempted to censor the book *Las aventuras de la China Iron* (*The adventures of China Iron*), written by writer and journalist Gabriela Cabezón Cámara, on the grounds that it contained sexually explicit content inappropriate for students.

In November 2024, it was revealed that the Natalio Morelli Foundation had filed a criminal complaint against the Director of Education of the Province of Buenos Aires for the distribution of the book, along with some works by other authors, in schools in the city of Buenos Aires. Vice President Victoria Villarruel, described these works as ‘degrading and immoral’ and demanded that they be withdrawn from the classroom.

Writer and journalist, Gabriela Cabezón Cámara, born in San Isidro, Buenos Aires on 4 November 1968, is considered one of the most prominent figures in contemporary Argentine and Latin American literature, as well as being a well-known intellectual, feminist and environmentalist. Her books include *La virgen cabeza* (Eterna Cadencia 2009), (published in English as *Slum Virgin*, by Charco Press, 2017), *Romance de la negra rubia* (*Romance of the Black Blonde*, Eterna Cadencia, 2014), and *Las aventuras de la China Iron* (Penguin Random House, 2017) (published in English as *The Adventures of China Iron*, Charco Press, 2019). She has also written a novella: *Le viste la cara a Dios* (*You’ve Seen God’s Face*, 2011).

Jorge FERNÁNDEZ DÍAZ

On 13 April 2024, President Javier Milei publicly insulted the novelist and journalist Jorge Fernández Díaz, and discredited his work as a columnist. The author and journalist had published several opinion pieces criticising the President,

who responded by insulting Fernández Díaz, creating a hostile environment for free expression in the country. Many authors condemned the criticism.

Well known writer Jorge Fernández Díaz was born in Buenos Aires on 8 July 1960. He is the author of more than 15 books, including novels, investigative journalism, short stories and essays including: *Cora* (Planeta, 2024), *La traición* (*The Betrayal*), (Planeta, 2020) and *La herida* (*The Wound*), (Planeta 2014). He is the winner of multiple awards, such as two Platinum Konex Awards, the Martin Fierro Award, the Silver Laurel for Personality of the Year, the Argentores Award for screenwriting, the Bicentennial Medal as an award for his journalistic and literary work, and the Cross of the Order of Isabel the Catholic, in recognition of his contributions to culture.

María Sol FANTIN

Writer and teacher María Sol Fantin faced attempts in 2024 to censor her book *Si no fueras tan niña. Memorias de la violencia* (*If you weren’t such a child: Memories of violence*, Paidós, 2022), an autobiographical work that recounts the sexual abuse she suffered as a teenager at the hands of a teacher. On 17 November 2024, Vice-President Virginia Villarruel published a social media post, describing the book as glorifying ‘paedophilia’ and ‘the sexualisation of children’. In response, Sol Fantin wrote a letter to families explaining her motivation for telling her story and warning of the negative consequences of censoring literature in educational contexts.

María Sol Fantin, born in Buenos Aires in 1982, is a teacher in the public school system, teaching oral narrative in primary and nursery schools. She is also a lecturer and has a degree in Fine Arts (UBA) who has undertaken research into post-war Spanish poetry. She is the author of several books including: *Un meteorito puede acabar con el planeta esta misma noche* (2011) (*A meteorite could destroy the planet*

tonight), *Decime que soy linda* (2012) (*Tell me I'm pretty*), *ÁNIMAL PRINT: Geografía de la metrópolis* (2017) (*ANIMAL PRINT: Geography of the metropolis*), *Normalidad* (2018) (*Normality*) and *Huevos* (2020) (*Eggs*).

María Soledad IPARRAGUIRRE

On 17 March 2024, shortly before the Day of Commemoration for Truth and Justice on 24 March, the non-fiction publishing house Marea, which specialises in journalism and human rights, faced a troll attack on its Facebook account, which resulted in more than 800 hate messages and comments being posted there. The aim of the attack was to discredit the book *Delia, bastion of resistance*, written by journalist María Soledad Iparraguirre, about Delia Giovanola (1926–2022), one of the founders of the group 'Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo' (Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo – a human rights organisation with the goal of finding the children stolen and illegally adopted during the 1976–1983 Argentine military dictatorship). Most of these messages either defended the last military dictatorship, supported the government of President Javier Milei or contained hate speech against the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, and included threats of disappearance or death against the editor or contributors.

María Soledad Iparraguirre, born in Mar del Plata on 2 April 1975, graduated in Journalism at the Faculty of Social Communication of the National University of La Plata (UNLP). She is an editor at *La Pulseada* magazine and a contributor to various media and websites such as *Socompa*, *Periodismo de Frontera* and *Agencia Perycia*, *Periodismo y Justicia*, among others. *Delia. Bastion of Resistance* is her first book.

Joaquín MORALES SOLÁ

Writer and journalist Joaquín Morales Solá was a victim of stigmatisation in 2024. On 6 April 2024, while at a conference, President Milei criticised Morales Solá after the writer published opinion pieces criticising the president.

Joaquín Morales Solá, born 6 August 1950, is a political journalist and author of books such as *El sueño Eterno* (Planeta, 2001) (*The Eternal Dream*) and *Los Kirchner: La política de la desmesura* (2003–2008) (*The Kirchners. The politics of excess*) (Sudamericana, Buenos Aires, 2008).

Dolores REYES

Author Dolores Reyes faced stigmatisation by officials during the year. On 7 November 2024, Vice-President Victoria Villarruel labelled Reyes' novel *Cometierra* (Sigilo, 2019), about a young woman who experiences visions when she eats soil, as immoral and degrading, showing excerpts on her social media and calling for its removal from schools and libraries. Notwithstanding the Vice-President's condemnation, Reyes' books remain part of library collections in Buenos Aires. PEN International condemned the attack as a dangerous step towards censorship and book banning based solely on the preferences of those in power.

Dolores Reyes, born in Buenos Aires in 1978, studied Primary Education at Colegio Normal 10 and Greek and Classical Cultures at the University of Buenos Aires. *Cometierra*, which was a finalist for the Medifé-Filba Foundation Novel Prize, the Silverio Cañada Memorial Prize, the Mario Vargas Llosa Prize and the Sara Gallardo National Novel Prize, has been translated into 14 languages. Reyes followed *Cometierra* by *Miseria* (Alfaguara, 2023), a sequel addressing femicide in Latin America. She worked on the Untold Microcosms project for the British Museum.

JUDICIAL HARASSMENT

Alejandro ALFIE

Journalist and writer Alejandro Alfie was judicially harassed in 2024. On 7 November 2024, he announced on social media that Esteban Glavinich (owner of the X account @TraductorTeAma and supporter of President Javier Milei) had filed a lawsuit against Alfie and the newspaper *Clarín* where Alfie works. In the lawsuit, Glavinich demanded ARS 20 million (almost USD 19,000) from the journalist and the newspaper company for an article Alfie wrote that was published in the newspaper. Earlier, between August and October 2024, President Milei retweeted various messages of harassment against the journalist, five of which were from Glavinich's account.

According to Alfie, between July and November 2024, Glavinich sent Alfie more than 100 messages of harassment and fake news. He also said that Glavinich, together with other X users, were attempting to buy shares in Grupo Clarín in order to get Alfie fired from his journalism post.

Alejandro Alfie is a journalist for the newspaper *Clarín*. He is the host of the programme 'ConTacto Digital' (Radio Rivadavia AM630) and an assistant professor of Comparative Legislation in the Communication Sciences programme in the University of Buenos Aires. He is the author of the investigative non-fiction book *Los agentes de Néstor y Cristina* (Néstor and Cristina's agents, Les Imaginateurs S.R.L, 2015) and the novel *Hambre de piel en la sociedad de control* (2004) (*Hunger for flesh in the surveillance society*).

BRAZIL

KILLED – TRIAL IN PROGRESS

Dom PHILLIPS

At the end of the year, trials continued of several men for the 2022 murder of British journalist and author Dom Phillips and Indigenous issues expert Bruno Pereira during a fact-finding trip in the Indigenous territory of the Javari Valley in the Brazilian Amazon. Phillips was working at the time on a book about sustainable development entitled *How to Save the Amazon*, and Pereira, who had close contacts with local Indigenous groups, was providing support with interviews. (See Case lists 2023/2024 and 2022).

In January 2024, Brazilian police announced the arrest of another suspect, said to have close links to the alleged mastermind of the murders. In September 2024, a court dropped murder charges against one of the three initial suspects due to insufficient evidence, following an appeal by the suspect's lawyer. The other two suspects, who had confessed to the crime, remained charged. On 4 November 2024, the Brazilian federal police concluded that the murders of Dom Phillips and Bruno Pereira were driven by Pereira's environmental monitoring work and his defence of Indigenous rights in Vale do Javari, an Indigenous territory. According to the final report, Rubens Villar Coelho (nicknamed Colômbia), head of an illegal fishing operation, provided ammunition to the killers and funded legal expenses for one of the initial suspects arrested. A total of nine individuals have been charged in connection with the murders and the concealment of the victims' bodies.

Dom Phillips, born on 23 July 1964, worked as a freelance journalist for many international media outlets including the *Guardian*, the *Financial Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times* and the *Intercept*. Most of

his investigations were about environmental issues. In 2018, Phillips reported on the threats posed by illegal mining and cattle ranchers to uncontacted indigenous peoples in the Brazil's Javari Valley. He is the author of the book *Superstar DJs Here We Go!: The Rise and Fall of the Superstar DJ*.

CANADA

JUDICIAL HARASSMENT

Brandi MORIN

On 10 January 2024, police officers arrested Cree/Iroquois/French freelance journalist Brandi Morin while she was reporting on an Indigenous encampment, in Edmonton, Alberta. When police raided the encampment, Morin said she identified herself as a journalist and stated her right to be on public property and to report on matters of clear public interest. Despite Morin exercising her legal right to do her job, the police officers arrested her. After PEN Canada and other organisations raised concerns, the charges against Morin were dropped.

Brandi Morin, born in Treaty 6 territory in Alberta in 1981, is the author of *Our Voice of Fire: A Memoir of a Warrior Rising* (House of Anansi, 2022). In 2023, Morin was awarded PEN Canada's Ken Filkow Prize for her bravery in 'advancing freedom of expression in Canada.' Morin is a well-known journalist who has reported extensively on Indigenous land and environmental rights and has won awards for her work on Truth and Reconciliation, and residential school grave discoveries.

CUBA

IMPRISONED

Randy ARTEAGA RIVERA

Musician and rapper Randy Arteaga Rivera continued serving a five-year prison sentence in prison camp 'La Guanajera' at the end of the year. He was arrested on 11 July 2021 in Santa Clara province while participating in peaceful protests against restrictions on rights, scarcity of food and medicines, and the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, popularly known as the #11J protests. He was violently dragged into a police bus in the street. In April 2022, he was sentenced for the alleged crimes of 'contempt' and 'public disorder'. His family deny that he was a ringleader of the demonstration. He was fired from his job as a security guard after his arrest. (See Case List 2023/2024)

Randy Arteaga Rivera, born on 3 December 1990 and better known as Randy AR, is a musician and rapper whose songs criticise repression and the social situation in Cuba.

Update: Randy Arteaga Rivera was conditionally released on 16 January 2025 following negotiations between the USA, the Vatican and Cuba.

Maykel CASTILLO PÉREZ

Cuban musician and rapper Maykel Castillo Pérez, widely known by the name 'Maykel Osorbo', continued serving a nine-year prison term in the high security 5 y Medio prison in Pinar del Río after his conviction on 24 June 2022 of charges including 'contempt, attack, public disorder and defamation of institutions and organisations'. He has been held since 18 May 2021 and has received threats from other inmates (see Case List 2023/2024, 2022 and 2021).

On 18 April 2024, Osorbo reported being viciously assaulted by prison officers, resulting in an injury in his left ear, with

subsequent additional violence by authorities leading to a significant deterioration in his health. In a letter made public on 3 May 2024, Osorbo said he fears for his safety in prison.

Osorbo was granted precautionary measures on 11 February 2021 by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has concluded that Osorbo is detained arbitrarily solely for his pro-democracy activism and has urged his immediate release.

Osorbo, born in 1983, is co-author, alongside other Cuban musicians, of ‘Patria y Vida’ (‘Homeland and Life’), a song that, since its release in February 2021, has served as an anthem during anti-government demonstrations across the island. The song received two Latin Grammy Awards.

Ibrahim DOMÍNGUEZ AGUILAR

Musician Ibrahim Domínguez Aguilar is servicing a 10-year sentence in maximum security Boniato Prison in Santiago de Cuba where he has been held since August 2021, reportedly in a collective cell with repeat offenders. He was convicted in an unfair trial of contempt, public disorder and sexual assault in connection with his artivism and participation in peaceful demonstrations in Contramaestre during the #11J protests in 2021. Domínguez Aguilar’s relatives reported that on 4 April 2024 he was beaten on the orders of the prison authorities, causing physical injury.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), which granted precautionary measures to Domínguez Aguilar in 2022 while he was held under arbitrary pre-trial detention after his arrest on 12 July 2021.

Ibrahim Domínguez Aguilar is a rapper from Santiago de Cuba, whose lyrics are critical of the Cuban government.

María Cristina GARRIDO RODRÍGUEZ

Cuban poet and activist María Cristina Garrido Rodríguez is continuing to serve a seven-year prison sentence imposed after she was convicted on 10 March 2022 of ‘public disorder,’ ‘contempt,’ and ‘resistance.’ She was arrested with her sister Angélica Garrido on 12 July 2021 after participating in peaceful protests. (see Case Lists 2023/2024, 2022 and 2021)

Garrido is held in poor conditions in detention, including solitary confinement, lack of food and water and inadequate sanitation. She has also been beaten. Together with her sister Angélica Garrido, she went on hunger strike for five days on 20 September 2022 in protest at their continued detention. In November 2023, Garrido sent an audio message to the PEN community talking about censorship in Cuba and the power of art.

Her sister, released on 10 July 2024, stated that the authorities promised Garrido a transfer to a camp with exit permits that would enable her to see her children, but that the measure was not in the end granted. María Cristina is the only female inmate from the 11-J movement still imprisoned; the rest have been moved to a camp or are on parole.

María Cristina Garrido Rodríguez was born in Quivicán, Mayaquebé in 1982. In 2008, she won the First National Prize in the Carlos Baliño Tobacco Competition. Her poetry and artistic vision have led her to reflect and write about her daily life, while her career as an activist has led her to join the Cuban Women’s Network, where she supports the visibility of women in various spaces. Garrido is a member of the Vuelta abajo por Cuba Foundation and a member of the Latin Federation of Rural Women (FLAMUR). She is the author of *Examen de tiempo* (*Time examination*), published in 2022. Her most recent book *Voz cautiva: poemas escritos desde la cárcel* (*Captive Voice: poems written from prison*) was published in 2023 by the Spanish publishing house Deslinde and highlights the challenges faced by Garrido during her political imprisonment, including ill-treatment, isolation, surveillance, and depression, among others.

Yasmani GONZÁLEZ VALDÉS

Yasmani González Valdés (also known as 'Libre Libre') was sentenced to four years in prison in February 2024, after conviction of 'propaganda against the constitutional order'. He has been held in the Combinado del Este Prison since 29 May 2023 and is reported to have lost a lot of weight. He was arrested at his home on 20 April 2023 for alleged involvement in painting anti-Cuban Communist Party graffiti (see Case List 2023/2024).

Rapper and activist Yasmani González Valdés was born in Artemisa on 2 September 1992. Previously, in 2022, González Valdés was fined CUP 3,000 (about USD 125) under Decree Law 370 for posting denunciations against the Cuban government on social media.

Marco Antonio PINTUELES MARRERO

At the end of the year, rapper and activist Marco Antonio Pintueles Marrero continued to serve a five-year sentence of correctional labour in 'La Aguada' camp for the crime of 'sedition'. Marco Antonio was arrested on 11 July 2021 in reprisal for his participation in peaceful protests, sentenced to seven years in prison in February 2022, and released in April 2022. On 9 June 2022, he was informed that he would have to serve five years of correctional labour. (See Case list 2023/2024 and 2022)

In November 2023, Pintueles Marrero released his song 'Basta' which criticises the censorship, poverty and the general crisis in Cuba under President Miguel Díaz-Canel. On 2 November 2024, immediately after the song was made public, the rapper was transferred to the State Security Criminal Instruction Centre in Holguín, where he was held incommunicado for six days and, according to his relatives, was threatened with further charges for writing the song.

Marco Antonio Pintueles Marrero, born in August 2003, is a rapper and activist who writes lyrics critical of the authorities.

Update: Marco Antonio Pintueles Marrero was conditionally released on 17 January 2025 following negotiations between the USA, the Vatican and Cuba.

DETAINED

Fernando ALMENARES RIVERA

(known as Nando OBCD)

Rapper Fernando Almenares Rivera (known as Nando OBCD) was detained on 31 December 2024 by two plain clothes police officials, reportedly without summons or judicial hearing, on 'suspicion' that he had committed 'acts of terrorism against the state'. He was initially taken to the seventh Police Unit of La Lisa.

This latest detention of Nando OBDC is part of the sustained harassment he has suffered due to his involvement in the independent art and activist movements. His involvement in projects such as 'Arte Prohibido' and collaborations with other critical artists, such as the AI2 El Aldeano, El Sexto, Maykel Osorbo, and others, have been met with escalating repression from authorities.

Update: At the end of February 2025, Nando OBDC was held in poor detention conditions at the Combinado del Este maximum security prison, accused of sabotage, and for allegedly participating in a fire in a park. However, his family members report that he had recently criticised the pollution and escalating usage of a synthetic cannabinoid known as 'el químico' in his neighbourhood of San Agustín in Havana.

Nando OBDC (born 1 April 1990) has been collaborating since 2020 with various cultural projects, including the Exprésate campaign; Fire Against Fire, the Forbidden Art exhibition, and the album Free by Right. Nando OBDC shared in interviews that he has been detained on numerous occasions, and received threats, and even beatings from authorities in response to his artistic and activism activities.

HARASSED

Camila ACOSTA RODRÍGUEZ

On 21 April 2024, journalist and author Camila Acosta Rodríguez was briefly detained by police officials in Matanzas, Cuba, while on her way to visit relatives of political prisoners to interviewing them. Acosta was held at a police station in Cárdenas for an hour and then returned to her home in Havana.

The journalist was intercepted before reaching the house of the relatives of political prisoners. Acosta stated that the police gave her no explanation whatsoever as to the reasons for her arrest, while at the same time a police operation was taking place at her house.

Acosta has previously been detained several times by the authorities for her investigations. Most recently, in May 2022, she was released after 10 months under house arrest in connection with her reporting on the July 2021 protests.

Camila Acosta Rodríguez, born in 1993, is a Cuban journalist who works in Havana as a correspondent for the Spanish newspaper ABC. She is the author of the book *Del templo al temple, silencios y escándalos de la masonería cubana* (2022).

Gorki Luis ÁGUILA CARRASCO

Musician Gorki Luis Águila Carrasco was detained by State Security at Havana's José Martí International Airport on 3 May 2024 while attempting to travel to Mexico. The authorities informed Águila Carrasco that he was 'regulated,' a word used to describe travel restrictions on government opponents. He was arrested and fined CUP 2,000 for contempt of court before being released on 4 May 2024. He finally arrived in Mexico on 13 May 2024, after authorities reportedly told him to leave the country.

Águila Carrasco was also prevented from travelling abroad in 2018 (see Case List 2018).

Gorki Luis Águila Carrasco (Havana, 11 November 1968) is a dissident Cuban punk musician and the vocalist of the band Porno para Ricardo. Since the early 2000s, he has been writing lyrics critical of the Cuban government.

Orlando MORA CABRERA

Filmmaker Orlando Mora Cabrera was detained by three State Security agents on 21 December 2024; he was released the same day. Before his arrest, Mora Cabrera had premiered the short film *Matar a un hombre (To Kill a Man)* (2024) in a number of alternative spaces, one of them the Ludwig Foundation and the Norwegian Embassy in Cuba, after its screening was postponed and cancelled at the 45th Havana Film Festival. *To Kill a Man* tells the story of Javi, an erotic dancer, who is presenting his show for the last time in a nightclub.

The authorities said that the cancellations were related to supposed power cuts, as happened with the first two official screenings, and the attempt to reschedule was cancelled at the last minute. From then on, the programmers requested the slots, but the screening was never approved.

The filmmaker has stated that his film was censored at the festival for homophobic reasons and for its criticism of violence and domination in Cuban society. The film was excluded from the official programme after a series of cancellations attributed to alleged 'electrical issues', despite having been selected for the short and medium-length film competition.

Filmmaker Orlando Mora Cabrera, born 15 October 1994 in Havana, is a graduate of the University of the Arts of Cuba. He attended the special programme Documentary Video Production in Havana, at New York University - Tisch School of the Arts. He graduated in film studies at the International Film and Television School of San Antonio de los Baños (EICTV) in Cuba, where he currently coordinates the film direction

department. His films include *Gemini*, 2022; *Brujo amor (Sorcerous Love)*, 2023; and *Cagüeira* (in distribution), 2025. His work has been selected for international festivals and film markets in Cuba, the USA, Mexico, Trinidad and Tobago, Spain, France, Australia, among others.

Jenny Victoria PANTOJA TORRES

The essayist, historian and academic Jenny Pantoja Torres faced several instances of harassment for her ideas, writings and peaceful activism in relation to human rights in 2024.

On 18 June 2024, Pantoja Torres was arbitrarily detained while travelling to Havana together with **Alina Bárbara López Hernández** (see below under Judicial Harassment) for their monthly peaceful protest against censorship by the Cuban authorities. The academics were detained for 11 hours at the La Playa police station in Matanzas, where they were interrogated and charged with 'attempt' to assault police officers in the line of duty and placed under precautionary house arrest.

On 18 July, police officers prevented Pantoja Torres from attending her peaceful demonstration. On 23 July she was made redundant from her job as a professor at the Miguel Enríquez Faculty of the University of Medical Sciences in Havana due to alleged cuts to the teaching staff. However, according to Pantoja Torres, State Security officials had pressured the dean to dismiss her and on two occasions police officers had threatened her with an end to her professional career.

On 18 September 2024, it was reported that Pantoja Torres was detained and released hours later, following police surveillance and threats from State Security and the National Police.

Essayist, historian and academic Jenny Pantoja Torres is an anthropologist and historian, and a specialist in Cuban religious practices of African origin. She is the coordinator of the Pro-Amnesty

Committee for political prisoners in Cuba. Her book *Del Templo al templo. Silencios y escándalos de la masonería cubana* (Editorial Primigenios) was published in 2022.

JUDICIAL HARRASSMENT

Raymar AGUADO HERNÁNDEZ

Alexander HALL LUJARDO

Art critic and columnist Raymar Aguado Hernández and historian and author Alexander Hall Lujardo continued to be subject to ongoing harassment in 2024 (see Case List 2023/2024).

Aguado Hernández was summoned for questioning on 28 June 2024 in connection with articles he had written and his social media posts, as well as his support for Palestinians and Cuban activists. On 18 September 2024, both he and Hall Lujardo were summoned for questioning due to their social media posts, activism, and criticism of the authorities.

Raymar Aguado Hernández is a student at the Centro de Estudios Eclesiásticos Padre Félix Varela. He also works as an art critic and writes for media outlets such as Rialta Magazine, Hypermedia and La Joven Cuba. In 2023, he published *¿(Des)aciertos críticos? La obra de cinco artistas visuales cubanos (Critical (mis) successes? The work of five Cuban visual artists)*, by Aquiescencia Editorial.

Alexander Hall Lujardo, born in Havana in 1998 is an historian and Afro-descendant activist. He writes for magazines such as *Sin Permiso* and *Rialta Magazine* and is the co-author and coordinator of the book *Cuba 11J: Perspectivas contrahegemónicas de las protestas sociales. (Cuba 11J: Counter-hegemonic perspectives on social protests.)*

Jorge FERNÁNDEZ ERA

Journalist and author Jorge Fernández Era continued to be subject to judicial harassment in 2024, mainly in retaliation for the humorous weekly column he writes for the magazine *La Joven Cuba*. (See Case List [2023/2024](#)).

During the year, Fernández Era was the target of multiple arrests and other forms of harassment by State Security. He reported being informed verbally by police in January that a case against him lodged in 2023 had been dismissed, but that he had never received formal notification. On 18 April 2024, he reported being surveilled when leaving and returning to his house. On 19 May 2024, he reported harassment by the same officers who had surveilled him the previous month, who attempted to prevent him from leaving his home without due legal process. On 18 August 2024, the writer was detained for a few hours after announcing on Facebook his intention to hold a peaceful protest in Havana's Central Park. The following month, Fernández Era was summoned for interrogation by State Security, on 18 September 2024. This summons came shortly after he resigned from the Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba (UNEAC) in solidarity with the expulsion of academic **Alina Bárbara López Hernández** (see below). This pattern of harassment and intimidation is connected to the monthly peaceful demonstrations called by López Hernández to demand democratic reform and an end to censorship. PEN International called for an end to his harassment.

Author of four books of short stories such as *Cincuenta cuentos de nuestro Era (Fifty Stories of our Era)* and *Cada cual a lo mío. Humor en bruto para gente no tan bruta (Each to my own. Raw humour for not-so-raw people)*, Jorge Fernández Era, born in 1962, graduated in journalism from the University of Havana. He has worked in various Cuban cultural institutions and has won more than 20 prizes in national and international journalism and literature

competitions, including First Prize in the Dinosaurio International MiniStory Competition, which he won twice, and the Aquelarre National Humorous Literature Prize, which he won for ten years.

Alina Bárbara LÓPEZ HERNÁNDEZ

The judicial harassment of essayist, editor and researcher Alina Bárbara López Hernández in connection with her writing and activism continued in 2024 (See Case List [2023/2024](#)).

In April 2024, López was detained for several hours. She lodged a complaint against the police in relation to injuries sustained during her arrest; her complaint was dismissed.

On 18 June 2024, López Hernández was again briefly detained for 11 hours along with a colleague while travelling to Havana for their monthly peaceful protest against censorship by the Cuban authorities and calling for reform. López Hernández was charged with 'attempt to assault police officers in the line of duty' under Article 182 of the Penal Code which carries a penalty of three to eight years imprisonment. PEN International believes that López Hernández was charged with a criminal offence in an attempt to limit her activities that are critical of the government.

According to López Hernández, when she asked for the reasons for her detention, the police physically assaulted her, and forcefully pushed her into a police car. During the struggle, López Hernández grabbed and partially tore one of the policemen's uniform, the basis for her charge. Police officers also threatened her with further violence and imprisonment

On 12 September 2024, López Hernández was expelled from the Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba (UNEAC) after she was accused of 'carrying out activities against the revolution,' and 'showing solidarity with the July 11 movement.' PEN International called for an end to her harassment.

Alina Bárbara López Hernández, born in Matanzas in 1965, is an essayist, editor and researcher. She works for Ediciones Matanzas publishing house. She is the author of several books of essays such as *Segundas Lecturas. Intelectualidad, política y cultura en la República burguesa* (*Second Readings. Intellectuality, politics and culture in the bourgeois Republic*), *En tiempos de blogosfera* (*In times of blogosphere*), and *El (des) conocido Juan Marinello* (*The (un)Known Juan Marinello*). She has been awarded prizes such as the 2008 Juan Marinello National Essay Prize and the 2013 Matanzas City Foundation Prize; National Prize of Cultural Investigation 2014.

CONDITIONAL RELEASE

Alejandro GUILLEUMA IBÁÑEZ

PEN International has learned that [Alejandro Guilleuma Ibáñez](#) is now reportedly serving a [four-year prison term without confinement](#), imposed in May 2023 by the People's Municipal Court of Centro Habana after he was convicted of contempt, public disorder and resistance in connection with September 2022 protests in El Vedado neighbourhood at a five-day electricity outage in the aftermath of Hurricane Ian. (See [Case List 2023/2024](#)). Under the terms of his sentence, he can live at home but must sign in at a court at least once a month.

Guilleuma Ibáñez was [arrested](#) in Havana on 1 October 2022. Initially held in pre-trial detention in the notorious 100 and Aldabó Detention Centre run by the Technical Department of Investigations, he was later transferred on an unknown date to Valle Grande Prison where he was held until his conditional release in May 2023. Friends and family members reported that his health had [deteriorated](#) in prison.

RELEASED

Richard Adrián ZAMORA BRITO

Rapper and musician Richard Adrián Zamora Brito, better known as 'El Radikal', completed his 18-month sentence of 'restriction of liberty' in January 2024. He was also sentenced to a fine of CUP 30,000 (approximately USD 1,200) (see [Case List 2023/2024](#)). El Radikal was released in January 2024, and he left Cuba in March 2024.

El Radikal is a member of the Council for Racial Integration and Demóngeles, a dissident group of artists, rappers, filmmakers, writers and artists. For years, El Radikal has suffered multiple forms of repression and harassment as a result of his music and *artivism*, such as police surveillance at his home, which has prevented him from attending hip-hop festivals. He was awarded a [2024 Cuban Migrant Artists Resilience Fellowship](#) after his departure from Cuba.

EL SALVADOR

BRIEF DETENTION

Carlos BUCIO BORJA

The poet Carlos Bucio Borja was [arrested](#) for reading aloud articles of the Salvadoran Constitution on 4 February 2024, the day of the presidential elections in El Salvador, in protest at the candidacy for re-election of Nayib Bukele. During his peaceful protest, the writer also made reference to other texts and to Monsignor Óscar Arnulfo Romero, a figure famous for his defence of human rights in El Salvador. Borja was detained by six members of the National Civil Police in an educational complex that was serving as a polling station and was transferred to the detention centre known as 'El Penalito'. According to public information, the poet was arrested on charges of 'public disorder'. The poet was [released without charge](#) 72 hours later, on 7 February 2024. PEN International [called](#) for his release.

Carlos Bucio Borja, born in La Unión in 1967, is a dual national Canadian–Salvadoran writer who lives in Canada. He graduated from economics and sociology at the José Simeón Cañas Central American University and in social anthropology from York University in Toronto. He has published short stories, poems and articles in various magazines and newspapers in El Salvador and Canada.

GUATEMALA

HARASSED

Marvin DEL CID

Sonny FIGUEROA

Guatemalan journalists Marvin Del Cid and Sonny Figueroa faced continuing harassment in 2024. On 18 September 2024, Sonny Figueroa posted on social media that public officials had exposed personal information and data among their contacts. One day after Figueroa's post, on 19 September, a photo of the two of them walking down the street was posted on social media. These acts of intimidation are intended to stop them doing their investigative journalism into corruption in Guatemala's public system. In August 2024, both journalists were able to return to Guatemala, which they had fled in 2023 due to harassment (see Case List [2023/2024](#)).

Marvin Del Cid, born in Guatemala City in 1976, is journalist and author specialising in investigative and political issues. Founder of the NGO Artículo 35, he has also worked as a professor at universities in Chile and Guatemala. Sonny Figueroa, born in Guatemala City in 1992, is an investigative journalist and author specialising in political affairs. He is Vice-president of Artículo 35 and founder of the investigative online media outlet Vox Populi. They are the authors of *¡Yo no quiero ser reconocido como un hijueputa más!* (*I don't want to be recognised as just another hijueputa!*) and *Así me convertí en un 'hijueputa más'* (*That's how I became one more 'hijueputa'*).

HONDURAS

HARASSED

Dina MEZA

Journalist, human rights defender, and founding member of PEN Honduras Dina Meza faced continuing harassment during the year. Meza's security situation remained a serious concern. (For details of previous harassment see Case Lists [2017](#), [2020](#), [2022](#), [2023/2024](#).)

Dina Meza reported surveillance and threats during 2024. On June 2024, the journalist was threatened by academic authorities with legal action if she did not withdraw articles about a student dispute with their university faculty from the Pasos de Animal Grande digital newspaper.

Meza, born in 1963, began her work as a human rights defender in 1989 and has worked for various human rights organisations and digital media outlets. In 2014, she was elected President of PEN Honduras. She also runs and writes for the website [pasosdeanimalgrande.com](#), which reports on freedom of expression and human rights in Honduras. She is the author of the Honduras chapter in *Vamos a portarnos mal: protesta social y libertad de expresión en América Latina* (*Let's misbehave: social protest and freedom of expression in Latin America*) (2011) and *Kidnapped: Censorship in Honduras* (2015). She is recipient of the 2007 Amnesty International UK Special Award for Human Rights Journalism Under Threat; the 2014 Oxfam Novib/PEN International Freedom of Expression Award; the 2016 Premio Letras in Periodismo y Derechos Humanos at Festival de Cine y Derechos Humanos de Barcelona; and the 2020 Sir Henry Brooke Award for Human Rights Defenders. She is an Honorary Member of PEN Català.

DEATH THREAT**Ivon Montserrat ARITA GUZMÁN**

Writer and journalist Ivon Montserrat Arita Guzmán has been subject to ongoing harassment since 2017, which continued in 2024. According to information received by PEN International, on 27 February 2024, between 2 am and 3 am, the security cameras outside Arita Guzmán's house were cut, and the windows of her car were broken. Later that day, while she was driving with her mother, the car was intercepted by two unknown men on a motorbike who pointed a shotgun at her head and threatened to kill her. In April 2024, the Mechanism for the Protection of Journalists granted her protection measures due to her journalism and opinion articles; she was forced to leave her home for fear of attacks.

Arita Guzmán's harassment began in 2017 following her investigations into the public health system, after which officials threatened her in person. In 2022, officials began a smear campaign accusing her of stealing medicines, which resulted in harassment and unjustified dismissal. Arita Guzmán sued her aggressors in 2022 and, on 24 April 2023, the authorities ruled in her favour, convicting one person for the death threats she received. This was followed by several complaints lodged by Montserrat for a series of threats and insults by public officials, including a member of parliament.

Ivon Montserrat Arita Guzmán (1976) is a Honduran journalist, writer, visual artist, playwright and human rights defender. She is author of the poetry collection *Los miserables de Lázaro*, haikus, short stories, paintings. She is a columnist for the *El Heraldo* newspaper, Radio House and Antorchas Verdaderas, among others. She has worked as a journalist since 2017 covering topics such as health, medicine, the cultural scene, social issues and corruption. She has founded theatre groups in which artists address health issues in Honduras.

RELEASED**Cesario Alejandro Félix PADILLA FIGUEROA**

On 7 May 2024, the Court of Criminal Appeals of Francisco Morazán ordered the final dismissal of charges against Cesario Alejandro Félix Padilla Figueroa and his fellow students Sergio Ulloa and Moisés Cáceres. They had been found guilty of the crime of 'illegal detention of public property' and faced nearly a decade of rights restrictions and prosecution in retaliation for exercising their freedom of expression (see Case Lists 2017 to 2020 and 2022 – 2023/2024).

Journalist, author, editor, student leader, and board member of PEN Honduras Cesario Alejandro Félix Padilla Figueroa, born on November 1992, refused to pay a fine, imposed in 2020 for 'illegal detention of public property', as he denied having committed the alleged crime. As a result, he faced a sentence of three years in prison, forced labour while in prison, suspension of his rights and payment for alleged damages that the authorities of the National Autonomous University of Honduras (UNAH) claim. PEN International believes that Padilla Figueroa was targeted for exercising his rights to freedom of expression and assembly. According to reports, the charge brought against Padilla Figueroa is alleged 'usurpation' of UNAH property.

PEN International campaigned on behalf of Padilla Figueroa for almost a decade and called for reparations for him and his fellow students after the final ruling.

Cesario Padilla Figueroa is the editor of the book *Carcelaria* and author of *Un pasito adelante, aproximación histórica del Comité Coordinador de Organizaciones Populares de Honduras (CCOP) (A little step forward, historical approach of the Coordinating Committee of Popular Organisations of Honduras [CCOP])*.

MEXICO

DEATH THREAT

Balam Rodrigo PÉREZ HERNÁNDEZ

In 2024, poet and migrants rights' defender Balam Rodrigo Pérez Hernández continued to be subject to death threats, which began in 2018, from criminal groups in the state of Chiapas, where he lives. Pérez Hernández and his family have had to temporarily leave their home on several occasions in order to protect their lives.

In 2024, Pérez Hernández continued to report the presence of criminal groups at cultural and literary events, mainly in Mexico and the United States, that address migration issues and the violence perpetrated by these groups, which have threatened to take action against him if he continues to write or speak about the issue. He also received anonymous comments from government-linked public officials working on cultural programmes, who wrote on the copy of the books in progress that attempted to devalue and questioned his literary work, still unpublished, in which he provides evidence of massacres of migrants.

Balam Rodrigo Pérez Hernández, born in Villa de Comaltitlán, Soconusco, Chiapas, in 1974, is one of the most prominent and recognised poets in contemporary Mexican literature. He is the author of more than 49 volumes of poetry and a book of essays. Some of his recent literary works include: *Marabunta* (Editorial Arte y Literatura, Cuba, 2022), *Central American Book of the Dead* (FlowerSong Press, McAllen Texas, USA, 2023), *Ceibario* (Lengua de Barro, 2023), *Iceberg negro* (*Black Iceberg*, La Primera Vértebra, Argentina, 2024). He has been awarded numerous prizes, including Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz International Literary Competition 2012, Jaime Sabines International Poetry Prize 2014, José Emilio Pacheco National Poetry Prize 2016, Amado Nervo National Poetry Prize 2017, Tijuana National Poetry Prize 2017

and Aguascalientes Fine Arts Poetry Prize 2018. His poems, published in anthologies, magazines and newspapers in Mexico and 15 other countries, have been translated into English, French, Italian, Macedonian, Polish, Portuguese and Zapotec.

Yohali RESÉNDIZ

On 28 November 2024, the journalist and writer Yohali Reséndiz received a death threat, including a video showing a dead body. Hours later, in a phone call from an unknown number, an individual threatened to rape and kill her unless she stopped her investigations. According to ARTICLE 19, Reséndiz has received similar threats in the past.

According to Reséndiz' social media posts, these attacks occurred after she published reports exposing corruption in the government of Morelos state, as well as other government departments such as the State Coordination of Mobility and Transport.

Yohali Reséndiz is a reporter and author of the books *Violar desde el poder* (*Rape from the seat of power*, Aguilar 2022), *Los hijos de la cárcel* (*The children of prison*, Aguilar, 2018 and *19S: El día que cimbró México* (*9/19/2017: The day that shook Mexico*, Aguilar, 2014). She also co-authored *¿Por qué los mataron? El acceso a la información. Casos de periodistas que fueron víctimas en el ejercicio de su profesión.* (*Why were they killed? Access to information. Cases of journalists who were victims in the exercise of their profession*, INAI, 2025) and has received numerous awards for her investigative journalism.

Mikeas SÁNCHEZ GÓMEZ

Writer, poet and land defender Mikeas Sánchez Gómez was threatened with death on 7 November 2024. Sánchez told PEN International that she filed a complaint, but the Public Prosecutor's Office asked her to close the case; local human rights organisations suggested that she should not close the case for her own protection.

She continued to pursue her complaint but, due to new threats, she left her community.

Sánchez Gómez's poetry has been a tool in stopping national and international projects in her community in Chiapas, México that would have allowed land dispossession. She also worked with the priest [Marcelo Pérez](#), killed on 20 October 2024 for his support of Indigenous Peoples and the defence of their lands.

Mikeas Sánchez Gómez, born in 1980 in Tzujsnäpajk, also known as Colonia Guadalupe Victoria in Chiapas, is one of the most important poets of the Indigenous Zoque People in Chiapas, working in Zoque, her mother tongue. Her volumes of poetry – including *Mokaya / Mojk'jäyä* and *Mumure' tä' yäjktambä / Todos somos cimarrones (We are all Maroons)* – are both bilingual Spanish-Zoque. Sánchez's work has been translated into Bangla, Catalan, English, German, Italian, Maya, Mixe, and Portuguese. In Chiapas, Mexico, she was awarded first place in the 'Y el Bolóm dice ...'. Her collection *How to Be a Good Savage and Other Poems (Milkweed, 2024) (Cómo ser un buen salvaje y otros poemas)* pairs English translations with her original bilingual texts. Mikeas has received several international awards, including the [Gold Medal for Best Translation](#) at the 2024 International Latino Book Awards (Medalla de oro a la mejor traducción en el 2024 International Latino Book Awards).

ATTACKED

Lydia CACHO RIBEIRO

Impunity for the December 2005 arrest and torture of Lydia Cacho Ribeiro continued in 2024. Arrested for alleged defamation in connection with her 2005 book *Los Demonios del Edén: el poder detrás de la pornografía (The Demons of Eden: the power behind pornography)* in which she implicated a number of influential businessmen and politicians in child abuse networks operating across

Quintana Roo and Puebla states, she was tortured in detention. She was cleared of all charges in 2007 but due to ongoing harassment, she went into exile in 2019.

The former Director of the Judicial Police of the State of Puebla, Hugo Adolfo Karam Beltrán, arrested in July 2023 for the crime of torture against the journalist, was [released from](#) prison with restrictions. The former official is linked to an organised power structure within the local government, whose members planned and executed the attack against Cacho Ribeiro in retaliation for the publication of her book. The arrest of Karam was an important step in the fight against impunity for the human rights violations Cacho Ribeiro suffered, and his conditional release is a worrying step. PEN International has consistently campaigned on her behalf and considers that much more needs to be done to provide Cacho Ribeiro with redress, including payment of compensation, as demanded by the [United Nations Human Rights Committee](#).

Lydia Cacho Ribeiro, born on 12 April 1963, has worked as a journalist for over 30 years, reporting on people trafficking, organised crime, drug trafficking, gender violence and corruption, among other topics. She has also published multiple books on similar issues. She has won numerous awards, including the 2009 One Humanity Award from Canadian PEN, the 2008 Tucholsky prize from Swedish PEN and the 2007 Oxfam/Novib PEN Award for Free Expression. Her books include: *Los Demonios del Edén (The Demons of Eden, Grijalbo, 2004)*, *Memorias de una Infamia (Memoirs of a Scandal, DEBOLSILLO, 2007)*, *Esclavas de poder: un viaje al corazón de la trata sexual de mujeres y niñas en el mundo (Slavery Inc. the Untold Story of International Sex Trafficking, Grijalbo, 2010)*, *Sexo y Amor en tiempos de crisis (Sex and Love in Times of Crisis, Grijalbo, 2014)*, among others. She is an Honorary Member of Scottish PEN and English PEN.

HARASSED

Denise DRESSER GUERRA

In 2024, political scientist, journalist and author Denise Dresser Guerra challenged ongoing harassment and threats posted on Dresser's personal social media that had begun in April 2023 in connection with her reporting of alleged conflicts of interest and influence peddling by then President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's children (see Case List 2023/2024).

In August 2024, Dresser was granted a legal protection order from the 19th Collegiate Court on Administrative Matters in response to a lawsuit filed against the then president. Dresser argued that during morning press conferences, the president made systematic comments that qualified, degraded and reviled her journalistic work, without giving her the opportunity to reply. The court ruled that such actions constituted an abuse of power and established that public officials must verify information before issuing it, guaranteeing that it is truthful and unbiased, as established in the Constitution.

Denise Dresser, born on 22 January 1963 in Mexico City, is a Mexican political analyst, columnist and academic. Dresser is the author of numerous books including *¿Qué sigue? 20 lecciones para para ser ciudadano en un país en riesgo* (*What's next? 20 lessons for citizenship in a country at risk*); *El país de uno* (*Own country*); *Neopopulist Solutions to Neoliberal Problems: Mexico's National Solidarity Program*. She has published articles in the *Journal of Democracy*, *Current History*, *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* and *Foreign Policy*. She writes a political column for the Mexican newspaper *Reforma* and the news weekly *Proceso* and was the host of the political talk shows *Entreversiones* and *El País de Uno* on Mexican television. She was a contributing writer at the *Los Angeles Times*, among other media.

Beatriz Maricela GUTIERREZ DE VELASCO VERDUZCO

Mexican cartoonist, publisher and author Beatriz Maricela Gutiérrez de Velasco Verduzco (Mexico City, 1976), also known as Beatrix, received a series of intimidating messages on 29 January 2024 from public official Sandra Cuevas, after publishing a cartoon alluding to the Mexico City official. The cartoonist confirmed to PEN that, in addition to the messages, she regularly faces digital harassment through bots, threatening and harassing messages.

Beatriz Gutiérrez is co-author of the book *Amor es...* (Trucha Salmonada Ediciones, 2024). She is an editorial designer, comic book author, teacher and workshop leader, and editor specialising in graphic narrative. She has a Master's degree in Editorial Design and Production (UAM_Xochimilco).

Anabel HERNÁNDEZ GARCÍA

On 17 May 2024, Mexican journalist and author Anabel Hernández García and Penguin Random House made public the attempts at copyright made against the book *La historia secreta: AMLO y el Cartel de Sinaloa* (Grijalbo, 2024) (*The Secret History: AMLO and the Sinaloa Cartel*). At a press conference, the author and the publisher denounced the censorship of a radio commercial about the book. The radio advert was broadcast once, after which the publisher was told that it could only be broadcast if changes were made, including removing the author's name and the book's subtitle.

The publisher also placed advertisements on billboards, but these were not allowed either. Anabel Hernández commented that she had never previously suffered censorship of this magnitude.

Earlier, in April 2024, then President Andrés Manuel López Obrador called the book 'a vulgar and slanderous campaign' and in May he accused the journalist of slander.

Anabel Hernández is a prominent journalist with a career spanning 28 years. She is the author of six books, including *Los señores del narco* (*The lords of the narcos*, Grijalbo, 2010), *La verdadera noche de Iguala* (*The real night of Iguala*, Grijalbo, 2016) and *El traidor* (*The Traitor*, Grijalbo, 2019). In 2001 she received the National Journalism Award. In 2003 she was recognised by UNICEF, the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, the EFE Agency and the Santillana Foundation for her research into Mexican girls trafficked and sexually exploited in agricultural fields in San Diego, California.

JUDICIAL HARASSMENT

Maria Amparo CASAR

The Mexican sociologist, columnist, activist and writer faced a smear campaign from then President Andrés Manuel López Obrador in 2024. The attacks began with the publication of her book, *Los puntos sobre las íes: El legado de un gobierno que mintió, robó y traicionó* (*Dots on the I's. The legacy of a government that lied, stole and betrayed*) (Debate, 2024), launched on 30 April 2024 in Mexico City, in which she documents and criticises the lack of transparency in López Obrador's government.

From 3 May 2024, in at least seven press conferences, Obrador attempted to discredit her work. On 13 May 2024, the Attorney General's Office announced that an investigation was opened against alleged fraud by the author in relation to the collection of the pension of her late husband, a former official of the Mexican state oil company PEMEX. The accusations were made public by PEMEX's current director at a press conference held by the then president.

The Mexican government also shared hundreds of pages of a file on an official website that included her husband's death certificate, as well as full documents with personal information about the author and her family, such as academic records of her children, their cheques and their

addresses, violating her security. Amparo Casar denied any wrongdoing, and successfully challenged PEMEX's suspension of pension payments; the company sought to overturn the ruling. PEN International believes the investigation was brought against her in reprisal for her research.

María Amparo Casar has a PhD in Political Science from the University of Cambridge. She specialises in Mexican politics and comparative politics. She is the author of books including *Dinero bajo la mesa* (Grijalbo, 2019) (*Money under the table*), *Anatomía de la Corrupción* (Mexicanos contra la corrupción, 2023) (*Anatomy of Corruption*) and *El Sistema Político Mexicano* (Oxford University Press, 2010) (*The Mexican Political System*), among others.

NICARAGUA

HARASSED

Julián Edelberto NAVARRETE SILVA

Investigative journalist Julián Edelberto Navarrete Silva was subjected to harassment in 2024 that led to his leaving the country to avoid arrest. He told PEN International that the harassment began on 26 April 2024, when two police officers arrived at his house to warn him that he was being investigated by the authorities without providing information about the reason for the investigation. After his diagnosis with colon cancer on 30 April 2024, the police officers requested pictures and documents to prove that he was in hospital.

PEN International has learned that on 5 July 2024, officers came to Navarrete Silva's house. When he started chemotherapy on 9 July, police again requested documentation of his whereabouts. The following day, a police patrol with two motorbikes and several officers arrived at his house, while he was hospitalised. The evening of Wednesday 10 July, Navarrete Silva decided to leave

the hospital and the country with his family to avoid his detention. On 13 July 2024, at 7am, two patrol cars, two motorbikes and approximately 20 police officers arrived at his residence in Managua to detain him.

Julián Navarrete Silva is a Nicaraguan investigative journalist. He writes for *Divergentes* and is a member of the *Connectas* platform. He worked as a journalist for *Confidencial* and *La Prensa*. He has published literary and journalistic chronicles in *Reportagen* magazine, Switzerland; *Courier International*, France; and collaborated with *The Wall Street Journal*, United States; and the newspapers *El País* and *La Razón*, Spain. Navarrete was awarded with the *Ortega y Gasset* and *Inter-American Press Association (IAPA)* awards in 2022; this work was also *nominated for the Gabriel García Márquez Award* for excellence in research and literature. His work has been included in books such as *Libertad tras las rejas (2023)* (Freedom behind bars); investigations *Fiscalizando al poder local (2023)* (*Overseeing local power*) and in an Oxfam Nicaragua anthology, *Otro Periodismo es Posible (2020)* (*Another journalism is possible*).

BANISHED

Freddy Antonio QUEZADA

Writer and academic *Freddy Antonio Quezada* was among 135 political prisoners *released* by the Nicaraguan authorities on 5 September 2024 and deported to Guatemala. He had been held since his arrest on 29 November 2023, hours after writing *social media posts* critical of the Nicaraguan government (see Case List *2023/2024*). On 24 January 2024, he was reportedly *convicted behind closed doors* of ‘disturbing the public order and inciting hatred and violence,’ but said after his release that he was never told his sentence. PEN International welcomed his release but *called* for an end to repression of writers and artists in Nicaragua.

On 9 November 2024, the Nicaraguan Court of Justice *declared* that the 135 exiled prisoners would be stripped of their citizenship and have all their assets confiscated after being convicted of ‘criminal acts threatening the sovereignty, independence and self-determination of the Nicaraguan people.’

Freddy Quezada is a sociologist, academic and guide for several generations of university students. He is the author of books such as *El Pensamiento Contemporáneo* and *Decolonialidad y Emancipación Como Jazz Epistémico*.

PERU

JUDICIAL HARASSMENT

Paola Margot UGAZ CRUZ

Investigative journalist, editor and writer Paola Ugaz continued to face judicial harassment in 2024, with an ongoing investigation for alleged ‘illicit enrichment’ begun in 2023. On 4 September 2024, Ugaz testified at trial hearing. Afterwards the interrogation, the judicial authorities *ordered* her telephone company to hand over the telephone records and geolocation data of the journalist for the period 2013 to 2020, thereby lifting the confidentiality of the journalist’s communications and violating her security and that of her sources of information. This set a dangerous *precedent* for journalists in Peru, with Ugaz being the first reporter in her country whose communications have been monitored and ‘seized’.

Since 2018, Ugaz has faced a *campaign* of harassment, threats and at least five defamation lawsuits, including allegations of crimes, due to her investigations into corruption as well as into physical, psychological and sexual abuse within the Peruvian religious organisation Sodalicio de Vida Cristiana, which she

has conducted with Pedro Salinas since 2010. Ugaz began to receive complaints and lawsuits following the announcement she was publishing a new book about the group's financial management. PEN International has campaigned for an end to her harassment over several years (see Case Lists [2020 – 2023/2024](#)).

Investigative journalist, editor and writer Paola Ugaz, born in 1974, is the co-author, along with Pedro Salinas, of the book *Mitad monjes, mitad soldados* (*Half Monks, Half Soldiers*) which uncovered a huge scandal within Sodalicio de Vida Cristiana. A correspondent for the Spanish newspaper ABC, she was one of the recipients of the International Women in Media Awards in 2021. She was [awarded](#) the Latin American Studies Association Media award in 2024.

Update: The Pope [dissolved](#) Sodalicio de Vida in January 2025, after an investigation uncovered sexual abuses by its founder, financial mismanagement by its leaders and spiritual abuses by its top members. The Pope based his decision on the research of journalists Paola Ugaz and Pedro Salinas.

Gustavo Andrés GORRITI ELLENBOGEN

On 27 March 2024, Lima prosecutor Alcides Chinchay opened an investigation [against prominent journalist and writer](#) Gustavo Gorriti, founder and editor-in-chief of IDL-Reporteros, for alleged bribery and requested that he reveal his journalistic sources, according to a statement from the [Peruvian Public Prosecutor's Office](#). According to the indictment, the prosecution was seeking to determine whether Gorriti, in his reporting on corruption for IDL-Reporteros, promoted the work of two public prosecutors in exchange for information about their investigations into political corruption; the indictment and the ongoing investigation against Gorriti states that he does not have the right to anonymity of his sources and that he should provide the prosecution with identifying data such as the telephone numbers he used

between 2016 and 2021. Gorriti is accused of having influenced the investigation against former presidential candidate Keiko Fujimori, whose trial for money laundering was scheduled to begin on 1 July 2024.

Over the past four decades, Gustavo Gorriti's journalistic [writing](#) has exposed cases of corruption at various levels of the Peruvian political and judicial system. Gustavo Gorriti (San Isidro, 4 de febrero de 1948) is author of several books such as *Sendero* (*Path*), *La Calavera en negro* (*The Skull in Black*), and *La Batalla* (*The Battle*).

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

BOOKS BANNED

Book bans in the United States of America have been steadily increasing since 2021, with many censored in 2024. The US chapter of PEN International, PEN America, has documented this major setback for democracy, freedom of expression, and, above all, the freedom to read, through its documentation, research and advocacy project '[Banned in the USA: Beyond the Shelves](#)', seeking to push back against the intolerance, exclusion, and censorship that undergird such bans. PEN America has been recording school book bans in the USA for the past three school years.

During the 2023–2024 school year, at least 10,046 instances of book bans in 29 states and 220 public school districts were recorded, including 19 titles that were banned in 50 or more school districts nationwide. The most commonly banned title was *Nineteen Minutes* by Jodi Picoult. As an illustration, the most heavily censored authors are listed below.

Nineteen Minutes by Jodi PICOULT

Looking for Alaska by John GREEN

The Perks of Being a Wallflower by Stephen CHBOSKY

Sold by Patricia MCCORMICK

Thirteen Reasons Why by Jay ASHER

Crank by Ellen HOPKINS

Identical by Ellen HOPKINS

The Kite Runner by Khaled HOSSEINI

The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret ATWOOD

Water for Elephants by Sara GRUEN

Tricks by Ellen HOPKINS

A Court of Thorns and Roses
by Sarah J. MAAS

Empire of Storms by Sarah J. MAAS

A Court of Mist and Fury by Sarah J. MAAS

A Court of Wings and Ruin
by Sarah J. MAAS

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian by Sherman ALEXIE

The Bluest Eye by Toni MORRISON

The Color Purple by Alice WALKER

A Court of Frost and Starlight
by Sarah J. MAAS

Sold by Patricia MCCORMICK

VENEZUELA

THREATENED

Alirio José FERNÁNDEZ RODRÍGUEZ

On 15 May 2024, writer, editor and professor Alirio José Fernández Rodríguez received a threatening phone call from an unknown number, which he believes was state sanctioned. As a result, Fernández Rodríguez told PEN International that he decided to destroy all the papers related to the novel he had been writing, including chapters and handwritten notes, fearing for his and his family's life. In the novel, he included the real names and stories of high-ranking public, political, military and intelligence officials, including from the state oil and gas company Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA). PEN International has worked with Fernández Rodríguez to save the novel.

Fernández Rodríguez believes that the reason for the threats against him is that he worked for PDVSA Gas and Pequiven, the state petrochemical company, between 2015 and 2018 without being part of the official party. In June 2018, Alirio resigned from his position as a manager at Pequiven because, after a change in senior management, he realised that his mobile phone was being tapped. He had also discovered microphones in his office. Alirio Fernández Rodríguez subsequently left Venezuela in October 2024.

Member of PEN Venezuela, Alirio Fernández Rodríguez is a writer, editor, professor, and cultural journalist for digital and international media such as *Letras libres*, *Papel literario*, Carátula magazine and Casapaís magazine, and *Prodavinci*. He has a degree in education, language and literature. He is the founder of the pioneer project of *Digital Humanities in Venezuela* www.narrativasinteractivas.com. In 2022, he created a well-regarded mapping of Latin American writers.

PEN ACTIONS IN THE AMERICAS

In addition to its advocacy for the writers referred to in this list, PEN International also took action on behalf of journalists and others at risk in the Americas, some in collaboration with other organisations, details of which can be found in the links provided below. PEN International also has a dedicated X account, [@PEN_LAC](#), where it regularly posts information about writers at risk in the Americas and Caribbean region.

COLOMBIA

Mardonio MEJÍA MENDOZA: *Journalist killed*

Action:

November 2024: Campaign: [Day of the Dead 2024](#). Cause of Death: [Impunity](#)

Jaime Alonso VÁSQUEZ GIRALDO: *Journalist killed*

Action:

November 2024: Campaign: [Day of the Dead 2024](#). Cause of Death: [Impunity](#)

CUBA

ÁNGEL CUZA: *Journalist sentenced*

Action:

January 2024: Statement: [PEN International, together with other organisations, rejects the sentence against the reporter Ángel Cuza in retaliation for his work as an independent journalist.](#)

José Luis TAN ESTRADA: *Journalist harassed*

Action:

May 2024: Statement: [Cuba: Authorities Must Stop Harassment and Arbitrary Detention of Writers and Artists](#)

Lázaro Yuri VALLE ROCA: *Journalist released*

Action:

June 2024: Statement: [Journalist Lázaro Yuri Valle Roca released and forcibly exiled](#)

GUATEMALA

César Augusto LEIVA PIMENTEL, Gleymer Renan VILLEDA: *Journalists killed*

Action:

November 2024: Campaign: [Day of the Dead 2024](#). Cause of Death: [Impunity](#)

Jose Rubén ZAMORA MARROQUIN: *Journalist imprisoned*

Action:

October 2024: [Trial Observation](#)

May 2024: [Trial Observation](#)

February 2024: Statement: [Guatemala: José Rubén Zamora Marroquín must be immediately and unconditionally released](#)

HONDURAS

Francisco RAMÍREZ AMADOR: *Journalist killed*

Action:

November 2024: Action: [Day of the Dead 2024](#). Cause of Death: [Impunity](#)

Luis Alonso TERUEL: *Journalist killed*

Action:

November 2024: Action: [Day of the Dead 2024](#). Cause of Death: [Impunity](#)

MEXICO

Mauricio CRUZ SOLÍS: *Journalist killed*

Action:

November 2024: Campaign: [Day of the Dead 2024](#). Cause of Death: [Impunity](#)

Víctor Alfonso CULEBRO MORALES:*Journalist killed***Action:****November 2024:** Campaign: Day of the Dead 2024. Cause of Death: Impunity**Roberto Carlos FIGUEROA:** *Journalist killed***Action:****November 2024:** Campaign: Day of the Dead 2024. Cause of Death: Impunity**Víctor Manuel JIMÉNEZ CAMPOS:***Journalist killed***Action:****November 2024:** Campaign: Day of the Dead 2024. Cause of Death: Impunity**Alejandro Alfredo MARTÍNEZ NOGUEZ:***Journalist killed***Action:****November 2024:** Action: Day of the Dead 2024. Cause of Death: Impunity**NICARAGUA****Víctor TICAY:** *Journalist released and banished***Action:****September 2024:** Statement: Freddy Quezada released and forced into exile along with 134 political prisoners, including journalists and artists**Leonel Orlando CHÁVEZ ESQUIVEL:***Journalist harassed***Action:****May 2024:** Joint statement: Nicaragua: Journalist Leonel Orlando Chavez Esquivel raided and Alfonso Morales arrested**VENEZUELA****Gabriel RODRÍGUEZ, Jesús ROMERO:***Journalists harassed***Action:****August 2024:** Statement: End attacks and violence against journalists, media and protesters

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

ASIA/PACIFIC

Ross Holder, Head of Asia/Pacific Region

In countries across the region, the right to freedom of expression is increasingly under pressure. Governments continue to misuse laws and judicial systems as a tool to silence peaceful expression by subjecting writers, cultural figures, journalists and other dissenting voices to censorship, harassment, arbitrary arrest and long-term imprisonment.

PERVASIVE USE OF LONG-TERM IMPRISONMENT

In **China**, throughout the year government authorities continued in their unrelenting subjection of writers, poets, academics and bloggers to long-term prison sentences (see China section below). In February, writer **Yang Hengjun** was handed down a suspended death sentence over two and a half years after a closed-door trial. Despite China's long-established reputation as the world's leading jailer of writers and journalists, the severity of the sentence marked a shocking escalation in the Chinese government's worsening crackdown on dissenting voices, drawing condemnation from PEN Centres around the world. In November, the national security trial in **Hong Kong** against writer and media publisher **Jimmy Lai** resumed, more than four years since his initial arrest in August 2020. If convicted under the draconian National Security Law, Lai faces a potential life sentence for his journalism and activism. Government authorities continue to engage in the systematic cultural repression of Uyghurs, Tibetans and other ethnic minority communities, illustrated by the ongoing life imprisonment of Uyghur academics **Rahile Dawut** and **Ilham Tohti**, and the long prison sentence being served by Tibetan writer, **Go Sherab Gyatso**.

In **Myanmar**, dozens of journalists, writers and others are currently imprisoned on trumped-up charges relating to their peaceful criticism of the military junta and its coup that toppled the country's elected government in February 2021. Among those who remain imprisoned on long sentences is writer and activist, **Wai Moe Naing**, who is now serving a combined sentence of 74 years in prison (see Myanmar section below).

Meanwhile in **Thailand**, poet and activist **Arnon Nampha** is serving a combined sentence of 18 years and 10 months in

prison, following his conviction in 2023 and 2024 of six counts of violating Thailand's notorious royal defamation law, which can result in a maximum sentence of 15 years in prison per charge. With eight further royal defamation charges pending, Arnon faces a potential maximum sentence of almost 140 years in prison if convicted on all counts (see Thailand section below).

Overlong prison sentences continue to be routinely imposed on government critics in **Vietnam**, including blogger and journalist **Nguyen Vu Binh**, sentenced to seven years in September after he was convicted of spreading anti-state propaganda. The same charge was brought against writer and activist **Pham Doan Trang**, currently serving a nine-year prison sentence following her conviction in 2021 (see Vietnam section below).

SHRINKING SPACE FOR ONLINE EXPRESSION

The internet plays a vital role as a space for expression, particularly in countries where print media is subject to various forms of censorship. This has led to the propagation of vaguely-defined legislation, ostensibly designed to counter harms caused by mis/disinformation and hate speech, but which all too often is used as a means to censor criticism of the government. In **China**, the existing internet censorship regime, commonly referred to as the 'Great Firewall', was supplemented by new regulations. These form part of a 'new literary inquisition', to control online discourse by impeding internet users' ability to circumvent the country's censorship apparatus through the creative use of language and wordplay, part of China's rich cultural and linguistic heritage.

New regulations were also imposed in **Vietnam** in December under Decree 14Z, providing authorities with expanded powers

to block social media accounts and to compel foreign organisations, including websites and online magazines, to provide detailed user data. As noted in a [joint report](#) submitted for Vietnam's UPR by PEN International, Vietnamese Writers Abroad PEN and PEN America, these measures risk imposing a considerable, chilling effect on online expression in the country by enhancing authorities' ability to identify individuals engaging in online expression.

In **Malaysia**, despite some positive developments, including plans to [formally implement](#) the right to access information legislation, parliament in December passed [amendments](#) to the 1998 Communications and Multimedia Act: providing authorities with analogous powers to those found in **Vietnam**, which undermine users' right to privacy and risk imposing a similar chilling effect on online expression. These expanded powers include the ability to carry out warrantless searches and seizures of data from service providers and to compel social media platforms to disclose user data without prior court approval.

In **India**, the government used the Information Technology Act to [block](#) fact-checking websites [Hindutva Watch](#) and [India Hate Lab](#), which play an important role in tracking online hate speech, though the founder [challenged](#) the blocking orders in court; proceedings were ongoing at year end. The indiscriminate blocking of websites, part of a worrying trend in the arbitrary blocking of information that may be critical of the government or its policies, amounts to a form of pre-emptive censorship.

Internet shutdowns are another form of censorship that continues to be used by governments to impede the transfer of information for entire populations indiscriminately. This deliberate and indiscriminate act of blanket censorship is frequently implemented during times of conflict or heightened tension, as a means to conceal the perpetration of state violence and other gross human

rights violations. In **Myanmar**, [internet shutdowns](#), and [other restrictions](#) designed to limit individuals' access to the internet, continue to be deployed in areas of active conflict as a means to prevent individuals from sharing information on atrocities committed by the military junta.

In **Bangladesh**, the former government imposed a nationwide [internet shutdown on 18 July](#) that lasted for several days as the country was gripped by the brutal use of state violence against student-led demonstrators protesting against socio-economic grievances, resulting in as many as [1,400 killed](#) in the space of 46 days, including several journalists.

Internet shutdowns were also imposed for [several weeks](#) in **Pakistan's** Balochistan region while the authorities carried out mass arrests of demonstrators who sought to draw attention to human rights violations carried out against the region's marginalized ethnic Baloch minority.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AT A TIME OF CONFLICT AND CRISIS

The intersection of humanitarian and human rights crises can have a devastating impact on the right to freedom of expression. In countries gripped by a combination of authoritarian rule and crisis, writers, journalists and others can find themselves unable to support themselves due to the risk of persecution for their writing, forcing them into a perpetual cycle of fear and destitution. PEN International continues to provide often life-saving support to those at greatest risk.

In **Afghanistan**, the country's worsening humanitarian crisis has been compounded by the Taliban's unrelenting and increasing efforts to silence women and

girls through overwhelming levels of restrictions impacting every aspect of their lives, denying agency and dignity to a generation of women and girls. Writers, poets and journalists still in Afghanistan continue to face significant threats of arbitrary detention, torture and enforced disappearance for their writing or online expression, while many of those who have fled to bordering countries now face a life of abject precarity, including increased risk of deportation.

For those in **Myanmar**, almost four years of the military junta's rule by terror has left the country ravaged by violence and destruction, exacerbated by widespread restrictions on all forms of expression, including killings of journalists. The resulting situation has forced dozens of writers and journalists to flee across the border to Thailand to escape persecution and destitution, many of whom now struggle to find security or shelter in exile and are at active risk of deportation back to Myanmar.

Even when peace processes are underway, freedom of expression often remains at risk. In the **Philippines**, the use of 'red-tagging' – accusing individuals of being communist sympathisers – continues to be used by the current government and its proxies, facilitated by social media platforms such as Facebook, as a means to silence and intimidate journalists, writers and others expressing critical views towards the government or its military, including **Amanda Echanis** (see the Philippines section below). Red-tagging first surged under former President Rodrigo Duterte after the collapse of peace talks with the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). Those who are 'red-tagged' are at heightened risk of persecution, including arrest and murder. Following a visit in February, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression recommended that the government denounce the practice. She also highlighted the ongoing impunity for the killing of over 100 journalists in the last

30 years, as well as concerns regarding ongoing killings, recommending measures to protect journalists and human rights defenders. In May, the Supreme Court declared that 'red-tagging' amounts to a threat to people's life, liberty and security.

ARBITRARY DETENTION AND HARASSMENT

In all too many countries across the region, vexatious legal cases continue to be deployed as a means to silence critical voices. In the **Philippines**, journalist, writer and Nobel laureate **Maria Ressa** continues to be the target of a long-running campaign of lawfare despite having secured a series of significant legal victories, including the dismissal of five bogus tax evasion charges, and the overturning of a shutdown order in July 2024 that was issued against the news organisation she co-founded, Rappler (see Philippines section below).

In **Bangladesh**, following the August collapse of the Awami League-led government in the wake of the student-led protests and the emergence of an interim government led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, journalists and others alleged to be sympathetic towards the former government have been questioned or detained in apparent retaliation for their expression, with over 160 journalists stripped of their press accreditation. In **Cambodia**, investigative journalist **Mech Dara** was detained in October and accused of attempting to cause 'social disorder or confusion' over a since-deleted social media post. Released on bail, he is likely to face trial.

In **India**, writers **Arundhati Roy** and **Sheikh Showkat Hussain** faced renewed threat of legal proceedings in 2024 over speeches that occurred over 13 years previously. In November, journalist **Mohammad Zubair** was targeted with

a criminal complaint in connection to his work to counter misinformation on social media. The United Nations Human Rights Committee included PEN International's concerns over the country's deteriorating freedom of expression environment in its Concluding Observations in India's periodic state review under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

In **China**, writers, bloggers and others continue to be subjected to arbitrary arrest and detention for 'picking quarrels and provoking trouble', which is routinely used to harass dissidents and others who criticise the government. In September 2024, citizen journalist **Zhang Zhan** was re-detained on the above offence just four months after she was released having served a four-year sentence for the same offence in retaliation for her reporting on the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in Wuhan.

Similar patterns of harassment take place in **Vietnam**, including the abduction and arbitrary detention of blogger and activist **Danh Thi Hue**, who was interrogated over her social media content and ordered to cease posting online content critical of the government.

GOOD NEWS

Among the positive developments in the region is the **Malaysian** authorities' decision in April to close the case against writer **Uthaya Sankar SB**, almost two years after an investigation was first opened over a comment he posted on social media. In May, writer and editor **Prabir Purkayastha** was released on bail after **India's** Supreme Court declared his arrest to be 'invalid'. In **Bangladesh**, the long-running probe against photojournalist **Shahidul Alam** was suspended in November, with the interim government also announcing its intention to repeal the repressive Cyber Security Act. In December, PEN member **Zholia Parsi** was awarded the Martin Ennals Prize in recognition of her selfless advocacy for the rights of women and girls in **Afghanistan**.

2025 CASE LIST ASIA /PACIFIC

EMBLEMATIC CASES



CHINA

Ilham Tohti

Writer and academic currently serving a life sentence for his peaceful advocacy in support of Uyghur rights

A writer, academic and public intellectual, Ilham Tohti is currently serving a life sentence following a two-day unfair trial in September 2014. Thought to be held in solitary confinement, family members have not been allowed to visit him since 2017. Tohti's imprisonment is emblematic of the Chinese government's long-standing efforts to dislocate Uyghurs from their cultural identity and heritage through overwhelming levels of repression, resulting in the mass detention of writers, poets, academics and intellectuals.

Ilham Tohti. Photo credit: FREDERIC J. BROWN/AFP via Getty Images



THAILAND

Arnon Nampha

Poet and lawyer imprisoned for royal defamation after peacefully calling for the law's repeal

A poet and human rights lawyer, Arnon Nampha is serving a cumulative sentence of almost 19 years in prison after multiple convictions of violating Article 112 of the Thai Criminal Code that criminalises royal defamation (*lèse-majesté*) in connection with his peaceful expression, including his calls for the repeal of the very law he was convicted of violating. Nampha's imprisonment is emblematic of the Thai authorities' use of defamation laws to silence dissent throughout the country.

Arnon Nampha. Photo credit: [Prachatai](#). Permission type: CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

BANGLADESH

JUDICIAL HARASSMENT

Shahidul ALAM

Photojournalist and social activist Shahidul Alam continued to face an ongoing legal case centred on allegations of ‘giving false information’, ‘hurting the image of the nation’, and ‘causing deterioration of law and order’ by ‘making provocative comments’ from his social media account under Section 57 of Bangladesh’s repealed Information Communications Technology Act (ICT) 2006 (see Case Lists [2018-2023/4](#)). On 4 November 2024, the High Court of Bangladesh stayed (suspended) the investigation into the case against him and restrictions on his personal freedoms were lifted, although the case remains open. In response to the development, Alam stated that he ‘was wrongly charged and I want the case to be dismissed on legal grounds, not due to political interference’.

Alam was picked up by men in plain clothes on 5 August 2018, who raided his home just hours after he had given an interview to Aljazeera where he recounted his experience documenting street protests on road safety. On 6 August 2018, Alam was brought before a court in Dhaka where he first learned of the accusations against him. Section 57 of the ICT Act was subsequently repealed in October 2018 by the Digital Security Act (2018), raising questions over the legality of continuing the case against him. Alam was granted bail in November 2018 after five rejected applications and over 100 days in detention.

Over the following years, Alam has repeatedly challenged the legality of the continued investigations against him through the courts. A March 2019 High Court temporary suspension order was lifted in December 2021, following a challenge by the government.

Shahidul Alam, born in 1955, is the founder and managing director of the Drik

Picture Library and the founder of the Pathshala South Asian Media Academy, a photography school in Dhaka that has trained hundreds of photographers. Alam’s books include *Nature’s Fury* (2007), *Portraits of Commitment* (2009), *My Journey as Witness* (2011) and *The Tide Will Turn* (2019) In 2014, he was awarded the Shilpakala Padak by the President of Bangladesh for his significant contribution to Bangladeshi culture in the field of photography. In 2018, he received the prestigious, US-based Lucie Award in acknowledgement of his exceptional contribution to photography and society as well as the London-based Frontline Club’s Tribute Award and was named, among others, as *TIME Magazine’s* Person of the Year. In 2020, the Committee to Protect Journalists awarded Alam its International Press Freedom Award.

CHINA

IMPRISONED

Professor Rahile DAWUT

Rahile Dawut, a renowned anthropologist and leading expert on the study of Uyghur folklore, is reportedly serving a life sentence after conviction of endangering state security. In late 2017, Rahile Dawut disappeared shortly after she had made plans to travel from Xinjiang to Beijing for an academic conference. Rahile Dawut was then held in secret by Chinese authorities without any confirmation of her detention for over five years, despite international media attention and a campaign led by her daughter calling for her release. In September 2023, reports emerged suggesting that Rahile Dawut had been sentenced to life imprisonment after conviction of ‘endangering state security’. The report also confirmed that her appeal against the conviction had been rejected by the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region High People’s Court (see Case Lists [2018 – 2023/3034](#)).

Rahile Dawut, born on 20 May 1966, is an associate professor at Xinjiang University and founder of the university's research centre on minority folklore. A recipient of English PEN's Writer of Courage award in 2023, Rahile Dawut is recognised around the world for her peerless contributions to the study and cataloguing of Uyghur cultural heritage, including through her book *Uyghur Shrines (Uyghur Mazarliri)* published in Uyghur in 2001. Her work was also recognised and supported by the PRC government. In 2016, just a year before she was initially detained, Rahile Dawut received a research grant from the Ministry of Culture, reportedly the largest ever given to a Uyghur research project.

DONG Yuyu

A writer and journalist, Dong Yuyu is currently serving a seven-year prison term after conviction of 'espionage'. Police initially detained Dong on 21 February 2022 at a hotel in Beijing while he was having lunch with a Japanese diplomat, who was also briefly detained. On 23 March 2023, authorities informed Dong's family that his case had been sent to court for trial on charges of 'espionage'; the hearing was reported to have taken place in late July 2023 (see Case List 2023/2024). On 29 November 2024, Dong Yuyu was convicted of 'espionage' and sentenced to seven years' imprisonment. His family have yet to receive the verdict and have raised serious concerns over the basis for the conviction.

Dong's family have been denied contact with him for the duration of his detention and he has only been granted limited meetings with his lawyer. For the first six months of his detention, he was held in 'residential surveillance at a designated location,' a form of detention which United Nations human rights experts have described as 'tantamount to enforced disappearance'.

Dong Yuyu, born on 21 April 1962, is a writer and journalist. Before his arrest, he was the deputy head of the editorial

department for *Guangming Daily*, a state-owned newspaper, where he had worked since 1987. In 1998, he co-edited the book *Political China: Facing an Era of Choices for a New System*, which contained essays contributed by liberal scholars about judicial independence. In addition to his writing for *Guangming Daily*, he had written columns for *The New York Times* Chinese website from 2012-2014, including the essay 'I want to send my son to study in the United States' which continues to circulate on Chinese media. Another essay of his, the book review 'Viewing the Cultural Revolution from the Perspective of National Politics,' later led to Dong being labelled as 'anti-socialist' in 2017.

Professor Ilham TOHTI

A writer, academic and public intellectual, Ilham Tohti is serving a life sentence after conviction of separatism. He was detained on 15 January 2014 by police following a raid on his home in Beijing. During his detention, he was repeatedly denied access to his family or legal representatives. Despite the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention finding his detention to be arbitrary in March 2014, Ilham Tohti was convicted of separatism and sentenced to life imprisonment following a two-day unfair trial in September 2014 (see Case Lists 2014 – 2023/2024). On 4 July 2024, PEN International called for Ilham Tohti's release during China's Universal Periodic Review at the United Nations Human Rights Council.

Ilham Tohti, born on 25 October 1969, is an academic committed to the promoting inter-ethnic dialogue and advocating for the rights of Uyghurs and other minorities in China. An economics professor at Beijing's Minzu University, Ilham Tohti dedicated much of his academic work to the study of the role that state policy played in the systematic persecution of the Uyghur and other minority groups in China. Included in his writings, some of which have been collected in his book *We Uyghurs Have No Say*, are nuanced discussions of the state of

relations between ethnic groups in Xinjiang and the role that ethnic policy played in exacerbating long-standing social and economic issues experienced by Uyghurs.

In 2006, he founded Uyghur Online, a bilingual website designed to foster mutual understanding by reporting on human rights issues and calling for fair treatment of China's minority populations. Despite repeated attempts by authorities to close down the website, it emerged as an important platform for inter-ethnic dialogue through its discussion forums before it was forced to close in the run-up to Ilham Tohti's arrest. In 2020, the website was partially restored by the Ilham Tohti Institute.

Jimmy LAI

A writer, publisher and activist with UK citizenship, Jimmy Lai has been held in solitary confinement since December 2020 following his initial brief detention in August 2020 on multiple charges for his journalism and pro-democracy activism (see Case lists 2023-3024, 2022, and 2020). Since his arrest, Jimmy Lai has served sentences relating to four convictions of unauthorised assembly; these expired in September 2022. On 10 December 2022, Lai was sentenced to a further five years and nine months' imprisonment for violating the terms of a commercial lease.

On 18 December 2023, a new trial commenced on two counts of 'conspiracy to collude with foreign forces' under Hong Kong's National Security Law (NSL). Lai was also charged with 'conspiracy to produce seditious publications' under Hong Kong's colonial-era sedition law, with the prosecution citing 161 editions of *Apple Daily*, which Lai had founded in 1995, as 'examples of seditious publications[...] with a view to polluting the minds of the impressionable ones.' Jimmy Lai has pleaded not guilty to all charges. On 26 September 2024, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found Lai's ongoing detention to be arbitrary and called for his

immediate release. On 20 November 2024, Lai testified for the first time after the NSL trial was adjourned for four months. The trial was ongoing at the end of the year.

Jimmy Lai, born on 8 December 1947, is a veteran human rights and pro-democracy activist and owner of the now-defunct *Apple Daily* newspaper, which was once regarded as Hong Kong's most prolific pro-democracy news outlet before it was forced to close on 24 June 2021. Lai is also the author of over 20 books ranging from autobiographies to essays on entrepreneurship and his love of food. On 21 September 2024, Lai was named as recipient of PEN Canada's One Humanity Award.

Go Sherab Gyatso (known as Gosher)

A prominent Tibetan writer, educator and public intellectual, Gosher is serving a 10-year prison sentence reportedly imposed following a secret trial held in December 2021. According to the Chinese government, he was detained by Chinese security services on 26 October 2020, in the Sichuan province's city of Chengdu on suspicion of inciting secession. He was subsequently transferred to the Tibetan Autonomous Region where he was formally charged on 3 February 2021 (see Case Lists 2023-2024, 2022 and 2021).

There are ongoing concerns over Gosher's health and access to adequate medical care, following reports that he was detained while seeking medical treatment for a chronic lung condition. On 4 July 2024, PEN International called for Gosher's release during the adoption of China's Universal Periodic Review at the United Nations Human Rights Council.

Gosher, born on 9 September 1976, is the author of over 10 books, including *Wake Up* (2007), *General Knowledge & the Path* (2011) and *Insights of a Thinker* (2013). Much of his writing centres on Tibetan Buddhism, language, and culture. An outspoken intellectual and advocate for Tibetan monastic education, this is the fourth time that the PRC authorities have

imprisoned Goshier, who was previously detained in 1998, 2008 and [2011](#) for his criticism of Chinese government restrictions on Tibetan religious and cultural practices.

GUI Minhai

A poet, author, publisher, bookseller and member of the Independent Chinese PEN Centre (ICPC), Gui Minhai is a Swedish citizen serving a 10-year prison sentence imposed after his conviction of [national security charges](#) on 24 February 2020 (see Case Lists [2015 – 2023/2024](#)).

Gui is one of five Hong Kong booksellers who were forcibly disappeared in late 2015. He was [taken from his vacation home](#) in Thailand by the PRC security services and was not seen in public until three months later, when PRC state media aired a [forced confession video](#) where Gui Minhai claimed he had voluntarily returned to China to turn himself for a 2003 traffic offence. Briefly released while under continued surveillance in late 2017, Gui was [subsequently detained](#) by plain clothes police officers on 20 January 2018 whilst in the company of two Swedish diplomats on his way to Beijing for medical testing, after showing symptoms of a neurodegenerative disease. On [4 July 2024](#), PEN International called for Gui Minhai's release during the adoption of China's Universal Periodic Review at the United Nations Human Rights Council.

Gui Minhai, born on 5 May 1964, was the owner of Mighty Current Media and joint owner of its retail arm, Causeway Bay Books. Mighty Current Media was a Hong Kong-based publishing company best known for its sensationalist books about private lives of China's political leadership. Causeway Bay Books had a similar reputation before its closure following the forced disappearance of its staff and was a popular destination for those seeking to buy books that were banned or otherwise unavailable in China's mainland. A prolific author before his arrest, several poems written by Gui during his initial detention were published in 2020 as a poetry

collection titled, [I draw a door on the wall with my finger](#) (2020). In 2019, Gui Minhai was awarded [PEN Sweden's Tucholsky Prize](#).

YANG Hengjun (legal name, Yang Jun)

A writer, scholar and political commentator with Australian citizenship, Yang Hengjun is held under a suspended death sentence with reprieve after conviction of 'espionage'. Yang has been in various forms of detention [since January 2019](#), after he returned to China from the US with his family. Yang was initially held at a secret location for six months in a notorious form of incommunicado detention called '[Residential Surveillance at a Designated Location](#)', where he was [reportedly tortured](#). In August 2019, Yang was [formally arrested](#) on suspicion of 'espionage' without any evidence supporting the charge disclosed to his family or consular representatives (see Case Lists [2023/2024](#), [2022](#), [2020](#) and [2019](#)). On 5 February 2024, reports emerged that Yang Hengjun had been handed down a suspended death sentence with reprieve, a penalty in Chinese law where a death sentence may be reduced to a sentence of life imprisonment after a two-year period of 'good behaviour'.

Throughout his more-than-two years of pre-trial detention, Yang was denied family visits and was granted limited access to [legal counsel](#) and consular visits. He was reportedly subjected to over [300 interrogations](#) and his request for the [dismissal of testimony he gave under torture](#) was denied by the Chinese government. On 27 May 2021, Yang's trial was held behind closed doors and reportedly lasted less than [seven hours](#), with his consular representatives [denied the ability to attend](#), a breach of both the [Vienna Convention](#) and the [Australia-China bilateral consular agreement](#). There are ongoing concerns for his health and wellbeing after he was diagnosed with a painful cyst on his kidney in 2023. PEN International has learned that Yang was transferred to Beijing Municipal No. 2 Prison in June 2024.

Yang Hengjun, born on 18 April 1965, is a novelist, scholar and political commentator, said to be an ex-employee of the Foreign Affairs Ministry, who is committed to the advancement of human rights and greater freedoms in China. Yang is the author of the *Fatal Weakness* spy trilogy, which was reportedly banned in China but has been shared widely online among Chinese diasporas. He also has a significant following on Chinese social media for his online [blog posts](#), which frequently highlight democratic values, earning him the nickname ‘Democracy Peddler’ among his followers.

ZHANG Guiqi (Pen name, Lu Yang)

A poet, teacher and member of the ICPC, Zhang Guiqi is serving a six-year prison term imposed on 26 July 2022 after a trial behind closed doors where he was convicted of ‘inciting subversion of state power’. He was also sentenced to a further three years’ deprivation of his political rights. He has been detained since May 2020, just hours after he posted a video on social media where he called for President Xi Jinping to step down and for an end to the ‘CCP’s regime’. On 29 March 2023, Zhang was transferred from Liaocheng Detention Centre to Shandong Provincial Prison to serve his sentence (see Case Lists [2023/2024](#), [2022](#) and [2020](#)). As of the end of 2024, Zhang continues to serve his sentence, and is expected to be released in May 2026.

Zhang Guiqi, born on 4 January 1971, is a poet and former teacher from the Shandong province in eastern China. He has acted as founder, editor and publisher for several online poetry platforms, including the Chinese Contemporary Poetry Platform, which was forced to [shut down in 2007](#) following a directive issued by Chinese government censors. In 2008, he became a signatory to the seminal Charter 08 document, which called for greater human rights protections and political reform in China.

Following the detention of one of Charter 08’s authors, writer, Nobel Peace Prize

Winner and former president of the ICPC, [Liu Xiaobo](#), Zhang joined the PEN Centre as a member. Over the following years, he was an outspoken activist in support of free expression in China, supporting [government critics](#) who have been persecuted for their peaceful expression.

INDIA

DETAINED

Professor Hany BABU

Scholar and anti-caste activist Hany Babu continued to remain detained pending trial since his arrest in July 2020 (see Case lists [2023/2024](#), [2022](#) and [2021](#)).

Babu is one of a group of 16 writers, scholars and activists, including poet [Varavara Rao](#) (see On Trial section below), referred to as the BK-16, targeted under India’s counterterrorism law, the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) in connection with their alleged association with the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist) organisation and involvement in ‘inciting violence’ at the Elgar Parishad, a public event held on 31 December 2017 by activists advocating for the rights of Dalits and other marginalised communities. One day after the event, riots erupted between Dalits and Hindu nationalists during a celebratory gathering to mark the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Bhima Koregaon, a significant cultural event among India’s Dalit community. Babu’s wife Jenny Rowena has flatly [rejected](#) his alleged connection to any such groups or the public event, and his family [has issued an appeal](#) asserting his innocence.

On [10 September 2019](#), Babu’s home was raided by police who seized his laptop, mobile phone and books on caste and social formations. The Pune police did not provide [hash values for the devices](#) seized during the raid, raising concerns that his devices may have been hacked and

subjected to evidence planting. Arrested on 28 July 2020, Babu has repeatedly had his application for bail denied; his current bail application remains ongoing.

Held in grossly inadequate conditions in the notorious Taloja Central Jail, in May 2021, Babu has repeatedly been denied adequate medical treatment for a severe eye infection, eventually resulting in his temporary hospitalisation. On 15 December 2022, Babu underwent an operation at a private hospital under judicial custody at his own expense following loss of vision in his left eye. On 3 June 2024, PEN International raised serious concerns over Babu's detention conditions in a submission to the United Nations Human Rights Committee that oversees compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Hany Babu, born on 16 August 1966, is an associate professor of language and linguistics at Delhi University and an anti-caste activist and advocate for greater protections of marginalised languages. In addition to his academic work, he has regularly used his writing to highlight the relationship between human rights and linguistic plurality.

ON TRIAL

Prabir PURKAYASTHA

Author Prabir Purkayastha, founder and editor-in-chief of online media platform NewsClick, remained on trial at the end of the year, after he was released on bail in May 2024. He was initially arrested under the UAPA on 3 October 2023, when Delhi Police's Special Cell unit carried out mass raids at multiple locations targeting journalists, writers and others who contributed to the independent online news outlet, NewsClick. During the raid of Purkayastha's home, his electronic devices were seized by the police, who did not provide seizure memos and hash values, a necessary means to mitigate the risk of evidence tampering, which has occurred in previous

cases involving critics of the government.

On 11 October 2023, the government's Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) carried out further raids on both his home and office after registering a case against NewsClick, alleging violations of foreign funding regulations under the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) (see Case List 2023/2024). On 30 March 2024, the Delhi police filed a chargesheet amounting to almost 8,000 pages with a district court in Delhi. On 15 May 2024, Purkayastha was released on strict bail conditions hours after the Supreme Court found his arrest to be 'invalid' and ordered his release.

The raids were conducted as part of a broader investigation into NewsClick that, according to media reports, is connected to alleged funding it has received from entities associated with an individual purportedly connected with the Chinese Communist Party. However, NewsClick staff have rejected these allegations. Purkayastha and NewsClick have previously been subjected to judicial harassment, including a 113 hour raid of his home by Enforcement Directorate officials in February 2021, during which Purkayastha was effectively held under house arrest and prevented from leaving.

Born in 1952, Prabir Purkayastha is a journalist, writer and activist. A former engineer, Purkayastha is author of several books, including *Knowledge as Commons: Towards Inclusive Science and Technology* (2023). He is also the co-author of *Enron Blowout: Corporate Capitalism and Theft of the Global Commons* (2002) and *Uncle Sam's Nuclear Cabin* (2007). In 2009, he founded NewsClick to establish an independent platform for news reporting with a particular focus on progressive movements in India and elsewhere. In 2023, Purkayastha published his memoir titled *Keeping Up the Good Fight: From the Emergency to the Present*, which includes a detailed account of his first detention as a student protestor during India's state of emergency which took place from 1975-77.

Teesta SETALVAD

A writer and activist, Teesta Setalvad remained on trial at the end of the year while remaining subject to onerous bail conditions impacting her freedom of movement. She was detained on [25 June 2022](#) by Gujarat anti-terror police at her home in Mumbai, the capital of the neighbouring state of Maharashtra, in connection with allegations of ‘criminal conspiracy’ and ‘forging evidence’ as part of her efforts to seek government accountability for the 2002 Gujarat Riots, a period of inter-communal violence that led to the deaths of hundreds of Indian citizens. Setalvad has [alleged that she was assaulted](#) by two members of the anti-terror police when she requested permission to speak with her lawyer. Just one day prior to Setalvad’s detention, on 24 June 2022, the Supreme Court [rejected a plea](#) submitted by Setalvad and co-petitioner Zakia Jafri, whose husband, the former parliamentarian Ehsan Jafri, was killed during the riots. The plea sought to reopen an investigation into the potential involvement of local government officials in the violence. She was released on interim bail on 2 September 2022 and was [formally charged](#) on 20 September 2022 with fabrication of evidence offences under Sections 194, 218 and 468 and of the Indian Penal Code. On [19 July 2023](#), Setalvad was granted regular bail by the Supreme Court.

In October 2023, members of Delhi Police’s Special Cell unit carried out searches of Setalvad’s home and seized her phones, without a warrant, at the same time that [mass raids that were carried out](#) against journalists and contributors connected with online independent news outlet, NewsClick (see Case Lists [2023/2024](#) and [2022](#)).

Teesta Setalvad, born on 9 February 1962 is a writer, journalist and one of India’s most high-profile human rights defenders. From 1983, Setalvad wrote for a decade for news outlets including *The Daily*, *The Indian Express* and *Business India*. In response to the 1992 demolition of the Babri Masjid by Hindu nationalists, Setalvad left mainstream

journalism, to establish a monthly magazine called *Communalism Combat*, which sought to address issues of religious intolerance and the role of certain political parties which stoke inter-religious hostilities within Indian society. Over the following years, Setalvad mounted numerous campaigns for the rights of women and [marginalised groups](#) across India. In 2017, Setalvad published her memoir, entitled *Foot Soldier of the Constitution*, charting her career from journalist to civil rights activist and human rights defender.

Varavara Rao

Varavara Rao, a writer, poet, and activist, remained on trial at the end of the year. Freed on regular bail, he is one of 16 writers, scholars and activists, including scholar **Hany Babu** (see above under ‘Detained’), who have been targeted under India’s counterterrorism law, the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). The charges against the group, referred to as the BK-16, reportedly arose from their alleged involvement in ‘inciting violence’ at a public event held on 31 December 2017 by activists advocating for the rights of Dalits and other marginalised communities. On 1 January 2018, one day after the event, riots erupted between Dalits and Hindu nationalists during a celebratory gathering to mark the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Bhima Koregaon, a significant cultural event among India’s Dalit community. Rao has completely [rejected all charges](#), with many viewing his detention as being [politically motivated](#) and part of a [wider crackdown on activists](#) across India.

Detained in [abhorrent conditions](#) for over two years after his arrest on 28 August 2018, Rao suffered COVID-19 and other health complications but was repeatedly denied adequate medical treatment in jail until he was released on bail in February 2021 which has allowed him to receive medical treatment. However, he remains subject to strict bail conditions, which include restrictions on his movement and ability to make any

public statements regarding his case (see Case lists [2023/2024](#), [2022](#) and [2021](#)).

Born on 3 November 1940, Varavara Rao is a poet and activist. An important figure in Telugu literature, Rao is a founder of the Virasam – the Revolutionary Writers Association. The author of 17 poetry collections, from 1966–1992, and 19 prose books, all in Telugu, Rao ran *Srujana (Creation)*, a monthly journal focussing on modern Telugu literature.

HARASSED

Aakar PATEL

A writer, journalist and political activist, Aakar Patel remained subject to bail conditions restricting his freedom of movement at the end of the year. On [6 April 2022](#), he had been due to fly from India to speak at several academic conferences in the US on topics including attacks on civil society in India and the use of social media as a tool for social and political change. However, when he attempted to [board his flight](#) at Bangalore airport, immigration authorities prevented his travel, citing a look-out circular (LOC) issued by CBI. Despite a Delhi court order directing the CBI to rescind the LOC against Patel, when he returned to the airport on 7 April 2022, he was again blocked from leaving the country. On [8 April 2022](#), a judge directed Patel not to leave the country without prior permission.

While the CBI initially [refused to publicly comment](#) further on the reason why it initially attempted to restrict Patel's travel outside of India, [he was informed by the CBI](#) that the LOC emanates from ongoing litigation against him in relation to his former role as head and Chair of the Board of Amnesty International India. The human rights organisation was [forced to cease its operations](#) in September 2020 following a campaign of intimidation orchestrated by the Indian government that [included multiple raids, a smear campaign](#), and the freezing of Amnesty International India's bank accounts after authorities accused the organisation of [committing foreign funding](#)

[violations](#) under the FCRA. In December 2023, the CBI named Patel in a [supplementary chargesheet](#) it filed in connection to its ongoing probe against Amnesty International India (see Case lists [2023/2024](#) and [2022](#)).

Aakar Patel, born on 15 December 1969, is a human rights and political activist, [journalist](#) and writer. He published his first novel titled *After Messiah* in September 2023. He has also authored four non-fiction works, including *Price of the Modi Years* (2021), which provides a critical examination of the performance of the Indian government since Narendra Modi's election as prime minister in 2014. In 2020, he published *Our Hindu Rashtra*, which charts the rise of Hindu majoritarian nationalism in India and how it has accelerated under Modi's government. In 2014 he authored *The Anarchist Cookbook*, a guidebook on the role of campaigning in effecting democratic change, and *Why I Write: Essays by Saadat Hasan Manto*, which Patel edited and translated into English.

N. Venugopal RAO

Poet, journalist, translator and writer N. Venugopal Rao's home was [raided](#) by the NIA on 8 February 2024 as part of a series of searches of different locations that were [allegedly linked](#) to Sanjoy Deepak Rao, a leading member of the [banned Communist Party of India \(Maoist\)](#).

During the raid, eight members of the NIA entered Venugopal's home, searching his book collection and confiscating his phone along with a document related to his journalistic reporting. During the raid, Venugopal [protested](#) the seizure of his phone, necessary for his journalistic work, noting a [pending petition](#) before the Supreme Court regarding the seizure of digital devices belonging to media professionals. Several days after the raid, Venugopal was summoned for interrogation before being released without charge.

The purported basis for the raids bears similarities to the ongoing case against the BK-16, which includes Venugopal's uncle,

Varavara Rao (see above under ‘On Trial’). Several of those targeted were implicated on the basis of tenuous evidence, including their names allegedly being found on documents stored on a digital device belonging to one of the co-accused, which was later found to have been tampered with malware used to plant evidence via document insertion.

N. Venugopal Rao is a poet, journalist, translator and writer. He is the author of over 30 books and has also translated many publications from English into Telugu. Following over two decades working as a journalist for outlets including the Economic Times and the New Indian Express, Venugopal Rao established *Veekshanam*, a monthly magazine dedicated to Telegu political economy and society which he continues to oversee as its editor some 20 years later. Venugopal Rao is also co-editor of *Varavara Rao: A Life in Poetry* (2023), the first collection in English of his uncle’s poems.

MALAYSIA

RELEASED

Uthaya SANKAR SB

Writer Uthaya Sankar SB was notified on 3 April 2024 that the investigation against him had been closed; his phone was also returned. Sankar had been under investigation by police since his arrest at home on 11 April 2022 by investigators who had also seized his phone. The police initially sought to detain Sankar for four days. On 12 April 2022, the Magistrate’s Court dismissed the police application and permitted Sankar’s release after a night in detention (see Case lists 2023/2024 and 2022).

Sankar was investigated under Section 298A of Malaysia’s Penal Code for ‘causing disharmony, disunity, or feelings of enmity, hatred or ill will, or prejudicing the maintenance of harmony or unity, on grounds of religion’, and Section 233

of the Multimedia and Communications Act for ‘improper use of network facilities or network service’. The arrest and investigation stem from a complaint made to the police regarding a comment that Sankar posted on his Facebook account on 6 April 2022 that was considered to potentially insult the Prophet Mohammad, which is illegal under Malaysian law. In the post, Sankar referenced a prominent hadith collection within Sunni Islam when mocking Malaysian actor Iman Zulkarnain’s comments regarding polygamy.

Throughout the investigation, Sankar flatly rejected any claim that he had criticised Islam or the Prophet Mohammad in his social media post, noting that he has a track record of writing numerous books and articles about Islam and other religions without issue. He is the author of over 20 books and has written extensively on topics including language, culture and religion in Malaysian society.

Born on 10 June 1972, Sankar has published numerous books in Bahasa Malaysia, including several retellings of revered Indian texts, including *Ramayana dan Mahabharata* (2019), *Bhagavad Gita* (2021) and *Katha Sarit Sagara* (2023).

MYANMAR

IMPRISONED

WAI MOE NAING

A writer, pro-democracy activist and member of PEN Myanmar, Wai Moe Naing was serving a combined sentence of 74 years in prison after conviction of ‘offences’ including rioting, robbery, incitement and murder at the end of the year. PEN International believes he is being held in connection with his political activism and exercise of his right to freedom of expression.

Wai Moe Naing was initially arrested on 15 April 2021 by junta forces that reportedly

used an unmarked vehicle to ram Wai Moe Naing while he was driving on a moped as part of a protest rally in the Monywa region. When he tried to escape on foot, a group of armed men disembarked and assaulted him and a female protestor before detaining them both.

Previously sentenced in [August 2022](#), [October 2022](#), [April 2023](#) and [May 2023](#) to a cumulative sentence of 54 years' imprisonment (see Case lists [2023/2024](#), [2022](#) and [2021](#)), on [10 May 2024](#), Wai Moe Naing was sentenced to a further 20 years in prison after conviction of murder, bringing the total to 74 years. The [conviction is reported](#) to relate to the killings of two police officers in the Monywa region, but no evidence has emerged that links Wai Moe Naing to the killings. Since his arrest, Wai Moe Naing has been subject to repeated fair trial violations, with hearings held behind closed-door military courts. He has also been forced to represent himself following the [arrest of his legal representatives](#), with others unwilling to represent him out of fear of retaliation from the military junta. Wai Moe Naing's friends and [family](#) have rejected the accusation of murder on the strongest possible terms.

Wai Moe Naing, born on 26 September 1995, is a youth activist, writer, and member of PEN Myanmar. He began writing as a student, with his first short story being published in Teen Magazine at the age of 13. His writing has since been published in several literary outlets, including *Khit Yanantthit Magazine* and *Pae Tin Tharn Journal*. In the immediate aftermath of the military coup, Wai Moe Naing rose to prominence as a [leader of the anti-coup protest movement](#) and was among those who popularised the idea of banging pots and pans as a non-violent act of resistance to the military junta's rule.

PHILIPPINES

DETAINED

Amanda ECHANIS

A poet, writer and activist, Amanda Echanis has been held in [pre-trial detention](#) since she was arrested at her home alongside her then one-month-old baby on 2 December 2020, where she was charged with illegal possession of firearms, ammunition and explosives, a charge that is [routinely](#) used against those who have been '[red-tagged](#)' - or accused by government authorities or its proxies of having links to communist insurgency groups. Echanis has [flatly rejected](#) the allegation and has accused the Philippines authorities of planting evidence.

Echanis has been detained for over four years since her arrest, with court hearings repeatedly postponed. The right to a fair trial includes the right to be tried without undue delay, which for individuals denied bail requires that they be tried 'as expeditiously as possible'. In 1990, Amanda Echanis' father, a fellow activist in support of rural workers' rights, was also arrested on the same charge that she now faces, which resulted in Echanis staying at a custodial detention centre with her parents when she was less than [two years old](#), making her the country's '[youngest political prisoner](#)' at the time. The case against Echanis' father was dismissed in 1992. In [August 2020](#), just months before Amanda Echanis' arrest, her father was [brutally murdered](#) in a case that remains unsolved.

Amanda Echanis is a writer, poet and activist. She is the author of several literary works and has continued to write from behind bars. In 2023, Echanis published a collection of her poetry and essays from prison, entitled *Binhi ng Paglaya* (Seeds of Liberation). She has also won the [2023 Southeast Asian Translation Mentorship](#), established by *The Seams* in conjunction with *Ethos Books*, who are supporting Echanis' translation of Filipino poetry. In

June 2024, Amanda Echanis participated in a prestigious creative writing workshop, the *Palihang Rogelio Sicat*, which is named after renowned Filipino novelist, Rogelio Sicat. First established in 1984, the workshop was convened in hybrid format for the first time to accommodate Echanis' participation while she is being held in detention.

JUDICIAL HARASSMENT

Maria RESSA

A journalist and writer, Maria Ressa has been the target of a campaign of judicial harassment and intimidation since her initial arrest on 13 February 2019. At the end of 2024, she remained free on post-conviction bail with two active cases against her remaining. These included Ressa and a colleague's ongoing appeal to the Supreme Court against their 2020 conviction of cyber libel, that had been upheld on appeal in July 2022 and could carry a potential six-year sentence. The second case relates to a separate 2019 charge of violating the Philippines' Anti-Dummy Law, which places restrictions on foreign ownership or control of certain enterprises in the Philippines, in relation to foreign investment in 2015 in Rappler, a news outlet which she co-founded.

Five counts of tax evasion filed in 2018 against her and Rappler were dismissed in 2023, a significant victory for freedom of expression and the press in the Philippines (See Case List 2023/2024 for further details). Additionally, on 23 July 2024, the Philippines Court of Appeals overturned a 2018 shutdown order issued against Rappler which was instituted by the Securities and Exchange Commission in relation to the 2015 foreign investment in Rappler for which she is still facing Anti-Dummy Law charges.

Maria Ressa, born on 2 October 1963, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2021 in recognition of her efforts to 'safeguard freedom of expression, which is a precondition for democracy and lasting peace'. Since 2018, she has faced

numerous bogus charges for carrying out her journalistic work – work which includes ground-breaking journalism that exposes government corruption and the horrific human cost of former president Rodrigo Duterte's 'war on drugs', which has resulted in thousands of extra-judicial killings. She is the author of two books on the rise of terrorism in Southeast Asia: *Seeds of Terror: An Eyewitness Account of Al-Qaeda's Newest Center* (2011) and *From Bin Laden to Facebook: 10 Days of Abduction, 10 Years of Terrorism* (2013). She is the founder and CEO of Rappler, an online news platform.

THAILAND

IMPRISONED

Arnon Nampha

A poet and human rights lawyer, Arnon Nampha is serving a cumulative sentence of 18 years and 10 months in prison following a series of trials in which he was convicted of six counts of violating Article 112 (*lèse-majesté*) of the Thai Criminal Code in connection with his peaceful expression and participation in demonstrations that took place throughout 2020 and 2021. Nampha faces eight additional counts of *lèse-majesté*, which could each result in a maximum sentence of 15 years' imprisonment, per count and is at risk of disbarment (see Case Lists 2020 – 2023/2024).

As an activist lawyer, Nampha has a reputation for taking on challenging cases involving the violation of human rights by the Thai government. He was first arrested on 7 August 2020 for his participation in peaceful protests calling for reform of the Thai monarchy and an end to the use of *lèse-majesté* (royal defamation) laws. Nampha continued to participate in public rallies and was frequently detained, ultimately spending 337 days in prison until his release on bail on 28 February

2022. The Thai government has also continued its efforts to advance disbarment proceedings against Nampha, including [allegations](#) by the Bangkok Criminal Court that his ongoing representation of his clients while wearing a prison uniform is a violation of the dress code.

The case against Nampha is a significant test of Thailand's legal system and its commitment to the right to freedom of expression, which is explicitly extended to lawyers under Article 23 of the [UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers](#).

Arnon Nampha, born on 18 August 1984, has emerged as a leader of Thailand's [protest movement](#), and also uses his poetry to shine a light on the struggles faced by those who have been marginalised within Thailand. A collection of his poetry, entitled *People are Blind and Mute No Longer* (translated) was released to coincide with the fifth anniversary of the 2006 military coup. In 2021, PEN International published [English translations](#) of two booklets which contain speeches made by Nampha during the 2020 protests.

VIETNAM

IMPRISONED

Pham Doan TRANG

An author, journalist, and pro-democracy activist, Pham Doan Trang remains in prison after her appeal against her nine-year prison sentence for 'conducting propaganda against the State of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam' was [rejected](#) by the Hanoi People's High Court on 25 August 2022.

On 6 October 2020, Trang was detained during a raid on her apartment in Ho Chi Minh city as part of a joint operation by Hanoi Police and officials from the Ministry of Public Security.

While detained, Pham Doan Trang was denied access to legal counsel and medical care for over a year and was finally granted permission to meet with her lawyer on 19 October 2021. Her ill-treatment by the Vietnamese authorities raises serious concerns in relation to her pre-existing health conditions, such as low blood pressure and chronic pain, resulting from her legs being severely injured after she was assaulted by the police in 2015.

On 25 October 2021, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found her detention to be [arbitrary](#) and called for her immediate release. On [14 December 2021](#), the Vietnamese authorities sentenced Trang to nine years' imprisonment under Article 88 of the 1999 Penal Code. [On 1 October 2022](#), Pham Doan Trang was transferred to a prison located approximately 100km north of Ho Chi Minh City, further hampering visits from her family and legal representatives.

Born on 27 May 1978, Pham Doan Trang's published works include *Chính trị bình dân* (*Popular Politics*, 2018), *Cẩm nang nuôi tù* (*Handbook on Supporting Prisoners*, 2019), *Phản kháng phi bạo lực* (*Non-Violent Opposition*, 2019) and numerous other works. She has also sought to publish her writing online, through her [blog](#) and [social media](#), in order to overcome state censorship of traditional media and to raise awareness of human rights issues in Vietnam. Trang has received multiple awards for her work, including the Reporters Without Borders 2019 [Press Freedom Prize for Impact](#), and on [16 May 2024](#), Trang was awarded PEN America's 2024 PEN/ Barbey Freedom to Write Award.

PEN ACTIONS IN ASIA/PACIFIC

In addition to its advocacy for the writers referred to in this list, PEN International also took action on behalf of journalists and others at risk in the Asia/Pacific region, some in collaboration with other organisations, details of which can be found in the links provided below.

PEN International also continues to work intensively to provide protection to writers at risk across the Asia/ Pacific region. The ongoing crises in Afghanistan and Myanmar continue to demand intensive support for writers, poets, journalists, and scholars facing the threat of persecution within both countries. Working closely with PEN Centres, the PEN Emergency Fund and partner NGOs, PEN International has provided a range of life-saving supports, including emergency relocation, long-term resettlement and the provision of emergency financial aid. Since the Taliban take over, as of 31 December 2024, PEN International has worked closely with several PEN Centres in facilitating the emergency relocation and long-term resettlement of over 125 at-risk Afghans, comprising PEN Afghanistan members and their families. PEN International has also continued to provide discreet support to numerous at-risk writers and journalists from countries including Bangladesh, Myanmar and other countries throughout the region.

Afghanistan

August 2024: Statement [Three years of Taliban rule continues to devastate Afghanistan's cultural sphere](#)

Bangladesh

July 2024: Statement [PEN International condemns violence and calls for protection of journalists as protests escalate](#)

Cambodia

October 2024: Statement [Investigative journalist Mech Dara detained amidst growing clampdown on free expression](#)

China

October 2024: Statement [New campaign to 'standardise' use of language signals further clampdown on online expression](#)

July 2024: Statement [PEN International challenges China's free expression record at UN Human Rights Council](#)

April 2024: Joint Statement [PEN International joins 27 organisations calling for immediate release of human rights lawyer Yu Wensheng and activist Xu Yan](#)

India

December 2024: Joint Statement [Targeting of journalist Mohammed Zubair condemned by human rights organisations](#)

July 2024: Statement [PEN International raises concerns over freedom of expression environment at UN review](#)

June 2024: Statement [Efforts to prosecute writers Arundhati Roy and Sheikh Showkat Hussain condemned](#)

Pakistan

August 2024: Statement [Concerns over censorship and other restrictions on freedom of expression in Balochistan](#)

Vietnam

September 2024: Statement [As Vietnam's UN human rights review concludes, PEN International reiterates concerns over country's freedom of expression record](#)

September 2024: Joint Statement [Statement by RFA, PEN International, VNAPC and PEN America on Nguyen Vu Binh's guilty verdict](#)

March 2024: Joint Statement [PEN International joins Radio Free Asia in calling for immediate release of Vietnamese blogger Nguyen Vu Binh](#)

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

Aurélia Dondo, Head of Europe and Central Asia Region

The Russian Federation's war against Ukraine continued to cast a shadow across Europe and Central Asia, while political leaders inflamed tensions in the Western Balkans. The right to peaceful protest continued to be widely restricted and literary expression remained under threat across the region. On a positive note, PEN celebrated long-awaited regional legal reforms and improvements for several persecuted writers.

THE SHADOW OF WAR

PEN International deplored the continued suffering of millions in the Russian Federation's war against **Ukraine**, with Russian forces committing war crimes and other violations of international humanitarian law, including destruction of educational facilities. At least 15 journalists have been killed by Russian forces in Ukraine while carrying out their professional duties since the 2022 full-scale invasion. Ukrainian journalist **Viktoria Roshchyna**, missing since August 2023 while reporting in Russian-occupied eastern Ukraine, reportedly died on 19 September in the **Russian Federation** while being transferred to Moscow. The Russian authorities provided no information about her death.

The killing of at least 153 cultural figures by the end of 2024, as recorded by PEN Ukraine, marked yet another grim milestone in the Russian Federation's destruction of Ukrainian cultural life. Those killed included writers, translators, artists, musicians, photographers, and historians who played a key role in enriching and celebrating Ukraine's culture and identity. On 1 July, PEN International paid homage to PEN Ukraine member and war crimes investigator **Victoria Amelina**, who died from injuries sustained in a Russian missile strike a year before (see Ukraine section below), renewing its calls for accountability. Meanwhile, Russian destruction of Ukraine's cultural heritage continued unabated, with UNESCO verifying at least 468 cultural sites, including museums, libraries, and archives, damaged by the end of the year. PEN Ukraine and partners continued to play a leading role in preserving the memory and legacy of cultural figures killed by Russian forces, and supporting Ukraine's cultural life and literary community. A partnership with Book Aid International in support of PEN Ukraine's Unbreakable Libraries project saw an additional 15,000 books donated.

On 23 May, after two postponements amidst strong opposition from **Serbian** President Aleksandar Vučić, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution designating 11 July as international day of reflection and commemoration of the 1995 **Srebrenica genocide**. Milorad Dodik, president of **Republika Srpska** (one of two entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina) intensified secessionist rhetoric in the lead-up to the vote. Both leaders again inflamed tensions across the **Western Balkans**, with marches against the resolution taking place in Banja Luka, the capital of Republika Srpska. On 30 April, PEN members from countries in the former Yugoslavia issued a call for peace, endorsed by nearly 100 writers from the region.

JUSTICE DELAYED, JUSTICE DENIED

On 2 February, a court in **Serbia** acquitted four former state security officers who had been twice convicted of the 1999 murder of journalist, editor, and publisher **Slavko Ćuruvija**. The ruling sent a dangerous signal that attacks against writers and journalists in Serbia would go unpunished (see Serbia section below). In **Türkiye**, impunity also continued for the 2007 killing of Armenian language magazine editor **Hrant Dink** (see Türkiye section below).

In April, authorities in **Norway** dismissed the case regarding the attempted murder of prominent publisher, PEN International vice president, and former president of PEN Norway, **William Nygaard**. His legal team successfully appealed against the decision to close the investigation, which authorities announced in July would resume (see Norway section below).

Seven years after the killing of investigative journalist and anti-corruption campaigner **Daphne Caruana Galizia**, PEN International joined partners in urging authorities in **Malta** to implement measures to create an enabling media environment.

In a welcome move, on 12 June, an Amsterdam court sentenced seven men for the 2021 killing of Dutch crime reporter **Peter R. de Vries**. The prosecution appealed, calling for harsher sentences (see The Netherlands section below). On 30 January, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled that the **Russian Federation's** failure to effectively investigate security risks against, and protect the lives of two murdered journalists **Akhmednabi Akhmednabiyev** and **Khadzhimurad Kamalov**, violated their rights and ordered compensation for family members.

ARBITRARY DETENTION AND UNFAIR TRIALS

Authorities in **Belarus**, the **Russian Federation** and **Azerbaijan** intensified their crackdown on writers and other cultural figures in a bid to crush all dissent. These countries held the saddest accolades of the worst jailers of journalists in Europe and Central Asia, with respectively 31, 30 and 13 journalists held behind bars as of 1 December 2024, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists.

The situation in **Belarus** remained of grave concern, with the UN concluding that authorities may have committed crimes against humanity. PEN welcomed the establishment of a group of independent experts to investigate violations, collect and preserve evidence, and identify those responsible. At least 1,265 political prisoners were held at the end of the year, according to Viasna. Torture and other-ill-treatment of detainees remained systematic and widespread. Several individuals continued to be held in prolonged incommunicado detention, including writer and lawyer **Maksim Znak**. The health of Nobel Peace Prize winner **Ales Bialiatski** reportedly deteriorated due to inadequate healthcare (see Belarus section below). The authorities of Belarus increasingly targeted relatives of

dissidents and mounted acts of transnational repression, opening at least 104 criminal cases against Belarusians abroad who took part in Freedom Day celebrations in March.

In flagrant violation of international law, Ukrainian writers and journalists languished behind bars on fabricated grounds in Russian-occupied territories and in the **Russian Federation**, including citizen journalists and human rights defenders **Iryna Danylovych** and **Server Mustafayev**. Russian authorities also mounted acts of transnational repression against Russian writers. In February, a court issued an arrest warrant against London-based best-selling novelist **Grigory Chkhartishvili**, better known by his pen name Boris Akunin, for 'justifying terrorism' in relation to his support for Ukraine. In July, Russian-US writer and PEN member **Masha Gessen** was handed an eight-year prison sentence in absentia for 'spreading false information about the military' in relation to a 2022 interview where Gessen spoke about Russian war crimes in Bucha.

The United Nations climate change conference (COP29), held in Baku in November, shone a light on serious freedom of expression concerns in **Azerbaijan**, where hundreds of people remained behind bars on politically motivated charges. Renowned scholar **Gubad Ibadoghlu**, detained in July 2023, was released into house arrest in April. Facing up to 17 years in prison, he is in poor health.

In yet another tragedy for the rule of law in **Türkiye**, writer and opposition politician **Selahattin Demirtaş** was sentenced to 42 years in prison. In April, the ECtHR granted priority status to a second case lodged by publisher **Osman Kavala**, concerning violations perpetrated against him since the Court's ruling of December 2019 urging his release (see Türkiye section below).

CRACKDOWN ON PEACEFUL PROTESTS

Authorities across the region unduly restricted the right to peaceful protest. In **Georgia**, following disputed parliamentary elections in October, nationwide protests were violently dispersed by police. Journalists reported being deliberately targeted by security forces; several required hospitalisation. PEN Georgia documented the brutal beating of poet and translator **Zviad Ratiani** by police on 29 November in Tbilisi. Ratiani – who suffered serious injuries, including fractures to his nose and back – was sentenced to eight days of administrative detention on 2 December.

Human rights organisations highlighted how many European countries continued to unduly restrict the right to protest, including of climate, LGBTQI+, and minority rights activists, as well as those expressing solidarity with the Palestinian people in marches, demonstrations and cultural activities. For example, protests in February in cities in **Italy** were violently dispersed and in May, according to Amnesty International, law enforcement authorities in countries such as **Austria, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland**, and the **United Kingdom** dispersed pro-Palestinian protest camps in university precincts, sometimes resorting to excessive use of force.

REPRESSIVE LAWS AND SURVEILLANCE

Authorities across the region adopted Russian-style laws aimed at silencing all criticism and dismantling civil society. In April, **Kyrgyzstan** enacted a repressive ‘foreign representatives’ law. A similar law in **Georgia** came into force in August, despite earlier mass protests against it that were met by police violence. Attempts by **Republika Srpska** President Dodik to introduce a similar ‘foreign agents’ law were temporarily stalled in May following a national and international outcry. In **Türkiye**, a proposed ‘agent of influence’ bill was temporarily withdrawn in November, following sustained civil society pressure. In October, the ECtHR issued a landmark ruling on the **Russian Federation’s** ‘foreign agents’ legislation, condemning it as ‘stigmatising, misleading and used in an overly broad and unpredictable way’ and concluding its purpose was to ‘punish and intimidate’.

Russian Federation authorities continued using ‘LGBTQI propaganda’ laws to harass the LGBTQI community, resulting in detentions and at least three LGBTQI groups shutting down. Television channels and streaming services were fined for running LGBTQI-related content. Similar laws were enacted in **Bulgaria** and in **Georgia** in August and October; the latter provides a legal basis to censor films and books.

Surveillance continued to pose a threat to journalists and activists across the region. In December, a tribunal in the **United Kingdom** found that police had unlawfully spied on northern Irish journalists **Barry McCaffrey** and **Trevor Birney** in connection with their 2018 award-winning documentary *No Stone Unturned*, about the 1994 Loughinisland massacre, and sought to spy on over 800 other individuals. A December report by Amnesty International exposed the widespread use of advanced phone spyware by authorities in **Serbia** to unlawfully target journalists and activists – including at the **KROKODIL Centre for Contemporary Literature** (see Serbia section below).

CENSORSHIP AND BOOK BANS

Authorities in **Türkiye** kept a tight grip on the media and publishing landscape, with some books vilified by pro-government media as ‘obscene’. On 12 July, storytelling platform Wattpad was the latest victim of a series of court orders blocking popular social media platforms and other websites, including literary publishers. In September, police detained several individuals and seized hundreds of books from a bookstore on alleged terror-related grounds during raids in Diyarbakır. Scores of Kurdish writers continued to be persecuted for their writings promoting Kurdish language and culture, including novelist **Yavuz Ekinci**, who faced up to seven-and-a-half years in prison (see Türkiye section below).

In the **Russian Federation**, publishers recalled books with LGBTQI content. A court in Nizhny Novgorod fined a bookstore RUB500,000 (approximately USD5,000) for selling a novel depicting same-sex relations. On 8 July, a military court sentenced theatre director **Yevgenia Berkovich** and playwright **Svetlana Petriychuk** to six years’ imprisonment on fabricated grounds. The case against them stemmed from their award-winning play *Finist Yasny Sokol (Finist, The Brave Falcon)*, about Russian women who travelled to Syria and married members of armed groups (see Russian Federation section below).

In October, writer and government critic **Roberto Saviano** participated in the Frankfurt Book Fair despite being excluded from the official **Italian** delegation. Forty-one writers signed a letter of protest denouncing Saviano’s exclusion (see Italy section below).

GOOD NEWS

The Coalition Against SLAPPs in Europe, which includes PEN International, welcomed the adoption in February of a Directive against ‘Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation’ (SLAPPs), intended to protect journalists and media outlets from abusive litigation across **European Union** member states. The April 2024 **Council of Europe’s** non-binding recommendation provided a roadmap for jurisdictions that are not subject to the EU Directive. The May 2024 European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) established new EU rules to protect media pluralism and independence.

Some persecuted writers saw improvements in their situation, in part due to PEN International’s campaigns. On 8 March, **Serbia** lifted an expulsion order against Russian literary translator **Elena Kuposova**, who had signed a petition condemning the Russian Federation’s war against Ukraine. That month, authorities in **Montenegro** dropped all charges against PEN member **Boban Batrićević** brought in relation to his writings (see Montenegro section below). On 25 June, Wikileaks founder and publisher **Julian Assange** was released from prison in the **United Kingdom** following a plea deal with US prosecutors (see United Kingdom section below). Russian-US journalist **Alsu Kurmasheva** was freed from prison in the **Russian Federation** on 1 August in a prisoner exchange that included US reporter **Evan Gershkovich** and Russian-British writer **Vladimir Kara-Murza**. On 31 October, Belarusian filmmaker and journalist **Andrej Hniot**, at risk of extradition to Belarus, was freed from house arrest and allowed to leave **Serbia** (see Serbia entry below). Kurdish poet **İlhan Sami Çomak** was released on 26 November after spending 30 years in prison in **Türkiye**. PEN members continued to write to persecuted writers throughout the region, providing much needed encouragement and hope.

CASE LIST EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

EMBLEMATIC CASES



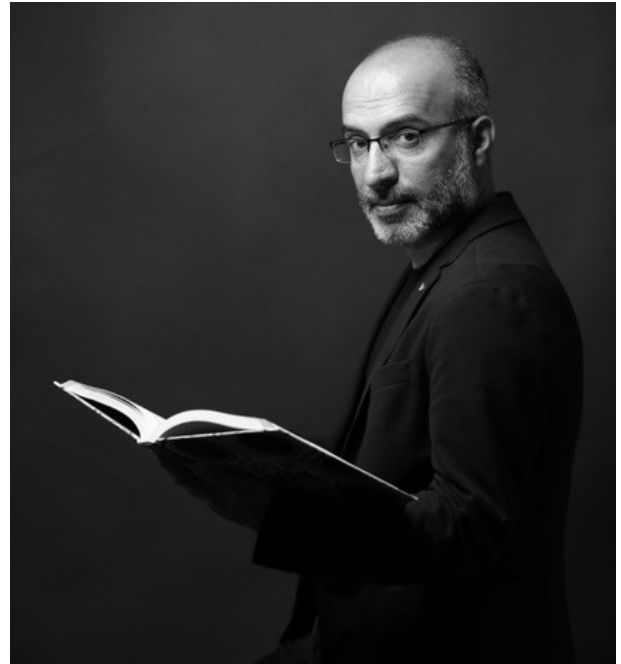
BELARUS

Kaciaryna ANDREJEVA (BACHVAŁAVA)

Writer imprisoned for 'treason against the state'

Journalist, writer and poet, Kaciaryna Andrejeva (real name Bachvałava) was arrested in Minsk in November 2020 while livestreaming a peaceful protest and sentenced to two years in prison in February 2021. In July 2022, she was sentenced to an additional eight years after conviction of bogus charges of 'treason against the state' following a trial held behind closed doors. Her case is emblematic of the relentless crackdown on independent voices in Belarus since the fraudulent presidential election of August 2020.

Kaciaryna Andrejeva. Photo credit: Irina Arekhovskaya



TÜRKIYE

Yavuz EKINCI

Writer accused of 'terrorism propaganda'

Kurdish writer Yavuz Ekinci faces up to seven and a half years in prison on bogus terrorism propaganda grounds for his book *Rüyası Bölünenler (Dream Divided)*. His trial opened in Istanbul in September 2024. The Court dismissed the case in December 2024 following [PEN International's campaign](#); the prosecution subsequently appealed the decision. *Dream Divided* remains banned for publication, distribution, and sale in Türkiye, where the authorities have dramatically increased their influence on the publishing landscape in recent years.

Yavuz Ekinci. Photo credit: Ege Tonbul

AZERBAIJAN

JUDICIAL HARASSMENT

Akram AYLISLI

Writer, poet, and playwright Akram Aylisli continued to face charges of resisting the authorities with violence under Article 315.1 of the Criminal Code, which provides for up to three years in prison (see Case Lists 2022 – 2023/2024). The alleged incident took place on 30 March 2016, when Akram Aylisli was detained at Heydar Aliyev airport in Baku, as he attempted to travel to Italy where he was due to speak at a literary festival. A young border official accused Aylisli of having punched him in the chest hard enough to bruise. Aylisli stated that the alleged punch was used as justification to deny him the right to leave the country.

Shortly after being detained, Aylisli signed a document compelling him to remain in Baku, thereby subjecting him to a local and international travel ban. Since then, he has been unable to attend scores of cultural and literary events and to promote his books. As part of the investigation, the Prosecutor General's office confiscated Aylisli's identity documents, which prevents him from accessing health care services. He is said to suffer from chronic bronchitis, heart and liver failure and remains in need of medical care. The case was ongoing as of 31 December 2024.

Akram Aylisli, born on 6 December 1937, has for years faced harassment by the Azerbaijani authorities in connection with his writings. His 2013 novel, *Stone Dreams*, part of a trilogy including *Yemen* and *A Fantastical Traffic Jam*, tackles the tense issue of Azerbaijani-Armenian relations and includes depictions of pogroms allegedly carried out by Azerbaijanis against Armenians in 1990. After the novel was published, Aylisli was stripped of his titles and medals and the president signed a decree stripping him of his presidential pension; his books were

also burnt. He was branded an apostate, and expelled from the Union of Azerbaijani Writers while people organised rallies against him. His books were withdrawn from the school curriculum and his plays were banned. An English translation by Katherine E. Young of his first book, *People and Trees: A Trilogy*, originally published in Russian in the 1970s, was published in November 2024.

BELARUS

IMPRISONED

Kaciaryna ANDREJEVA (BACHVAŁAVA)

Journalist, writer and poet, Kaciaryna Andrejeva (real name Bachvałava) is serving an eight-year prison sentence in Belarus on bogus charges of 'treason against the state'. Andrejeva was held in a medium-security penal colony in Homel, southeastern Belarus at the end of the year.

Andrejeva was arrested in Minsk on 15 November 2020 together with her colleague from Belsat TV, **Daria Čulcova**. They were livestreaming a peaceful protest honouring the memory of artist Raman Bandarenka, who was reportedly killed by Belarusian security officers following the presidential elections of August 2020, widely regarded as fraudulent. Andrejeva and Čulcova were sentenced to seven days of administrative detention on 17 November 2020, before being charged with 'organising and preparing of actions that grossly violate public order' under Article 342.1 of the Belarusian Criminal Code, and placed in pre-trial detention. On 18 February 2021, a court in Minsk found Andrejeva and Čulcova guilty and sentenced them to two years in prison. Their sentence was upheld on appeal on 23 April 2021.

Andrejeva was scheduled to be released on 5 September 2022, yet on 13 July 2022, a court in Homel, southeastern Belarus, sentenced her to an additional eight years in prison on bogus charges of 'treason against the

state' under Article 356.1 of the Belarusian Criminal Code. The trial was held behind closed doors. The verdict was upheld on appeal on 20 September 2022. Andrejeva still has to serve the remaining three months in prison left in her first sentence.

Born on 2 November 1993, Andrejeva is an award-winning Belarusian journalist and writer. She was working for the leading independent broadcaster Belsat TV at the time of her arrest. Her non-fiction book *Belarusian Donbas*, co-authored with her husband, journalist Ihar Iljaš, and published in 2020, details their investigation into the role of Belarusian citizens and organisations in the war in Donbas, eastern Ukraine. The book was deemed 'extremist' by the Belarusian authorities and subsequently banned in 2021. Andrejeva started composing poetry while in prison. Her poems have been published and translated by the #FreeAllWords initiative.

Ales BIALIATSKI

Writer, PEN Belarus member, human rights activist and Nobel Peace Prize winner Ales Bialiatski continued to serve a 10-year prison sentence in a medium-security penal colony in Horki – a facility known for inmates being beaten and subjected to hard labour. Detained on 14 July 2021, alongside several Viasna colleagues following raids by Belarusian law enforcement officers on more than a dozen civil society and human rights organisations, Bialiatski was convicted on 3 March 2023 of fabricated charges of smuggling (Article 228.4 of the Belarusian Criminal Code) and organising and financing actions that grossly violate public order (Article 342.2 of the Belarusian Criminal Code) and sentenced to 10 years.. His sentence was upheld on appeal on 21 April 2023 (see Case Lists 2023/2024, 2022 and 2021). He was reportedly prevented from receiving packages and medicine. He was in urgent need of medical care as of 31 December 2024.

Bialiatski has been targeted by Belarusian authorities for years. On 4 August 2011,

he was arrested on spurious charges of tax evasion. On 24 November 2011, he was sentenced to four-and-a-half years' imprisonment in a high security prison colony. PEN members actively campaigned for his release; he was amnestied in June 2014. On 21 May 2023, to mark the International Day of Solidarity with Political Prisoners in Belarus, PEN International published a letter signed by 103 Nobel Laureates, expressing solidarity with Bialiatski. In May 2024, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found his detention to be arbitrary and called for his immediate release.

Ales Bialiatski, born on 25 September 1962, is a literary scholar, essayist, and human rights defender. He was a founding member of the Belarusian literary organisation Tutejšyja (The Locals) and formerly served as head of the Maxim Bahdanovich Literary Museum in Minsk. In April 1996, he founded the Viasna Human Rights Centre, an organisation that campaigns for opposition activists who are harassed and persecuted by the Belarusian authorities. Bialiatski was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in December 2022 alongside the Russian human rights organisation Memorial, and the Ukrainian human rights organisation Center for Civil Liberties.

Aliaksandr FIADUTA

Writer, political analyst, literary critic and PEN Belarus member Aliaksandr Fiaduta continued to serve a 10-year prison term, imposed in September 2022 and upheld in November 2022. He was convicted of 'conspiracy or other acts committed to seize or hold state power in an unconstitutional manner' under Article 357.1 of the Belarusian Criminal Code, in relation to an alleged US-planned 'coup' and 'assassination attempt' against President Aliaksandr Lukašenka and his family. News that he was detained in the Russian Federation emerged on 13 April 2021, and he was subsequently returned to Belarus by the Belarusian KGB. Fiaduta suffers from serious heart problems (see Case Lists 2023/2024, and 2022).

Fiaduta previously received a suspended two-year prison term in May 2011.

Once an active member of Lukašenka's campaign team and later the President's press secretary, Aliaksandr Fiaduta, born on 3 November 1964, resigned from this post in the mid-1990s and joined the opposition. He became a vocal opponent of the current government and notably worked as a journalist for Russian and Belarusian independent newspapers (*Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta*, *Moskovskie Novosti*, *Imia*, and *Narodnaja Volia*). In December 2010, Fiaduta was arrested while working on an opposition campaign, and wrote *American Poems* while in pre-trial detention. *American Poems* won the 2012 Aleś Adamovič Award issued by PEN Belarus.

Uladzimir MACKIEVIČ

PEN Belarus member and renowned philosopher Uladzimir Mackievič continued to serve a five-year prison sentence imposed on spurious public order and national security grounds in a closed-door trial on 23 June 2022. Detained on 4 August 2021 when the Belarusian KGB raided his house after he posted a video on YouTube, Mackievič was convicted of 'organising and preparing actions that grossly violate public order', 'creation of an extremist group' and 'insulting the President' under Articles 342.1, 361.1(1) and 368.1 of the Belarusian Criminal Code respectively. He is held in prison No.4 in Mahilioŭ – known for its harsh conditions (see Case Lists 2023/2024, 2022 and 2021).

Born on 14 May 1956, Uladzimir Mackievič is a prominent Belarusian philosopher, essayist, public figure, and broadcaster. He played a key role in launching Charter'97, a civic initiative working to restore democracy and human rights in Belarus. In 2011, some seven years after being stripped of the right to teach at Belarusian public universities for criticising Aliaksandr Lukašenka, he co-founded the Flying University, an independent platform that promotes critical thinking. Prior to his 2021

arrest, since 2012 he had been hosting 'Talk of the Day', a show on Belsat TV channel. A prolific writer, Mackievič has penned numerous articles and about 50 research papers on philosophy, politics, culture, and transformation of education. He co-authored a series of books on civil society, dialogue, and values entitled *Belarus for Beginners* (2006–2009) and published video courses on philosophy and social change.

Andrzej POCZOBUT

A board member of the Union of Poles in Belarus, Andrzej Poczobut continued to be held in solitary confinement, serving an eight-year prison term in connection with his coverage of 2020 anti-government protests in Belarus, statements he made in support of the Polish minority in Belarus, and his labelling of the Soviet invasion of Poland in 1939 as an act of 'aggression'. He was reportedly still being denied access to life-saving heart medication.

Initially detained on 25 March 2021 in Hrodna, western Belarus, after the Union's offices throughout the country were searched, he was taken to a detention centre in Minsk and charged with inciting hatred under Article 130.3 of the Belarusian Criminal Code. Poczobut was subsequently also charged with encouraging sanctions aimed at harming the national security of Belarus (Article 361.3 of the Criminal Code). Found guilty and sentenced to eight years in a medium-security penal colony on 8 February 2023, his sentence was upheld on appeal on 26 May 2023 (see Case List 2023/2024 and 2022).

Born on 16 April 1973, Andrzej Poczobut is an essayist, journalist, columnist, blogger, poet, and musician. He is a correspondent of *Gazeta Wyborcza* – a Polish daily newspaper – and works for several Belarusian media outlets. His book *System Białoruś (System Belarus)*, published in 2013, explores Aliaksandr Lukašenka's grip on Belarus. Poczobut is a prominent Polish-Belarusian minority activist and

holds dual citizenship. The Polish authorities have repeatedly called for his release.

Maksim ZNAK

Lawyer, academic, and writer Maksim Znak remained held incommunicado -serving a 10-year sentence in a medium-security penal colony imposed on spurious national security grounds. Znak was the electoral campaign lawyer of opposition presidential candidates Viktor Babaryka and Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, and a member of the Coordination Council for the Transfer of Power, which called for the resignation of President Lukašenka following the disputed presidential election held in August 2020.

Maksim Znak was arrested by members of the main investigative department of the Investigative Committee of Belarus at Viktor Babaryka's election headquarters on 9 September 2020, and placed in pre-trial detention. He was subsequently charged with 'inciting actions aimed at harming the national security of the Republic of Belarus', 'conspiring to seize power by unconstitutional means' and 'creating an extremist formation', and tried alongside Maryia Kalesnikava, who headed Viktor Babaryka's campaign team. Their trial opened in Minsk on 4 August 2021 behind closed doors. They were both found guilty on 6 September 2021, with Znak receiving a 10-year sentence, and Kalesnikava 11 years in prison. In May 2022, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention called for his immediate and unconditional release. Znak was last seen by his lawyer in February 2023 (see Case List [2023/2024](#)).

Maksim Znak, born on 4 September 1981, is a lawyer, professor at the Law Faculty of the Belarusian State University, poet, and lyricist. While detained, Znak wrote *Зекameron* (*The Zekameron: One hundred tales from behind bars and eyelashes*, Vremja, Moscow, 2022), in which he poignantly details his new everyday life.

JUDICIAL HARASSMENT

Svetlana ALEXIEVICH

In August 2020, Svetlana Alexievich became a member of the Coordination Council for the Transfer of Power. On 20 August 2020, the Belarus Prosecutor General laid charges under Article 361 of the Belarussian Criminal Code – appeal to overthrow or change the constitutional order of the Republic of Belarus or to carry out crimes against the government – against members of the Coordination Council, including Alexievich. This carries a maximum three-year prison sentence, increased to five years if the act is carried out through 'mass media'. On 26 August 2020, she was questioned at the Investigative Committee building in Minsk, telling the press as she left that she had refused to cooperate. On 9 September 2020, Alexievich reported that unidentified men had attempted to enter her home. This led to several diplomats from European embassies in Minsk staging a 24-hour vigil at her home to protect her from attack. Alexievich left Belarus for Germany later that month, pledging to return once the political situation allows. The case against her was still pending as of 31 December 2024.

Alexievich's name and books were removed from the school curriculum in Belarus in August 2021. According to PEN Belarus, libraries across the country removed her books from circulation in June 2023.

Svetlana Alexievich, born on 31 May 1948, is a world-renowned author, translated into numerous languages, and has won numerous international awards, including the 2015 Nobel Prize in Literature. She is a former president of PEN Belarus.

ITALY

ON TRIAL

Roberto SAVIANO

Writer, journalist, and PEN award winner Roberto Saviano remained on trial accused of defaming Matteo Salvini, Italy's Deputy Prime Minister, in a speech in which Saviano accused Salvini of ignoring the mafia stranglehold on Italy in favour of stirring up resentment against immigrants. He faced up to three years in prison if convicted. The trial opened on 1 February 2023. In 2018, Salvini had threatened to remove Saviano's police protection, in place since October 2006 after Saviano received threats from the mafia following the March 2006 publication of his bestseller *Gomorrah*.

Previously, on 12 October 2023, Saviano was found guilty and fined for defaming Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni after he criticised her 2020 speech in which she said that NGO boats attempting to rescue refugees in the central Mediterranean should be seized and sunk, and the migrants on board repatriated. He subsequently decided not to appeal (see Case Lists [2023/2024](#) and [2022](#)).

In July 2023, the government-appointed CEO of the public broadcaster Radiotelevision Italia (RAI), Roberto Sergio, announced that a TV show hosted by Saviano had been cancelled. The four-part show – Insider, Face to Face with Crime – notably explored the mafia's influence on Italian politics and was scheduled to air in November 2023. Saviano condemned the decision as politically motivated. In May 2024, Sergio told the RAI Supervisory Committee that the recorded episodes would eventually be broadcast. Saviano attributed RAI's reversal to sustained pressure by his viewers, civil society organisations and mafia victims' relatives.

In October 2024, Saviano took part in the Frankfurt book fair despite being excluded from the official delegation representing Italy, the guest of honour.

Forty-one Italian writers had signed a letter of protest in the lead up to the fair, denouncing the decision to exclude Saviano as emblematic of the Italian authorities' pervasive crackdown on artistic freedom

Roberto Saviano, born on 22 September 1979, is the author of *Gomorrah*, an international bestseller that has sold over 10 million copies worldwide. Other books include *La bellezza e l'inferno* (*Beauty and the inferno*) (2009); *Vieni via con me* (*Come away with me*) (2011), *ZeroZeroZero* (2013), *La paranza dei bambini* (*The children's boat*) (2016), *In mare non esistono taxi* (*There are no taxis at sea*) (2019), *Gridalo* (*Shout it*) (2020), *Solo è il coraggio* (*Only courage*) (2022). He has written several screenplays and theatre scripts and regularly contributes to newspapers and magazines.

MOLDOVA (TRANSNISTRIA)

HARASSED

Dumitru CRUDU, Emilian GALAICU-PĂUN and Maria IVANOV

On 16 September 2024, Moldovan writers and PEN Romania members Dumitru Crudu, Emilian Galaicu-Păun and Maria Ivanov, as well as journalist Elvira Moroșan, were detained at the border of Bender/Tighina by agents with the Ministry of State Security (MGB) – the security service of the Russia-backed separatist government in Transnistria. The writers and journalist were heading to a literary meeting with high school students in Bender/Tighina (Bender/Tighina is a city within the internationally recognised borders of Moldova under de facto control of the separatist region of Transnistria, which broke away from Moldova in 1990).

According to Dumitru Crudu, who wrote a detailed account of their detention, MGB agents confiscated their identity documents

before searching their car. The agents notably confiscated copies of TIMPUL, a cultural magazine meant to be shared with the students, which included articles condemning the Russian Federation's war against Ukraine. They subsequently interrogated Crudu, Ivanov, Galaicu-Păun and Moroşan for over an hour, enquiring about the purpose of their visit and refusing to provide them with any explanations as to why they were being detained. Fearing for their arrest, Crudu managed to call representatives of Moldova's Ministry for Reintegration, who brokered their release. Crudu, Ivanov, Galaicu-Păun and Moroşan were subsequently sent back to Chişinău, Moldova's capital, before being told they would no longer be allowed into Transnistria. According to [media reports](#), the Moldovan authorities were working to ensure the original visit could take place at a later date. In November, Crudu and Ivanov filed a complaint against the agents who prevented them from entering Transnistria. The case was ongoing as of 31 December 2024.

Free expression organisations have [documented](#) how journalists are being obstructed or detained while reporting in Transnistria – including through systematic surveillance, harassment, and confiscation of equipment – with impunity. PEN International and PEN Romania [urged](#) the local authorities to ensure that writers and journalists – including Crudu, Ivanov, Galaicu-Păun and Moroşan – can work and travel in Transnistria freely and safely, without intimidation.

Dumitru Crudu (born on 8 November 1967) is an award-winning novelist, poet, and playwright. Emilian Galaicu-Păun (born on 22 June 1964) is an award-winning poet, novelist, essayist, literary critic, translator and publisher. Maria Ivanov (born on 21 September 1993) is a writer, poet, journalist and editor-in-chief of TIMPUL.

MONTENEGRO

HARASSED

Andrej NIKOLAIDIS

In March 2024, an effigy of prominent writer, journalist and PEN member Andrej Nikolaidis, was burnt at a carnival in Herceg Novi, southwestern Montenegro. The incident was the latest in a series of harassment and smears against Nikolaidis, on account of his views critical of the Montenegrin authorities (see [Case List 2022](#)).

On 2 March 2024, organisers of the Herceg Novi carnival burned an effigy of Andrej Nikolaidis, amidst chants denigrating his mixed ethnicity and association with Montenegrin literature. The incident generated wide coverage in Montenegro and the broader region, with civil society and academics [fearing](#) his targeting was reminiscent of historical acts of book burnings and meant to intimidate critical thinkers. Both the [Montenegrin PEN Centre](#) and [PEN Bosnia and Herzegovina](#) condemned the incident. Nikolaidis himself [expressed concerns](#) he was being targeted for his dissenting views.

Known for his political activism, anti-nationalism, anti-war stance, and support for human rights, Andrej Nikolaidis has received many threats throughout the years, including a [death threat](#) during a live radio appearance. In August 2022, the Ministry of Culture and Media of Montenegro notably announced it would consider [revoking](#) the status of 'Prominent Cultural Creator of Montenegro' from Nikolaidis, due to aesthetic statements he made about writers Ivo Andrić and Petar II Petrović Njegoš. Nikolaidis subsequently [faced](#) online smears and backlash in pro-government media. At the time, PEN International and the Montenegrin PEN Centre [raised concerns](#) that Nikolaidis was being targeted for his vocal opposition to the Russian Federation's war against Ukraine,

and of Russian and Serbian attempts to interfere in Montenegrin internal affairs.

Andrej Nikolaidis, born in 1974, is an acclaimed and influential Montenegrin-Bosnian writer and journalist. He is a member of both the Montenegrin PEN Centre and PEN Bosnia and Herzegovina. His novel *Sin (The Son)* won the European Union Prize for Literature in 2011 and Montenegro's prestigious Thirteenth of July Award in 2020. His novel *Anomaly* was notably awarded English PEN's [PEN Translates](#) award in 2024.

RELEASED

Boban BATRIĆEVIĆ

In March 2024, a court in Podgorica dropped all charges and dismissed the case against academic, writer, and vice president of the Montenegrin PEN Centre Boban Batrićević. Batrićević had [faced](#) up to 60 days in prison or a fine under [Article 19](#) of Montenegro's National Law on Public Order and Peace, which prohibits national, racial, or religious insults, for an August 2023 [article](#) he wrote on the independent Montenegrin portal Antena M about hateful narratives spread by the Serbian Orthodox church in Montenegro (see [Case List 2023/2024](#)).

Batrićević's statement and his ensuing prosecution came against the backdrop of a controversial population [census](#), eventually begun on 3 December 2023 after several delays, which opposition parties had threatened to boycott over fears pro-Russian forces, including the Serbian Orthodox Church, would spread propaganda and inflate the numbers of people identifying as Serbian. Batrićević's trial [opened](#) at the Misdemeanour Court in Podgorica on 22 January 2024 amidst a national outcry. The case was subsequently dismissed on 26 March 2024.

Boban Batrićević, born in 1988, is a prominent historian, civil society activist, and professor at the Faculty of Montenegrin Language and Literature in Cetinje, in the southwest of Montenegro, who specialises in the

history of propaganda and totalitarian movements, as well as cultural identity theory. He was elected vice president of the Montenegrin PEN Centre in 2022.

THE NETHERLANDS

KILLED – TRIAL IN PROGRESS

Peter R. DE VRIES

Dutch crime reporter Peter R. de Vries [died](#) on 15 July 2021 from injuries sustained in a shooting in Amsterdam nine days earlier. De Vries was shot five times, including in the head, while on his way to a car park after leaving the studio of RTL Boulevard, on which he appeared as a guest. Ursula von der Leyen, the European Commission president, condemned the killing, [stating](#) on 15 July 2021 that 'investigative journalists are vital to our democracies. We must do everything we can to protect them'.

Two suspects were arrested soon after the shooting; their trial opened in Amsterdam in June 2022. Prosecutors called for life sentences against them, but a verdict was postponed after new information emerged that judges said needed to be added to the case. Seven other suspects were subsequently arrested in the investigation. All nine men went on trial in Amsterdam in January 2024. On 12 June 2024, the court [sentenced](#) Delano G., the man who shot de Vries, and getaway driver Kamil E. to 28 years in prison. Krystian M., who organised the killing, was sentenced to 26 years and one month in prison. Three men were convicted of complicity in the murder and given sentences ranging from 10 to 14 years of imprisonment. One man was convicted of drug possession and sentenced to four weeks in jail. Two were acquitted over lack of evidence regarding their involvement in a criminal organisation. The full names were not released in line with Dutch privacy regulations. The Public Prosecution Service subsequently [filed](#) an appeal, calling for harsher sentences to be handed over to all nine men. The case

was ongoing as of 31 December 2024.

Peter R. de Vries, born on 14 November 1956, was a well-respected investigative journalist and crime reporter, who won critical acclaim for his reporting on the Dutch underworld. He notably worked for *De Telegraaf* and had his own television crime programme: Peter R. de Vries, misdaadverslaggever (Crime Reporter). He is the author of *Kidnapping Mr. Heineken*, an international bestseller. Before he was killed, de Vries had acted as an adviser to the key prosecution witness against alleged drug kingpin Ridouan Taghi. Derk Wiersum, the lawyer of a state witness in the case, was shot dead in Amsterdam in 2019.

NORWAY

ATTACKED

William NYGAARD

Following campaigning by PEN Norway and PEN International, publisher William Nygaard's legal team successfully appealed against the decision to close the investigation into the 1993 attempted murder of Nygaard, with the Norwegian authorities announcing on 24 July 2024 that the investigation would resume.

In April 2024, PEN International had joined PEN Norway in expressing profound disappointment and concern over the decision by the Oslo District Attorney's Office to dismiss the case regarding the attempted murder of prominent Norwegian publisher, PEN International vice president, and former president of PEN Norway, William Nygaard. On 11 October 1993, Nygaard, then publishing director at Aschehoug, one of Norway's largest publishing houses, was shot three times and seriously injured outside his house in Oslo. He spent months in hospital.

Nygaard quickly linked the shooting with his support for writer Salman Rushdie and Aschehoug's publication in Norwegian of Rushdie's book *The Satanic Verses*. Yet it

took five years for the Norwegian police to acknowledge a connection between the attempted murder of Nygaard and the fatwa issued in 1989 by Iran's late leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini against Rushdie, the book, and his publishers. Without anyone being named as a suspect or charged with the attack against Nygaard, the case was dropped in 2007.

Norway's special investigation unit, Kripas, reopened the case in 2009 following a 2008 documentary *Blodsporene fra Dagaliveien* (*The Traces of Blood from Dagaliveien*) by investigative journalist and author Odd Isungset (who also documented the attack in his 2010 book *Hvem skjøt William Nygaard?* (*Who shot William Nygaard?*)). In October 2018, two days before the expiration of the statute of limitation, Kripas charged two individuals with Nygaard's attempted murder. The investigation continued until September 2023, when Kripas submitted the case to the Oslo District Attorney's Office, suggesting dismissal due to insufficient evidence. PEN Norway notably called for an independent public inquiry into the handling of the Nygaard case by the police. PEN International renewed its call for full justice and accountability for the attack.

RUSSIAN FEDERATION

IMPRISONED

Yevgenia BERKOVICH and Svetlana PETRIYCHUK

Theatre director Yevgenia Berkovich and playwright Svetlana Petriyuchuk are each serving lengthy prison sentences handed down by a military court in Moscow in July 2024, on fabricated 'terrorism' grounds.

On 8 July 2024, the Second Western District Military Court in Moscow found Yevgenia Berkovich and Svetlana Petriyuchuk guilty of 'justifying terrorism' under Article 205.2 of

the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation and sentenced them to six years in prison. Their trial took place behind closed doors, with members of the public and journalists without cameras permitted to be present for only the sentencing. Berkovich and Petriyчук will also be banned from ‘administering websites’ for three years after their release. In December 2024, a Moscow military court of appeals upheld the verdict but reduced Berkovich’s sentence to five years and seven months in a medium-security penal colony, and Petriyчук’s to five years and ten months.

The case against Berkovich and Petriyчук stems from their award-winning play *Finist Yasny Sokol* (*Finist, The Brave Falcon*), about Russian women who travelled to Syria and married members of armed groups. Berkovich and Petriyчук were detained in May 2023 and kept in pre-trial detention despite asking to be placed under house arrest. Both women denied the charges brought against them, arguing that their aim was to prevent terrorism. Supporters of Berkovich believe her prosecution may be linked to a series of poems she wrote criticising the Russian Federation’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. According to human rights groups, no one accused of terrorism or related crimes has been acquitted in the Russian Federation since statistics first became available in 2015.

Yevgenia Berkovich, born on 29 April 1985, is a Russian theatre director, playwright and poet. Svetlana Petriyчук, born on 22 April 1980, is a Russian playwright, screenwriter and theatre director. First staged in 2020 by Berkovich’s independent theatre project based on Petriyчук’s eponymous play, *Finist Yasny Sokol* won the Russian Federation’s most prestigious theatre award, the Golden Mask, in two categories in 2022: Best Playwright (Petriyчук) and Best Costume Design.

Yuri Alexeyevich DMITRIEV

Historian, author and head of the Karelian branch of the human rights centre Memorial, north-western Russia, Yuri

Dmitriev continues to serve a 15-year prison sentence in a high-security penal colony after conviction of alleged sexual offences his supporters in the Russian Federation and abroad say are punishment for his research unearthing human rights abuses of the Stalin era, which he has published in several books. Dmitriev was arrested on 13 December 2016 and charged with making pornographic images of his adopted daughter and possessing an illegal firearm. He denied the charges, saying that the purpose of the photographs was to monitor the health of the child for social services. He spent more than a year in pre-trial detention.

On 5 April 2018, Dmitriev was cleared of the child pornography charges but was sentenced to two years and six months of probation (three months after deducting time spent in custody) and community service for illegally possessing components of a firearm. On 14 June 2018, the Karelian Supreme Court overturned his acquittal and placed him under new charges of ‘violent acts of a sexual nature in relation to a person who has not reached the age of fourteen’. Dmitriev subsequently underwent enforced psychiatric testing.

Both criminal cases against Dmitriev were merged in October 2018. On 22 July 2020, he was acquitted of the firearms charges and those of child pornography but was sentenced to a three-and-a-half-year term for sexual assault against an underage child. On 29 September 2020, the Karelia Supreme Court overturned the July acquittal relating to possession of firearms and sent the charges of child pornography for further expert ‘consideration’. It increased his sentence by another 10 years. The appeal hearing took place behind closed doors, without the presence of Dmitriev or his lawyer. On 27 December 2021, a court in Petrozavodsk increased his jail sentence to a total of 15 years. The sentence was upheld by the Supreme Court of the Republic of Karelia on 22 March 2022.

Yuri Dmitriev, born on 28 January 1956, is the author of several books, including *Место расстрела Сандармох* (*Sandarmokh, a Place of Execution*) (1999), *Поминальные списки Карелии. Уничтоженная Карелия. Часть 2. Большой террор* (*The Karelian Lists of Remembrance: Murdered Karelia, part 2, The Great Terror*) (2002) and *Место памяти Сандармох* (*Sandarmokh, a Place of Remembrance*) (2019). He continues to write from prison.

SERBIA

KILLED: TRIAL IN PROGRESS

Slavko ĆURUVIJA

On 2 February 2024, the Belgrade Court of Appeals announced that it had acquitted four former Serbian state security officers who had already been twice convicted of the murder of journalist, editor, and publisher Slavko Ćuruvija, shot and killed outside his house in Belgrade on 11 April 1999. Ćuruvija was an outspoken critic of former Serbian President Slobodan Milošević. According to news reports, the verdict, which cited lack of reliable evidence, was reached on 19 April 2023, but was only made public on 2 February 2024 and is final. The Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation subsequently appealed to Serbia's Supreme Court to assess whether the appellate proceedings adhered to the rule of law. In December 2024, the Foundation reported receiving online death threats and promptly informed the Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime.

In March 1999, Ćuruvija was fined and sentenced to five months in prison for 'spreading false information', after he published a story linking the killing of a Belgrade doctor to then Serbian deputy prime minister, Milovan Bojić. Ćuruvija was appealing the sentence at the time of his death. On 5 February 2019, the Higher Court in Belgrade convicted four former State Security Directorate (RDB) officers for

their role in the killing. Radomir Marković, former Head of the RDB, and Milan Radonjić, RDB officer, were sentenced to 30 years in prison, while agents Ratko Romić and Miroslav Kurak received 20 years. On 15 July 2020, the Belgrade Court of Appeals overturned the previous verdicts, ruling that they violated the rules of criminal procedure, and ordered a retrial. On 2 December 2021, the Higher Court in Belgrade convicted the same officers again and sentenced them to the same prison terms. Their appeal started at the Belgrade Court of Appeal in March 2023, ending up with their acquittal. PEN International condemned the decision as sending a dangerous signal that attacks against writers and journalists in Serbia would go unpunished.

Slavko Ćuruvija, born on 9 August 1949, was the owner of Serbia's first private daily newspaper *Dnevni Telegraph* and the weekly magazine *Evropljanin*. His book *Ibeovac* (1990) is based on his interviews with Vladimir 'Vlado' Dapčević, a former political dissident and prisoner.

DEATH THREAT

Dinko GRUHONJIĆ

Dinko Gruhonjić, a journalist, writer, and lecturer at the Faculty of Philosophy of Novi Sad in Vojvodina, northern Serbia, has been facing increased harassment, smears, and death threats since 14 March 2024, following the publication of an edited video in which Gruhonjić was falsely made to appear as welcoming his sharing a name with Dinko Šakić, who was found guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity in World War II.

On 21 March 2024, unknown individuals painted threatening graffiti on the entrance to Gruhonjić's residence. That same day, his personal phone number was disclosed, resulting in him receiving numerous death threats. Students who publicly supported Gruhonjić also reported receiving death threats. The coordinated smear campaign and threats continued throughout 2024.

For example, in May during a TV interview, Prime Minister Miloš Vučević falsely named Gruhonjić as the opposition candidate for mayor of the city of Novi Sad and claimed he was the main ideologue of the Serbian opposition, placing him at risk of attack. In June, Gruhonjić discovered leaflets falsely portraying him once again as opposition candidate in Novi Sad. PEN International understands that despite a formal complaint being lodged, law enforcement officials had not launched a thorough investigation into the threats by the end of the year. Regional and international press freedom organisations urged the Serbian authorities to hold those responsible to account. PEN International believes Gruhonjić is being targeted on account of his staunch criticism of nationalism and the glorification of war criminals.

Dinko Gruhonjić, born on 15 September 1970, is the author of three books – two on journalism *Diskurs agencijskog novinarstva (Discourse of Agency Journalism)* (2011) and *Hibridni novinarski žanrovi (Hybrid Journalistic Genres)* (2021) and one collection of his columns *Ničim Izazvana Zbirka (Unprovoked Collection)* (2012). He also works as Programme Director at the Vojvodina Association of Independent Journalists (NDNV).

Marko VIDOJKOVIĆ

Death threats against writer and journalist Marko Vidojković persisted in 2024. Vidojković notably spoke in March 2024 about his plight and the broader situation in Serbia at an online panel event marking the launch of PEN International's 2023/2024 Case List of persecuted writers.

An outspoken writer and journalist, Vidojković is known for his critical stance towards the Serbian authorities. Death threats intensified after the publication of his best-selling novel *Djubre (Trash)*, in September 2020, prompting him and his family to relocate out of concern for their safety. Since 2021, Vidojković has reported several instances of being publicly smeared (see Case List 2023/2024 and Case List 2022).

In September 2024, a court in Belgrade found Vidojković guilty of causing 'mental pain' to Aleksandar Šapić, the mayor of Belgrade, and ordered him to pay RSD70,000 (approximately USD620) in a case that bore the hallmarks of a SLAPP. Harassment of Vidojković by government officials and pro-government supporters continued as of 31 December 2024.

Marko Vidojković, born on 1 October 1975, is a writer, journalist, and TV host from Serbia, who regularly comments on political and societal issues, including in his podcast *Dobar, Los, Zao* (The Good, the Bad and the Evil). His dystopian novel *Djubre (Trash, Laguna 2020)* focuses on corruption and attracted the ire of pro-government media and members of the public. His latest book *Povrede na radu (Work injuries)*, a collection of columns and satirical texts spanning from 2018 to 2023, was published in December 2024.

THREATENED

Jovo BAKIĆ

Writer and academic Jovo Bakić continued to face threats and harassment by government officials and pro-government social media trolls in 2024, with Minister for Family Care and Demography Milica Đurđević notably branding him 'extremist'. Bakić further told PEN International he received several online messages threatening him and his family during the year.

Bakić's ordeal originally started on 13 June 2019, after the independent weekly NIN published an interview in which he denounced the nationalistic stance of the Serbian authorities and connections between criminal organisations and government representatives. That same day, Serbia's President Aleksandar Vučić smeared Bakić at a press conference, calling for a criminal investigation against him to be launched. An edited version of the interview, shown by Serbian broadcaster RTS, falsely made Bakić to appear to be calling for violence. A pre-investigation procedure was launched

on 14 June 2019 but was promptly shelved after Bakić provided a copy of his interview to the police. Yet attacks against Bakić by members of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) and pro-government tabloids continued at the time, with Bakić receiving several anonymous threats online.

On 7 May 2023, following two mass shootings in the country within days, pro-government Pink TV broadcast a short film on social media quoting Jovo Bakić out of context, accusing him of stoking violence. A smear campaign by government officials and pro-government outlets and trolls ensued, with then Prime Minister Ana Brnabić notably urging the University of Belgrade to take a stand against Bakić and an SNS MP starting a petition calling for his dismissal. Pro-government tabloids quoted Bakić as calling for ‘blood’ to be spilled in the streets of Belgrade – words he never used. PEN International has seen several anonymous messages sent to Bakić, threatening him and his family with rape. Alarmingly, his home address was disclosed on Pink TV. Bakić also reported being approached twice on 3 June 2023 by an unknown individual who threatened and insulted him. PEN International has called for an end to the harassment.

Jovo Bakić, born on 23 March 1970, is a writer, sociologist and academic, who specializes in national conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. His writings focus on theories of ethnicity, nation and nationalism, national minorities, refugees, conflict, and war studies, and he frequently contributes to daily independent newspapers. He currently works as Associate Professor at the University of Belgrade, Serbia.

HARASSED

Vladimir ARSENIJEVIĆ and other staff of KROKODIL

On 20 September 2024 at around 4pm, a group of Russian-speaking men wearing clothes with far-right Serbian imagery, entered the premises of the KROKODIL Centre for Contemporary Literature in

Belgrade, took down a Ukrainian flag and intimidated staff. KROKODIL, which notably set up the first Ukrainian library in Serbia, hosted Ukrainian writers and delivered humanitarian aid to Ukraine, and is one of the few associations in Serbia that actively denounces Russian propaganda. Although KROKODIL staff reported the incident to the police and provided high-resolution security camera footage, no progress had been reported in the investigation as of 31 December 2024.

Disturbingly, in October 2024, an activist with KROKODIL was invited to the Serbian Security Information Agency to provide information about the incident. Their phone was left unattended outside the interview room during the meeting. A subsequent forensic analysis by Amnesty International found evidence that the NoviSpy Android spyware had been installed on their phone during that time.

Set up in 2009 with the aim of building bridges in the Western Balkans, KROKODIL is an internationally acclaimed association focusing on literature, culture and socio-political programmes, which hosts a renowned annual literary festival in Belgrade. Its president and creative director is **Vladimir Arsenijević**, an award-winning writer, translator and publisher.

KROKODIL has faced systematic and sustained pressure from the Serbian authorities since its inception, with threats soaring following the Russian Federation’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. The office is often vandalized, and offensive graffiti is painted on its outside walls. In an alarming move, the authorities filed 28 misdemeanor charges to date against KROKODIL and its staff, for removing hateful graffiti in Belgrade and other cities in Serbia. KROKODIL set up a SLAPP Back Fund, relying on private donations to cover mounting legal fees. Staff have also reported receiving threats of physical violence – including sexual violence – and death threats. Despite regularly informing

the relevant authorities, impunity persists, encouraging further threats and attacks.

CONDITIONAL RELEASE

Andrej HNIOT

Andrej Hniot, a Belarusian filmmaker, journalist, and activist, was arrested upon his arrival in Belgrade on 30 October 2023, on the basis of an Interpol arrest warrant issued at the request of the Belarusian authorities on alleged charges of tax evasion (Article 243.2 of the Belarusian Criminal Code), which carries up to seven years in prison. Hniot denied any wrongdoings, arguing that these charges were fabricated and in retaliation for his journalistic work and political activism.

On 31 May 2024, Serbia's High Court ruled in favour of Hniot's extradition to Belarus. Hniot was placed under house arrest on 5 June 2024, after spending seven months in detention in Belgrade Central Prison, where he said he was not provided with adequate medical care and his health badly deteriorated. Under house arrest, Hniot had to wear a tracking ankle bracelet and was only allowed to leave his apartment for one hour a day. In August, the Interpol arrest warrant was withdrawn, due to violations of provisions of the Interpol Statute relating to politically motivated prosecutions. On 11 September 2024, the Court of Appeal in Belgrade overturned an earlier decision to extradite him to Belarus, though ordered the case to be retried. Following sustained pressure, Hniot was freed from house arrest on 31 October 2024 and subsequently allowed to leave Serbia. He held a press conference in Germany on 2 November, where he recalled his ordeal and shared details of his release. PEN International campaigned for his release and understands that the extradition process in Serbia is still ongoing and continues to call on the Serbian authorities to drop the case against him.

Born on 7 July 1982, Andrej Hniot is a Belarusian filmmaker, journalist, activist and co-founder of the Free Association of

Athletes SOS-BY, which notably played a role in the cancellation of the 2021 Hockey World Cup in Belarus and was subsequently labelled 'extremist' by the Belarusian authorities. Hniot also collaborated with a range of independent news outlets during the 2020 protests that swept through Belarus following the disputed presidential elections that saw Aliaksandr Lukašenka return to a sixth term in office.

TÜRKIYE

KILLED – TRIAL IN PROGRESS

Hrant DINK

Impunity continues for the murder of Hrant Dink, author and editor of the Armenian language magazine *Agos*, killed outside his office in Istanbul on 19 January 2007. In July 2011, 17-year-old Ogün Samast was sentenced to 22 years and 10 months in prison for Dink's murder.

In May 2013, the Supreme Court of Appeal accepted Hrant Dink's lawyers' call for the case to be considered as an organised crime, which opened the way for several new investigations and trials, involving law enforcement and security officials, members of the prosecutorial services, and members of criminal organisations. In July 2019, the Istanbul 14th Heavy Penal Court concluded that the murder 'was an organised crime' and sentenced seven defendants to prison, ranging from 99 years and six months to two years and nine months. In a separate trial involving public officials, 26 out of 77 defendants were given prison terms in March 2021 in relation to the murder; four were sentenced to life in prison, including two without the possibility of parole. Dink's family appealed against the verdict, arguing that the court did not expose the full conspiracy behind his killing. They requested a retrial from the Constitutional Court of Türkiye in July 2023. The Court had not taken a decision as of December 2024.

On 15 November 2023, Ogün Samast was freed on parole after serving 16 years and 10 months in prison, triggering widespread criticism across the country and prompting the Ministry of Justice to issue a statement saying that it had followed the law. PEN International continues to call for full justice.

Update: On 10 January 2025, seven people accused in one of the trials for Hrant Dink's murder benefited from the statute of limitations in Türkiye and were spared trial. Eight intelligence and police officers were retried for 'premeditated homicide' and 'violation of the constitutional order' and subsequently sentenced to life in prison on 7 February 2025.

IMPRISONED

Selahattin DEMIRTAŞ

On 16 May 2024, the Ankara 22nd Heavy Penal Court found writer and former co-chair of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), Selahattin Demirtaş, guilty of 'aiding in undermining the unity and integrity of the state', 'incitement to commit a crime' and 'making terrorist propaganda', sentencing him to a combined total of 42 years in prison. The trial, which started in April 2021 and involved 108 HDP members, was part of a probe into deadly protests across Türkiye from 6 to 8 October 2014, which began over accusations that the Turkish army stood by as Islamic State militants besieged the Syrian Kurdish town of Kobane. It is widely seen as politically motivated, with the HDP facing a potential ban in a separate case. Many senior HDP figures were convicted of offences including homicide and harming the unity of the Turkish state. Some of the defendants were acquitted. The HDP denied all charges.

Demirtaş was arrested on 4 November 2016, alongside several HDP MPs, on charges of being a leading member of a terrorist organisation and inciting public hatred and hostility. The Turkish authorities failed to implement a December 2020 ruling by the Grand Chamber of the

European Court of Human Rights, which ordered Demirtaş' immediate release.

Demirtaş has faced numerous previous prosecutions. In a separate case, on 7 September 2018, Demirtaş was sentenced to four years and eight months in prison for allegedly carrying out terrorist propaganda during a speech he had given in 2013. Shortly before the Grand Chamber hearing, Demirtaş' release from pre-trial detention was ordered, but he remained in prison due to this separate case. His sentence was upheld by the Court of Cassation on 26 April 2021 and became final that day. In March 2021, Demirtaş was further sentenced to three years and six months in prison for 'insulting' President Erdoğan. His sentence was upheld on appeal in February 2022.

Politician and author Selahattin Demirtaş, born on 10 April 1973, wrote a collection of short stories while in prison entitled *Seher (Dawn)* (2017), which instantly became a bestseller and was translated into scores of languages, notably being awarded a PEN Translates award in 2018 by English PEN. He later wrote *Devran* in 2019. His latest book, co-written with Yiğit Bener, *Arafta Düet (Duet in Purgatory)* was published in 2024.

Mehmet Osman KAVALA

Publisher, civil and cultural rights activist, and philanthropist Osman Kavala continues to serve a life sentence upheld on 28 September 2023 by Türkiye's Court of Cassation. The court also upheld 18-year prison sentences against his co-defendants Çiğdem Mater, Can Atalay, Mine Özerden and Tayfun Kahraman (three other defendants – Mücella Yapıcı, Hakan Altınay and Yiğit Ali Ekmekçi – were acquitted in February 2025).

Kavala – who has been detained continuously since 18 October 2017 – and eight co-defendants present in court were acquitted on 18 February 2020 of all charges related to alleged crimes committed by protestors across Türkiye during the 2013 Gezi Park protests. However, in January 2021, the

Istanbul regional appeals court overturned the acquittals, and in April 2022, Kavala was convicted of ‘attempting to overthrow the government’ and sentenced to aggravated life in prison. Seven co-defendants – Çiğdem Mater, Can Atalay, Mine Özerden, Tayfun Kahraman, Mücella Yapıcı Hakan Altınay and Yiğit Ali Ekmekçi – were sentenced to 18 years’ imprisonment. Their sentences were upheld on appeal in December 2022. In February 2022, the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers voted to begin infringement proceedings against Türkiye over its failure to abide by a December 2019 ruling from the European Court of Human Rights urging Kavala’s immediate release.

In April 2024, the European Court of Human Rights published details of and granted priority status to a second case lodged by Kavala in January 2024, concerning violations of the European Convention on Human Rights perpetrated against him since the Court’s ruling of December 2019 (Articles 3, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11 and 18). The case was referred by the Court to Türkiye on 21 March 2024, which appeared to have failed to comply with a request to reply by 16 July 2024.

Osman Kavala, born on 2 October 1957, has dedicated his life to promoting open dialogue and peace, human rights, and democratic values in Türkiye. He is a prominent businessman who helped establish a number of civil society organisations, including Anadolu Kültür. He also helped found İletişim Publishing in 1983, which has since become one of Türkiye’s largest publishing houses.

ON TRIAL

Gulgeç AKDENİZ (pen name Gulgeç DERYASPI)

Writer and Kurdish PEN member Gulgeç Akdeniz – pen name Gulgeç Deryaspî – remained on trial at the end of the year, appealing a six-year three-month prison term imposed after conviction on 3 December 2020 of ‘membership of a terrorist organisation’ under Article 314/2 of Türkiye’s

Penal Code. She denies any wrongdoing.

Deryaspî was arrested on 25 July 2019 following simultaneous raids across Bitlis province, eastern Türkiye, during which eight other individuals were also detained. She was charged on 29 July 2019 and sent to Bitlis E Type Closed Prison. The first hearing was held on 4 February 2020; she was released from pre-trial detention on 30 March 2020 in an effort by prison authorities to stem breakouts of COVID-19 in the country’s overcrowded jails. Her appeal before the Court of Cassation was lodged on 28 February 2021. PEN International has campaigned for her release.

Born in 1978, Gulgeç Deryaspî studied Kurdish Language and Culture at Muş University, eastern Türkiye. She has published three novels in Kurdish. *Tariya Bi Tav (Darkness with Sunshine)*, published in 2010, portrays life in Kurdish villages and explores the concept of alienation. *Xezal (Gazelle)*, published in 2013, depicts the struggle of a woman standing against patriarchy and state oppression, while *Ez Ne Ezim (I am not who I am)*, published in 2018, explores existential and philosophical questions. She has been a member of Kurdish PEN since 2013. She joined German PEN’s Writers-in-Exile programme in 2023.

Can DÜNDAR

Can Dündar, then editor of the daily newspaper *Cumhuriyet*, continues to appeal against a lengthy prison term and is on trial on other charges (see Case Lists [2014 – 2023/2024](#)). Dündar was detained on 26 November 2015 alongside his Ankara bureau chief Erdem Gül on terrorism and espionage charges, in connection with a May 2015 story published by *Cumhuriyet* featuring photos and videos of Turkish intelligence agency’s trucks allegedly carrying arms to Syria. President Erdoğan filed a criminal complaint accusing them of trying to manipulate justice with fabricated material and violating confidentiality by publishing the story. Dündar and Gül were released

on 26 February 2016 following a Supreme Court decision that stated that their rights and that of the press had been violated. On 23 December 2020, Dündar was sentenced *in absentia* to a combined total of 27 years and six months in prison. The appeal process was ongoing as of 31 December 2024.

Dündar is also accused of ‘attempting to overthrow the government’ in the ‘Gezi Park’ trial case (see Mehmet Osman Kavala entry above). Proceedings were ongoing as of 31 December 2024.

Dündar is also facing several years in prison in relation to the ‘Editors Watch’ solidarity action with *Özgür Gündem* daily and for posting a video about arms shipments to Islamist groups in Türkiye on his news website *Özgürüz* (We are free) on 1 March 2017. Hearings continued throughout 2024; proceedings were ongoing at the end of the year.

In December 2022, Dündar revealed he had been added to a database published by Türkiye’s Ministry of Interior that identifies alleged terrorists and offers rewards for their capture. In October 2024, the social media platform X blocked access to Dündar’s account in Türkiye. In total, 107 accounts were blocked, including those of several journalists and activists from Türkiye living in exile, following allegations from the authorities that they were spreading terror propaganda following the death of US-based cleric Fethullah Gülen (whom Türkiye blamed for orchestrating a failed coup attempt on 15 July 2016). The ban remained in place at the end of the year.

Can Dündar is the author of *We Are Arrested: A Journalist’s Notes from a Turkish Prison*, which the Royal Shakespeare Company in Britain turned into a play in 2018. He currently resides in Germany, where he launched *Özgürüz*.

Yavuz EKINCI

Writer Yavuz Ekinci remained on trial at the end of the year, accused of ‘making terrorist propaganda’ in relation to his book *Rüyası Bölünenler* (*Dream Divided*), a charge that carries up to seven and a half

years in prison under Article 7 of Türkiye’s Anti-Terror Law No. 3713 – routinely used to silence independent voices. The trial opened on 18 September 2024 at the 23rd High Criminal Court in Istanbul, which dismissed all charges against Ekinci on 9 December 2024 following PEN’s campaign. The prosecution subsequently appealed the decision; the case was pending as of 31 December 2024.

Previously, on 14 March 2023, a court in Istanbul ruled that *Dream Divided* included content amounting to ‘terrorist propaganda’ and banned its publication, distribution, and sale. Copies of the book were also confiscated. The case was pending before Türkiye’s Constitutional Court as of 31 December 2024.

In a separate case in March 2022, Ekinci was found guilty of ‘making terrorist propaganda’ and handed a suspended sentence of one year, six months and 22 days in prison, for eight tweets published on his Twitter account in 2013 and 2014. The tweets, none of which promoted or incited violence, for the most part related to the Newroz (New Year) celebrations in Diyarbakır, south-eastern Türkiye, and to the 2014 battle of Kobane in Syria. The case was pending before Türkiye’s Court of Cassation as of 31 December 2024. In 2018, a smear campaign was launched online against Ekinci following the publication of his book *Peygamberin Endişesi* (*The Prophet’s Concern*).

Yavuz Ekinci, born in 1979, has received multiple awards for his short stories, including the 2005 Haldun Taner Award and the 2007 Yunus Nadi Award. His work focuses on the plight of Kurdish people in Türkiye and has been translated into German, Greek, and Kurdish. He also works as a teacher and editor of Kurdish literature. Published in 2014, *Dream Divided* tells the journey of a Kurdish man who fled Türkiye for political reasons and struggles to build a new life in Germany. Upon learning that his father is gravely ill, the protagonist sets on a journey to find his long-lost brother, who took up arms years prior and fled to the Qandil Mountains. The book ends with a call for unity and peace.

Professor Şebnem Korur FINCANCI

Prominent academic, forensic scientist, and leading human rights defender, Professor Şebnem Korur Fincancı remained on trial throughout 2024 in relation to restrained comments made in 2022 during a live interview regarding the possible use of chemical weapons by Türkiye's armed forces against members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Arrested on 26 October 2022 on charges of 'disseminating propaganda for a terrorist organisation' under Article 7/2 of Anti-Terror Law No. 3713, Fincancı was sentenced to two years, eight months, and 15 days in prison on 11 January 2023. She was freed pending appeal. The case was ongoing as of 31 December 2024 (see Case Lists 2023/2024 and 2022).

In November 2023, a court in Ankara ordered the dismissal of the elected executive board of the Turkish Medical Association (Türk Tabipler Birliği – TTB), chaired by Fincancı – leading to a national and international outcry. In October 2024, a court in Ankara ordered Fincancı to pay TL50,000 (approximately USD1,400) in damages to Türkiye's Ministry of National Defence. The lawsuit claimed that Fincancı's comments on the alleged use of chemical weapons had damaged the Ministry's reputation.

In a separate trial that began on 14 October 2024, Fincancı stood accused of publicly insulting the Turkish nation, the Turkish Republic, the institutions and organs of the state (Article 301 of Türkiye's Penal Code), in relation to comments she made during an interview in March 2022 on instances of torture and other ill-treatment.

Former Chair of the Turkish Medical Association and board member of the Human Rights Foundation of Türkiye (HRFT), Şebnem Korur Fincancı has been judicially harassed for years, including in the *Özgür Gündem* case in which she and co-defendants Erol Önderoğlu and

Ahmet Aziz Nesin are undergoing a retrial for acting as guest editors of the Kurdish daily during a country-wide solidarity campaign in 2016. This is despite the court ruling to acquitt all three on 17 July 2019. Fincancı was also one of the 'Academics for Peace' – a group of 2,212 academics who were signatories of a petition calling for a restart to peace negotiations in the south-east of Türkiye. Fincancı was tried for her participation and acquitted of all charges.

Update: Fincancı was acquitted at a trial hearing on 20 February 2025 in relation to the defamation case concerning her March 2022 comments about torture.

Pınar SELEK

Sociologist, feminist, writer, and PEN Türkiye member Pınar Selek continued to face a decades-long trial over a 1998 explosion that killed seven and injured 100 in the Istanbul Spice Bazaar. Arrested in July 1998, Selek spent over two years in prison, where she said she suffered torture and other ill-treatment. Selek has been acquitted of all charges four times – in 2006, 2008, 2011 and 2014 – due to expert witnesses testifying that the cause of the explosion was a gas leak not a bomb, yet courts ordered retrials after each of these acquittals. Her fourth trial resulted in a conviction in January 2013 when Selek was handed an aggravated life sentence, although this conviction was overturned by Türkiye's Supreme Court of Appeals on 11 June 2014 on procedural grounds. The 15th High Criminal Court in Istanbul subsequently acquitted her of all charges on 19 December 2014.

On 21 June 2022, the Turkish Supreme Court overturned Selek's fourth acquittal. Her retrial before the Istanbul Criminal Court which opened on 31 March 2023 has been postponed several times and was ongoing at the end of the year. She is the subject of an international arrest warrant. PEN International believes that her prosecution is linked to her work as a sociologist researching Kurdish communities in the mid-to-late 1990s,

and that she is being pursued through the courts as a means of penalising her for her legitimate research and commentary. At the time of her arrest, Selek had been working on an oral history of the banned Kurdistan's Workers Party (PKK) and talking to some PKK members to find out why they had chosen armed violence. Selek reported being tortured under investigation, in an attempt to coerce her into divulging the names of individuals she had interviewed as part of her research (see Case Lists 2012–2014 and 2022–2023/2024).

Pınar Selek, born on 8 October 1971, is a dual national French-Turkish sociologist, feminist, writer, and member of PEN Türkiye. She has written extensively about the plight of women, the poor, street children, the LGBTQI community and the Kurds in Türkiye. She is one of the founding editors of *Amargi*, a Turkish feminist journal. Her latest book *Le Chaudron Militaire Turc (The Military Cauldron)* was published in August 2023. She has been living in France since 2012.

Meral ŞİMŞEK

Throughout 2024, writer, poet, and Kurdish PEN member Meral Şimşek continued to be on trial, appealing against a 15-month prison sentence imposed by the Malatya 2nd High Criminal Court in Malatya province, eastern Türkiye on 7 October 2021, after it convicted her of 'making terrorist propaganda'.

Anti-terror police detained Şimşek on 9 December 2020; she was released the following day pending trial and placed under a travel ban. In January 2021, she was charged with 'membership of a terrorist organisation' and 'making terrorist propaganda'. The indictment mentions Şimşek's short story *Arzela*, featured in the anthology *Kurdistan + 100*, in which 12 contemporary Kurdish writers imagine a country they could call their own by the year 2046. Şimşek was found guilty of 'making terrorist propaganda' and sentenced to 15 months in prison. The court acquitted her of the charge of 'membership of a terrorist organisation' and lifted her travel ban.

Şimşek attempted to flee to Greece on 29 June 2021 but was apprehended by Greek police who reportedly stopped and strip-searched her before handing her over to masked individuals who forced her to cross the border back into Türkiye. On 30 June, she was detained by police at the Ipsala border crossing, north-western Türkiye, and sent to Edirne Prison, where she spent seven days before appearing in court. She was released and asked to report to the police station three times a week. On 20 September 2022, a court in Ipsala found her guilty of 'entering a restricted military area' and sentenced her to one year and eight months in prison. Her appeal in this second trial was also ongoing as of 31 December 2024.

Meral Şimşek, born in 1980, is the prize-winning author of three poetry books – *Mülteci Düşler (Refugee Dreams)*, *Ateşe Bulut Yağdıran (Clouds on Fire)* and *İncir Karası (Black Fig)*. Her novel *Nar Lekesi (Pomegranate Stain)*, published in 2017, tells the story of Şimşek's family and sheds light on the plight of Kurdish people in Türkiye in the 1990s. Her latest collection of short stories, *Arzela*, was published in April 2022. Some of her poems and stories have been translated into German, English and French. She currently resides in Germany and is a member of PEN Berlin.

Merdan YANARDAĞ

On 10 December 2024, writer and PEN Türkiye member Merdan Yanardağ was retried in Istanbul on charges of insulting the Turkish nation, the Republic of Türkiye, the institutions and organs of the state (Article 301 of Türkiye's Penal Code), in relation to his column 'Düzenin Mafyalanması' (The Mafia-ization of the System), published in May 2021. Yanardağ had previously been sentenced to seven months and 15 days in prison, with the verdict overturned on appeal. The hearing was adjourned to 22 May 2025.

Yanardağ's appeal against a separate conviction, imposed on 4 October 2023 after a court in Istanbul found him guilty

of ‘making propaganda for a terrorist organisation’, also continued at the end of the year. The court had sentenced him to two years and six months in prison and ordered his release. Yanardağ, editor-in-chief of TELE 1 broadcaster, had been detained in Istanbul on 26 June 2023 by counterterrorism officers after the public prosecutor’s office launched an investigation into a 20 June 2023 broadcast on TELE 1 in which Yanardağ spoke about the peace process between the Turkish government and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which broke down in July 2015. (See [Case List 2023/2024](#))

Merdan Yanardağ, born on 24 February 1961, is a prominent journalist, writer, and member of PEN Türkiye. He is the editor-in-chief of TELE1, one of the few remaining news outlets critical of the Turkish authorities.

JUDICIAL HARASSMENT

Ragıp ZARAKOLU

Publisher, human rights activist, and PEN Türkiye member Ragıp Zarakolu, was arrested in October 2011 and is facing a sentence of up to 15 years in prison in Türkiye on bogus terrorism charges in connection with a speech he made at an event by the now defunct pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy (BDP) party. Freed pending trial on 10 April 2012, Zarakolu, who has been living in Sweden since 2013 and holds Swedish citizenship, continues to be harassed by the authorities of Türkiye.

In May 2017, police officers raided Belge Publishing House, which he founded in 1977 with his late wife Ayşe, and seized over 2,000 books. In July 2018, the Istanbul 3rd High Criminal Court submitted a request for an Interpol Red Notice, a mechanism used to locate and provisionally arrest an individual pending extradition. In December 2019, Sweden’s Supreme Court rejected an extradition request from Türkiye on the grounds that the allegations against Zarakolu would not be considered a crime under Swedish law, and that an extradition would breach Article 3 (prohibition of torture) and

Article 6 (right to a fair trial) of the European Convention on Human Rights. The authorities of Türkiye subsequently confiscated all of Zarakolu’s assets in Türkiye and froze his pension. In September 2020, the European Court of Human Rights found Türkiye in violation of Article 5 (right to liberty and security) and Article 10 (freedom of expression) of the European Convention on Human Rights regarding Zarakolu’s arrest and ordered it to pay him EUR6,500 (approximately USD7,700) in compensation. In May 2022, Zarakolu was named by Turkish state media as one of the individuals wanted for extradition by Türkiye in exchange for the country allowing Sweden to join NATO. The eventual memorandum signed did not list any individuals.

Ragıp Zarakolu, born in 1948, is a well-known political activist who has been fighting for freedom of expression in Türkiye for over 30 years, publishing books on issues such as minority and human rights.

UKRAINE

IN MEMORIAM

According to PEN Ukraine, at least 153 cultural figures have been killed by Russian forces as of December 2024, including PEN Ukraine member, writer and war crimes investigator **Victoria Amelina** (1986–2023). She was 37 years old.

Amelina died on 1 July 2023 from injuries sustained in a Russian missile strike in Kramatorsk, Eastern Ukraine, on 27 June 2023. She was travelling to areas liberated from Russian occupation, recording the testimonies of witnesses and survivors, and working on a book about her experiences. *War and Justice Diary: Looking at Women Looking at War* was published posthumously in February 2025. Deliberate attacks on civilian infrastructure amount to war crimes. PEN International calls for all those responsible to be brought to justice (see [Case List 2023/2024](#)).

KILLED – IMPUNITY**Volodymyr VAKULENKO**

No one was brought to justice for the killing of Ukrainian writer Volodymyr Vakulenko during the year. However, in May 2024, the human rights initiative Truth Hounds published a [detailed investigation](#) into his murder, alleging broader involvement from the Russian Federation's Federal Security Service (FSB).

News that he had been abducted first [emerged](#) in April 2022, but information about his fate was only made possible after the Ukrainian army recaptured Izium from Russian forces in September 2022. According to Vakulenko's family, members of the Russian forces raided his home on 22 March 2022, seizing phones, documents, and books in Ukrainian. A day later, they took Vakulenko and his son Vitalii, diagnosed with autism. They undressed the writer to inspect his tattoos and beat him. Both were allowed to return home the following day. Vakulenko subsequently decided to bury his war diary under a cherry tree in his garden. Around 11 am on 24 March, a bus with a Z-sign drove up to Vakulenko's house and took him towards Izium. His relatives never saw him again.

On 28 November 2022, DNA analysis carried out by Ukrainian forensic and war crimes investigators [confirmed](#) that a body found in grave N.319 in the woods of Izium, eastern Ukraine, was that of Vakulenko. In November 2023, the Ukrainian authorities [announced](#) they had identified two soldiers of the Russian army involved in the murder of Vakulenko, and that an arrest warrant would be issued against them.

Award-winning writer Volodymyr Vakulenko – pen name Volodymyr Vakulenko-K – was born on 1 July 1972. He had published 13 books by the time of his death, including *Monoliteracy* (2008), *You Are... Not* (2011), *The Sun's Family* (2011), and *We, the Province!* (2013). Vakulenko defined his own genre, with elements of postmodernism, modernism, neo-classicism, and logical absurdism, as 'counterliterature'.

UNITED KINGDOM**KILLED – TRIAL IN PROGRESS****Lyra MCKEE**

Journalist, writer and LGBTQI campaigner Lyra McKee was [shot dead](#) on 18 April 2019 by

a masked gunman as she was observing a riot on the Creggan estate in Derry, Northern Ireland. She was standing beside a police vehicle when a gunman fired on police officers and onlookers. She died in hospital soon afterwards. On 14 September 2022, Niall Sheerin, from Derry, was [sentenced](#) to seven years in prison for possessing the gun used to murder McKee. Three men from Derry have been charged with her murder. Their trial [opened](#) in May 2024 and was ongoing as of 31 December 2024.

The first killing of a journalist in Northern Ireland since that of Martin O'Hagan in 2001, Lyra McKee's death was met with outrage from political leaders and others in Ireland and worldwide. On 23 April 2019, the 'New IRA' paramilitary group issued a [statement](#) in which it issued 'sincere apologies' for McKee's death, adding that she was not the intended target. By the time she died, aged 29, McKee had worked on numerous print and online publications including BuzzFeed, *Private Eye*, *The Atlantic* and *the Belfast Telegraph*. Her hugely popular blog, 'Letters to my 14-year-old self', chronicled her experiences as a gay woman. In June 2019, her book *Angels with Blue Faces*, based on her four-year investigation into the killing of an MP, was published posthumously. At the time of her death, she was working on a second book, *The Lost Boys*, about the disappearance of children in Northern Ireland, which remains under review. A collection of her writings, *Lost, Found, Remembered*, was published in 2020.

RELEASED**Julian ASSANGE**

Wikileaks founder and publisher Julian Assange was released from detention on 24 June 2024. Assange returned to his home country of Australia following a plea deal with US prosecutors, after spending 1,901 days behind bars in Belmarsh High Security prison, London. Assange agreed to plead guilty to a single criminal count under the US Espionage Act of conspiring to obtain and disclose classified US national defence documents and was sentenced to 62 months of time already served.

The plea deal followed a two-day public hearing held in February 2024 attended by representatives of PEN International, English PEN and PEN Norway. On 26 March 2024, the UK High Court adjourned Assange's permission to appeal his extradition order, and on 20 May 2024 eventually granted Assange 'legal appeal on grounds 4 (violation of free speech rights) and 5 (prejudiced at trial due to nationality) on all counts on the second superseding indictment'.

Assange had been arrested in April 2019 at the Ecuadorian embassy in London, where he had been given asylum for almost seven years. He was arrested for breaching his bail conditions in 2012, and further arrested on behalf of the US authorities under an extradition warrant for his role in obtaining and publishing classified military and diplomatic documents in 2010. If extradited to the US, Assange would have faced trial on 17 counts under the Espionage Act and one count under the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act, which combined could have seen him imprisoned for up to 175 years. Assange challenged his extradition order several times (see Case List 2023/2024).

On 25 June 2024, PEN International welcomed the release from prison of Assange but expressed concern that his plea deal, while granting him freedom, would set a dangerous precedent for press freedom worldwide.

Julian Assange, born on 3 July 1971, is the first publisher to be charged under the US Espionage Act. On 15 November 2023, PEN Norway awarded Assange the 2023 Ossietzky Prize for outstanding contributions to freedom of expression.

PEN ACTIONS IN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

In addition to its advocacy for the writers referred to in this list, PEN International also took action on behalf of journalists and others at risk in Europe and Central Asia, some in collaboration with other organisations, details of which can be found in the links provided below:

AZERBAIJAN

VARIOUS: *human rights concerns ahead of United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference (COP29)*

Action:

September 2024: Joint statement Civil society demands attention to human rights and climate justice ahead of COP29 in Azerbaijan

November 2024: Joint statement EU: Raise Human Rights Crisis in Azerbaijan during COP29

BELARUS

VARIOUS: *persisting attacks against the rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly*

Action:

August 2024: Statement Belarus: Accountability for gross human rights violations four years on

CROATIA

VARIOUS: *death threats against the editorial staff of weekly newspaper Nacional*

Action:

May 2024: Statement [Croatia: Death threats against Nacional editorial staff condemned](#)

EUROPEAN UNION

VARIOUS: *press freedom and safety of journalists*

Action:

July 2024: Statement [EU: European Commission must promote press freedom and safety of journalists](#)

GEORGIA

VARIOUS: *repressive legislation and crackdown on peaceful assembly*

Action:

April 2024: Statement [Georgia: Drop repressive 'foreign agents' law](#)

May 2024: Statement [Georgia: Repressive 'foreign agents' law approved amidst violent crackdown on protestors](#)

October 2024: Statement [Georgia: Relentless onslaught on fundamental rights condemned](#)

December 2024: Joint statement [Georgia: Assault on journalists during demonstrations condemned](#)

December 2024: Statement [Georgia: End violent crackdown on journalists and peaceful protesters](#)

IRELAND

VARIOUS: *defamation legislation, SLAPPs, safety of journalists and public service media*

Action:

November 2024: Joint statement [Ireland: Continue to prioritise media freedom and better protect journalists](#)

ITALY

Giovanni TIZIAN (m), Nello TROCCHIA (m), Stefano VERGINE (m): *journalists facing prison term*

Action:

April 2024: Joint statement [Italy: Petition Against Attacks on Domani Newspaper](#)

KOSOVO

VARIOUS: *press freedom concerns*

Action:

June 2024: Joint statement [Kosovo: Concerns over attempts to remove general director of public broadcaster](#)

MALTA

Daphne CARUANA GALIZIA (f): *journalist and anti-corruption campaigner killed in 2017*

Action:

October 2024: Joint statement [Malta: Open letter to Prime Minister Abela seven years since the killing of Daphne Caruana Galizia](#)

RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Alsu KURMASHEVA (f): *journalist detained*

Action:

May 2024: Statement [Russian Federation: Free Russian-American journalist Alsu Kurmasheva](#)

July 2024: Statement [Russian Federation: Russian-American journalist Alsu Kurmasheva sentenced to 6.5 years in prison](#)

August 2024: Statement [Russian Federation: Alsu Kurmasheva amongst journalists freed in prisoner swap](#)

SERBIA

Nenad KULAČIN (m): *journalist threatened and harassed*

Action:

September 2024: Statement Serbia: Mounting threats against journalist Nenad Kulačin condemned

VARIOUS: *divisive rhetoric by political leaders in Serbia and Republika Srpska (Bosnia and Herzegovina) threatening stability*

Action:

June 2024: Statement Western Balkans: End dangerous rhetoric ahead of UN Srebrenica resolution vote

TÜRKIYE

İlhan Sami ÇOMAK (m): *poet detained*

Action:

August 2024: Joint statement Türkiye: Free Kurdish poet İlhan Sami Çomak

VARIOUS: *journalists detained; on trial; harassed*

Action:

May 2024: Joint statement Türkiye: Alarming Surge in Arrests of Kurdish Journalists

August 2024: Joint statement Türkiye: Decision upholding prison sentence for journalist Bülent Mumay condemned

September 2024: Joint statement Türkiye: Alarm over death threats against journalist Murat Ağirel

VARIOUS: *free expression concerns*

Action:

March 2024: Joint statement Türkiye: Big tech should protect free speech and resist state censorship

May 2024: Statement Türkiye: Solidarity with the Saturday Mothers ahead of 1000th vigil

July 2024: Joint statement Türkiye: The EU must do more to prioritise protecting media freedom and human rights

July 2024: Statement Türkiye: Lift arbitrary

ban on storytelling platform Wattpad

September 2024: Statement Türkiye: Raids on Kurdish language associations and bookstore condemned

October 2024: Joint statement Türkiye: Regulator's decision to shutter Açık Radyo condemned

December 2024: Joint statement EU: Oppose Türkiye's 'Agent of Influence' bill

UKRAINE

VARIOUS: *condemnation of the Russian Federation's war against Ukraine*

Action:

February 2024: Statement Ukraine: Two years since Russian full-scale invasion, justice and accountability must prevail

February 2024: Statement Ukraine: A story to share

May 2024: Statement Ukraine: Over 100 cultural figures killed by Russian forces since full-scale invasion

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

Mina Thabet, Head of the Middle East and North Africa Region

The freedom of expression crisis in the Middle East and North Africa continued throughout the year, overshadowed by war in **Gaza** and **Lebanon** that risked spreading across the region. Governments such as **Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Iran, Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia** and the **United Arab Emirates (UAE)** weaponised their legal systems to punish any public or perceived dissent, and stifled the rights to peaceful assembly, association and freedom of expression. Writers, journalists, human rights defenders, activists and bloggers continued to be arbitrarily arrested, detained for prolonged periods without trial, and to face trumped-up charges solely in relation to their work or critical views. Others were systematically targeted by repressive tactics aimed at silencing them, including judicial harassment, smear campaigns, threats and intimidation, physical assaults, and travel bans. These, along with worrying signs of a resort to transnational repression, exerted a chilling effect on freedom of expression across the region.

The rapid downfall of dictator Bashar Al-Assad in **Syria** raised hopes for a better future after decades of death, destruction, and widespread and systematic censorship and repression. However, the future of freedom of expression in the country remains in doubt, due to the Baathist regime's legacy; civil war; and fears about the political and ideological affiliation of the current government. Tens of thousands of Syrian families are continuing to seek answers about the fate of their relatives, victims of enforced disappearance, including the prominent Syrian blogger and human rights defender Razan Zaitouneh (see Case List 2014). Accountability for these crimes is essential if the country is to heal.

MEDIA FREEDOM IN JEOPARDY

Governments maintained strict censorship over media and online spaces and severely punished critical voices. The region was the deadliest for the killing of journalists in 2024, according to CPJ. Most were killed in Gaza by **Israel**, but killings of journalists and media workers also occurred in **Iraq, Lebanon and Syria**.

In **Algeria**, authorities expanded online censorship by using vaguely worded 'national security' offences. In **Jordan**, authorities weaponised the repressive Cybercrime Law, using it to imprison Palestinian-Jordanian journalist **Hiba Abu Taha** for a year in relation to her investigative reporting on Jordan's shipment of goods to Israel. **Israel** enforced strict censorship on reporting on the war in Gaza, including by banning foreign reporters from Gaza and shutting down Al Jazeera inside Israel in May. In September, heavily armed Israeli soldiers raided and closed Al Jazeera's West Bank bureau in Ramallah, an area under Palestinian control.

In February, authorities in **Egypt** questioned and briefly held prominent journalist **Lina Atallah** in relation to Mada Masr's 2023 reporting on the potential displacement

of Palestinians from Gaza to Egypt as a result of Israel's Gaza offensive. Authorities revived the investigation in retaliation for Mada Masr's reporting of a corruption scandal involving a businessman with close connections to President Al-Sisi.

THE OLD RULE BOOK OF ARBITRARY DETENTION AND IMPRISONMENT

Regrettably, 2024 saw no let-up in the long-standing abuse of detention and imprisonment in the region to silence those expressing dissenting views. Scores of writers, journalists, human rights defenders and activists in **Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Morocco**, and the **UAE** also faced threats, intimidation, physical attacks, smear campaigns, travel bans, and asset freezes. Writers released from prison, many suffering ill-health as a result of their prison conditions, often faced continued repression, harming their psychological health and impeding their ability to write.

A disturbing new development was the move to transnational repression, spearheaded by the **UAE** when it successfully requested extradition from Lebanon of Turkish-Egyptian poet Abdel Rahman Yusuf Al-Qaradawi on alleged national security-related charges, shortly after he expressed critical views of the UAE, Egypt, and Saudi in a video message, creating a climate of fear among exiled critics across the region.

In **Algeria**, poet and prominent activist **Mohamed Tadjadit** spent nine months in pre-trial detention on fabricated charges in relation to his online expression before being released following a presidential pardon (see Algeria section below). Artist, poet, and activist **Djamila Bentouis**, a French-Algerian national, was released in December after serving nine months of an 18-month sentence for her song

about the Hirak protest movement, which overthrew former President Abdelaziz Bouteflika in 2019. Award-winning French-Algerian writer **Boualem Sansal** was arrested in November on national security-related charges in retaliation for his views (see Algeria section below).

At the end of the year, British-Egyptian writer **Alaa Abd El-Fattah** continued to be held in prison arbitrarily, without access to a lawyer or consular visits in **Egypt**, beyond expiry of his five-year prison term. Poet **Galal El-Behairy** was also held arbitrarily despite having exceeded the maximum legal limit of pre-trial detention in September 2023. Journalist **Khaled Mamdouh** and cartoonist and translator **Ashraf Omar** both remained in pre-trial detention at the end of the year, facing fabricated security-related charges following their arrest in July (see Egypt section below).

Iran maintained its brutal, decades-long crackdown on peaceful dissent, severely restricting freedom of assembly, stifling free expression, and targeting critical voices supporting the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' protest movement. A new, massive, draconian campaign imposing prison, flogging and fines as punishment for defiance of the compulsory hijab laws started in April, severely impacting women and girls' bodily autonomy and freedom of expression and belief. Behind prison walls, writers were among those held in deplorable conditions. PEN International heard accounts of the authorities' ongoing use of deliberate medical negligence as a punishment for expressing critical views of the government. Writer, human rights defender and Nobel peace laureate **Narges Mohammadi** saw her total sentence increased to 35 years, while Baha'i poet and teacher **Mahvash Sabet** also remained arbitrarily imprisoned. The two writers were denied access to adequate medical care and their health deteriorated significantly throughout the year, with both temporarily released in December on medical grounds (see Iran section below).

The **UAE** continued to impose a zero-tolerance policy against dissent, subjecting scores of human rights activists and critical voices, including writers and poets, to arbitrary detention, unfair trials and lengthy prison sentences. A fresh unfair mass trial launched in December 2023, despite human rights organisations' calls on the UAE to release unjustly imprisoned critics ahead of the COP28 climate conference, resulted in the sentencing of 53 men to terms ranging from 10 years to life imprisonment. Most had already spent over a decade in prison, and included Emirati academic and human rights defender **Mohamed Al-Roken**, who continued to be held after his unjust 10-year sentence ended in July 2022 (see Case Lists 2010 to 2023-2024), and poet and blogger **Ahmed Mansoor** (see UAE section below).

HARASSMENT AND REPRISALS

Authorities in **Egypt** also continued to target poet and activist **Ahmed Douma** through a travel ban, asset freeze, smear campaigns, physical attacks and judicial harassment in a bid to silence him following his release (see Egypt section below). According to local human rights organisations, El-Maraya publishing house in Cairo faced reprisals for its attempt to publish a second edition of Douma's poetry collection *Curly*, including a police raid where books and computers were confiscated and a ban on participating in the Cairo Book fair.

In **Morocco**, journalists **Omar Radi** and **Soulaïman Raïssouni** continued to face threats and smear campaigns by pro-government media outlets after their release, while prominent academic **Maati Monjib** remained unable to travel, work, or access his assets, despite all three receiving royal pardons in July (see Morocco section below). In the Occupied West Bank, Palestinian writer and activist **Ahed Tamimi** remained under a travel ban and movement restrictions imposed by the **Israeli** authorities throughout the year (see Israel/Palestine section below).

OCCUPATION AND CONFLICT: A DEATH KNEEL FOR FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The war in **Gaza** continued to have a devastating impact on freedom of expression across the region. A staggering number of writers and journalists were targeted, killed, displaced, or arbitrarily detained across the **Occupied Palestinian Territories** and in **Lebanon** in the deadliest war for writers since WWII. According to PEN International's research, since 7 October 2023 at least 23 writers (excluding artists and cultural sector workers) have been killed by Israeli bombardment, six of them in 2024, while **Israel** was responsible for the deaths of 85 journalists, almost 70% of all journalists killed worldwide during the year, according to CPJ. Such a massive loss of life represents a colossal blow to Palestinian cultural and media sectors and poses a significant challenge to the immediate safety of writers and journalists, as well as their ability to recover after the war ends. Coupled with the ongoing displacement of writers – such as that of **Mosab Abu Toah** who was forced to leave Gaza in 2023 (see Case list 2023/2024) – and the widespread and systematic destruction of most of Gaza's infrastructure including cultural heritage sites, schools, universities, bookstores, and cultural institutions, libraries (among them the Edward Said Public Library, Gaza's first English language library), these distressing statistics unveil a concerted effort to erase Palestinian culture, risking irreparable damage to the Palestinian people and their right to participate in cultural life.

The destruction of schools has been particularly shocking. According to the UN, more than 95% of all school buildings across the Gaza Strip have been destroyed or damaged, with more than 72% directly

hit by Israeli bombardment, leaving more than 658,000 students with no access to formal education for more than 15 months. Pending reconstruction of schools and recruitment of teachers, children's ability to develop and enjoy their creative expression in later life will be severely impaired, depriving us all of a crucially important Gazan perspective on life and the world.

Similarly during the escalation of conflict in Lebanon, Israel destroyed and damaged vast swathes of critical civilian infrastructure, including homes, businesses, agriculture establishments, municipal buildings, and healthcare and educational facilities, particularly in the south. The sharp escalation of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah in September triggered mass displacement of 1.2 million civilians, about 100,000 of whom remain displaced.

PEN International pays tribute to the ongoing efforts to document and ensure accountability for the grave violations of international law committed since October 2023. Despite attempts to undermine UN agencies, smear campaigns against UN experts, and attacks on the International Criminal Court (ICC) (which issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, as well as for Hamas commander Mohammed Diab Ibrahim Al-Masri), UN experts and international human rights groups, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, concluded that Israel has committed acts of genocide in Gaza since October 2023.

In September 2024, PEN International adopted a resolution condemning the alarming increase in targeted killings, arbitrary detentions, and restrictions on access to information in Palestine and Israel since 7 October 2023, noting that Israeli authorities were primarily responsible for these violations. The resolution called on the international community to support swift, independent, and transparent investigations into the

killings of writers and journalists and to work towards ending the Israeli occupation of Palestine in line with international law.

At the time of writing, despite the ceasefire in Gaza, the future for Palestinians looks increasingly bleak, with escalating attacks in the occupied West Bank, and threats to forcibly transfer the entire population of Gaza to Egypt and Jordan.

Lebanese and Palestinian writers told PEN International of the far-reaching impact of the war on their ability to work and creatively express themselves. Writers in **Gaza** described their traumatic experiences of losing dozens of family members; enforced displacement and loss of their homes; starvation; spread of disease and lack of vital healthcare services and medicines, leading to avoidable health harms. In one case, a writer reported losing 45 members of his extended family due to the Israeli bombardment that hit their houses since October 2023. His wife suffered from a back injury and was unable to receive treatment due to the war, while his brother lost sight in one eye due to the lack of vital medicines, including diabetes and blood pressure medicines. Another related the trauma of having to leave their home and walk long miles to reach the designated humanitarian zone, while surviving Israeli forces shooting at displaced civilians to force them to walk faster. A PEN member in **Lebanon** lost his home and his family home due to the indiscriminate bombardment of civilian areas, including a huge personal library.

Despite the ongoing push back from some states, led by Israel and the USA, human rights, accountability and justice must be at the forefront of negotiations to end the war. Achieving a peace that enables all to live their lives in dignity requires meaningful participation for Palestinians, respect for international law, and freedom of expression for all to be placed at the heart of decision making.

GOOD NEWS

In July, PEN International welcomed the release of **Moroccan** journalists **Omar Radi**, **Soulaiman Raissouni** and **Taufik Bouachrine** after receiving royal pardons from King Mohamed VI, and also the temporary or conditional releases in **Iran** of **Sedigheh Vasmaghi** in April and **Narges Mohammadi** and **Mahvash Sabet** in December.

2025 CASE LIST MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

EMBLEMATIC CASES



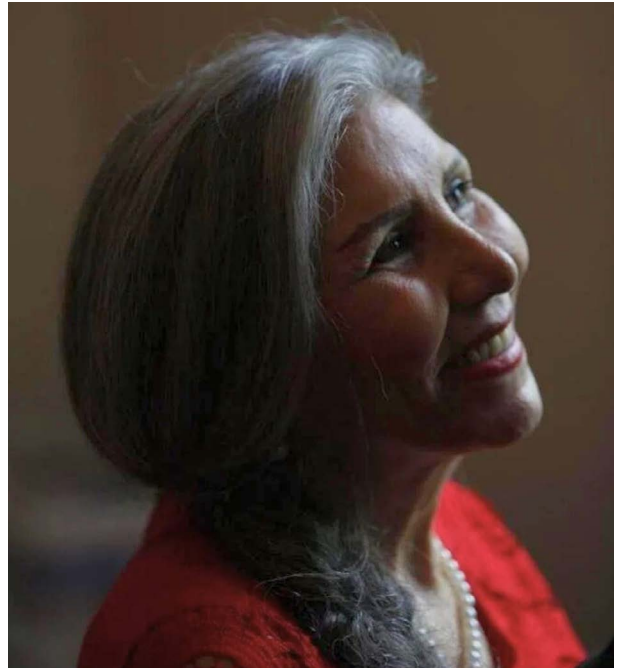
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Ahmed MANSOOR

Poet and human rights defender imprisoned in relation to his dissenting views

Ahmed Mansoor is an Emirati poet and prominent human rights defender who has been imprisoned since March 2017. He is currently serving two sentences of 10 and 15 years imposed in 2018 and 2024 respectively, following unfair trials on bogus charges for his expression. He published his poetry *أبعد من عدم* (*Beyond Failure*) in 2010.

Ahmed Mansoor. Photo credit: Bloomberg



IRAN

Mahvash SABET

Poet and teacher detained in relation to her freedom of religion

Mahvash Sabet is a teacher, poet and member of the persecuted Baha'i minority. Currently serving a 10-year prison sentence imposed in 2022 after an unfair trial on unfounded charges of 'espionage', she previously spent a decade arbitrarily imprisoned due to her religious beliefs. In poor health, she was released temporarily on medical grounds in December 2024 but remained at risk of reimprisonment. She began writing poetry in prison, and three collections of her prison poems have been published.

Mahvash Sabet. Photo credit: Sabet's family

ALGERIA

DETAINED

Boualem SANSAL

Boualem Sansal, 75, is a dual national, award-winning French–Algerian writer held on national security charges. On 16 November 2024, Algerian authorities arrested Sansal upon arrival at Algiers airport. His whereabouts remained unknown for over a week, during which he was denied access to his family and legal counsel, contrary to international law. Sansal was interrogated in the absence of his lawyer, in violation of his right to a fair trial. He was subsequently charged with national security-related offences under Article 87 bis of the Algerian Penal Code, a provision criticised for its frequent misuse against government critics, including human rights defenders. According to his legal team, the charges are based on previous statements he made to the media that were interpreted as threatening Algeria’s national security.

On 9 December 2024, Sansal’s French lawyer, François Zimeray, was denied entry to Algeria to represent his client before the court. Two days later, an Algerian appeal court refused Sansal’s appeal for release. On 16 December 2024, Sansal was hospitalised at his request, for the second time since his detention, raising concerns about his health.

Sansal, born in Algeria on 15 October 1949, was granted French citizenship in 2024. Previously a government official, he began writing at the age of 50 and is the author of *2084: La fin du monde* (*2084: The End of the World*, 2015) for which he received the Grand Prix du roman de l’Académie française and the prize-winning 2008 novel *Le village de l’Allemand ou le journal des frères Schiller* (translated into English as *An Unfinished Business*), among several other remarkable novels published by Gallimard. He received the Prix du Premier Roman and the Prix Tropiques for his debut novel *Le serment*

des barbares (*The Barbarians’ Oath*) in 1999, and the Arab Novel Prize for his novel *Rue Darwin* (2011) in 2012. Sansal was also awarded the German Book Trade Peace Prize in 2011, and honoured with the Grand Prix de la Francophonie from the Académie Française in 2013.

JUDICIAL HARASSMENT

Mohamed TADJADIT

Poet and activist in the ‘Hirak’ protest movement, which overthrew the former Algerian president Abdelaziz Bouteflika in 2019, Mohamed Tadjadit spent nine months arbitrarily detained in connection with his exercise of his right to free expression before his release in October 2024.

On 29 January 2024, he was arrested from his home in Algiers and received a pre-trial detention order. Two days later, Tadjadit appeared before the prosecutor at the Court of Roubia in the Algerian capital in the absence of his lawyer. He faced charges under Articles 87 bis 4 and bis 12 of the Penal Code, including ‘glorification of terrorism’ and ‘using communication technologies to support the actions and activities of terrorist organisations,’ concerning his social media videos and private communications. Tadjadit was released on 31 October 2024 following a presidential pardon, which included over 4,000 prisoners, among whom were many journalists and another Hirak poet, Djamila Bentouis.

Mohamed Tadjadit, born in 1995, participated in the Algerian anti-government protests in February 2019 known as the ‘Hirak’ movement – sparked by the election of President Bouteflika to a fifth term in office – where he performed his slam poetry critical of the authorities. He has been dubbed ‘the poet of the Hirak’, becoming a well-known figure of the protest movement, resulting in increased state surveillance and judicial harassment; he has been arrested at least four times since 2019 in connection with his poetry and political activism in Hirak (see Case List 2020).

Update: On 16 January 2025, Algerian authorities arrested and detained Tadjadit in relation to his online expression. Four days later, he was sentenced to five years in prison. On 23 January, a European Parliament resolution called for his release.

EGYPT

DETAINED

Alaa ABD EL-FATTAH

Alaa Abd El-Fattah, an award-winning writer and Honorary Member of English PEN, remained arbitrarily imprisoned at the end of the year, despite fully serving an unjust five-year prison sentence in connection with his exercise of his right to free expression. He remains in poor health.

Arrested in September 2019, he was sentenced to five years in prison in 2021 on fabricated charges including ‘joining an illegal organisation’, ‘spreading false news,’ and ‘misusing social media’ after a grossly unfair trial before the Emergency State Security Court. Abd El-Fattah has been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment and held in deplorable prison conditions, as well as prohibited from accessing books and newspapers, all of which has impacted his health. In 2022, Abd El-Fattah underwent a lengthy hunger strike in protest at his conditions of detention and to call attention to the human rights situation in Egypt (see Case Lists 2019 to 2023/2024). This is his second period of imprisonment; he previously served an unjust five year sentence for participating in a peaceful protest in 2013.

On 29 September 2024, Abd El-Fattah completed his five-year sentence; however, Egyptian authorities continue to arbitrarily detain him beyond his prison term. According to his family, the Egyptian authorities refuse to recognise the more than two years that Abd El-Fattah spent in pre-trial detention, pushing his release date

to January 2027. Egyptian authorities also continue to deny Abd El-Fattah’s access to a lawyer and British consular visits. His mother, academic and human rights activist Laila Soueif, started an open-ended hunger strike on 29 September to protest Abd El-Fattah’s arbitrary imprisonment.

In April and November 2024, PEN International, along with a coalition of human rights organisations, sent a letter to the UN WGAD on behalf of Abd El-Fattah, urging the working group to announce its opinion on his detention. PEN International and English PEN joined Abd El-Fattah’s mother Laila Soueif in multiple demonstrations outside the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office to urge the UK authorities to do more to secure his release.

Born on 18 November 1981, dual British-Egyptian national Alaa Abd El-Fattah was a crucial voice of the 2011–2012 Arab Spring uprisings, during which he documented human rights abuses and advocated for democracy. His book, *You Have Not Yet Been Defeated* (2022, Seven Stories Press), which compiles some of his profoundly influential writings, has received widespread acclaim. He won the 2022 Electronic Frontier Foundation Award for Democratic Reform Advocacy and PEN Canada’s One Humanity Award in 2023. Abd El-Fattah was named the 2024 Writer of Courage by PEN Pinter Prize 2024 winner Arundhati Roy.

Ashraf OMAR

Cartoonist and translator Ashraf Omar, arrested in July 2024, remained held in pre-trial detention on bogus national security charges at the end of the year.

Security forces stormed Omar’s house on 22 July 2004, confiscated his personal belongings, blindfolded him and took him to an unidentified location where he was held incommunicado without access to his family or lawyer for more than two days. According to a statement by Omar’s family, he was physically assaulted during the

arrest and subjected to intimidation before appearing in front of the Supreme State Security Prosecutor (SSSP) on 24 July, who questioned him about his work, including translations and cartoons, before ordering his pre-trial detention on bogus charges, including ‘dissemination of false news’, ‘misusing the internet’, and ‘membership of a terrorist group’. On 4 August, his lawyer demanded the SSPP investigate Omar’s allegations of ill-treatment and properly document all personal belongings confiscated during his arrest, which the police had failed to include in the case documentation. The SSPP had extended his detention 10 times by the end of the year.

Born on 8 May 1968, Ashraf Omar is a cartoonist and translator who worked with several independent media and news websites, including Al-Manassa and Al-Hoodoud. His work tackles social, political and economic issues in Egypt, including the debt crisis and electricity outages.

Update: On 16 January 2025, national security officers arrested Omar’s wife **Nada Mougheeth**, an academic and translator, from her home for speaking out on behalf of her imprisoned husband. The SSSP charged Mougheeth with ‘spreading false news’ and ‘joining a terrorist group,’ but later the same day released her on bail. The day before, authorities also arrested writer and journalist **Ahmed Serag** on charges including ‘membership of a terrorist group,’ ‘spreading false news,’ and ‘propagating terrorist ideas.’ Serag had recently interviewed Mougheeth about Omar’s arrest and ongoing detention, in which she criticised security forces for arbitrarily arresting her husband.

Galal EL-BEHAIRY

Arrested in March 2018, he continued to be held without trial at the end of the year despite fully serving an unjust three-year sentence followed by two years in arbitrary pre-trial detention. He has reportedly been beaten and tortured in detention.

El-Behairy was arrested on 5 March 2018 at Cairo International Airport while attempting to travel abroad. He initially faced charges of ‘joining a terrorist group’, ‘disseminating false news’, and ‘insulting the President’ for lyrics he had written for the song *Balaha*, performed, and disseminated online by exiled Egyptian singer Ramy Essam. The song heavily criticised President Sisi and was deemed insulting to the president. This case was eventually dropped, but he was sentenced to three years in prison in a separate case for allegedly ‘disseminating false news and rumours’ and ‘insulting the Egyptian army’ in his unpublished poetry collection, *خير نسوان الأرض* *The Finest Women on Earth*.

In July 2021, after his sentence expired, he was subjected to enforced disappearance for three weeks before being freshly charged with ‘disseminating false news’ and ‘joining a terrorist group’ by the Supreme State Security Prosecution. He exceeded the maximum legal limit of pre-trial detention without a trial on 5 September 2023; however, Egyptian authorities continue to detain him arbitrarily (see Case Lists 2018 – 2023/2024).

In protest at his continued detention, El-Behairy has undertaken several hunger strikes. El-Behairy’s family has informed PEN International that his health has significantly deteriorated due to his imprisonment, poor prison conditions, lack of adequate medical care, and prolonged hunger strikes. He suffers from high blood pressure, joint pain and heart problems. His mental health has severely deteriorated in recent years and he has attempted to commit suicide. The family informed PEN International in December 2024 that El-Behairy continues to suffer from a lack of access to adequate medical care as Egyptian authorities have denied his requests for treatment for a tumour in his mouth, which is causing difficulty in swallowing and requires urgent medical intervention. On 17 November 2024, El-Behairy and his family members were subjected to invasive body searches after their visit to Badr 1 prison, to

which El-Behairy objected. In response, a prison officer threatened to take him to the torture room, which has no cameras in prison Badr 3 and ‘do whatever he wants with him.’

PEN International has constantly campaigned for his release, including by highlighting his detention on the [2019 Day of the Imprisoned Writer](#) and by featuring him as an emblematic case in the [2023/2024 Case List](#).

Galal El-Behairy, born on 27 June 1990, is a poet and lyricist known for critical views of the Egyptian authorities. Two [collections](#) of his poetry have been published: *Masna'a El Karasy (The Chair Factory, 2015)* and *Segn Bel Alwan (Colorful Prison, 2017)*.

HARASSED

Ismail ALEXANDRANI

Writer, journalist and researcher [Ismail Alexandrani](#) continues to be unable to travel since his [release](#) in December 2022 after completing a seven-year prison term for ‘leaking military secrets’ and ‘membership of a terrorist group’ following a grossly unfair trial, according to information received by PEN International (See [Case Lists 2015 – 2023/2024](#)). PEN International believes that Alexandrani’s ongoing harassment since his release is linked to his work, which challenges the government’s narrative on its counter-terrorism operations in the Sinai Peninsula.

Ismail Alexandrani, an award-winning writer, investigative journalist and socio-political researcher, has worked with several research centres, including the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights and the Arab Reform Initiative, and is best known for his research and writings on militant groups operating in Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula. His work has been published in various regional and international media, as well as academic journals, including the independent Lebanese newspapers *Assafir* and *al-Modon*, and the American Arab Studies Journal *Jadaliyya*. He contributed to the book *Egypt beyond Tahrir Square* (Indiana University Press,

2016). Alexandrani was awarded the 2015 [Visiting Arab Journalist Fellowship](#) at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. In 2014, he won the [Open Eye – Hany Darweesh Award for Exceptional Essay](#). In 2009, he was one of the global winners in the World Youth Movement for Democracy’s [Youth Essay Contest on Democracy](#), and the winner of the National Contest for Spreading Understanding and Mutual Respect at the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies.

Ahmed DOUMA

Poet, writer and activist Ahmed Douma [continues](#) to be targeted by Egyptian authorities. In 2024, he was subject to prosecution and smear campaigns in relation to his writings, statements and activism, as well as a physical attack. Since his release from prison in 2023, (see Case List [2022](#) and [2023/2024](#)) he has remained under a de facto travel ban. His poetry collection *Curly* remains banned in Egypt.

Despite receiving a presidential pardon in 2023 after over a decade in prison, which the UN WGAD [deemed](#) to constitute arbitrary detention, the Egyptian authorities continued to persecute Douma throughout 2024. Since his release, Douma has actively been raising awareness about the situation of detainees in Egyptian prisons. He was also at the forefront of the rare pro-Palestinian [protests](#) in Cairo in January 2024. Due to his chants during the protests, he was subject to a smear campaign by pro-government media. A few days following his participation in the protests, a complaint was [filed](#) against him by a pro-government lawyer, accusing him of endangering national peace and spreading false news. In July, Douma [faced](#) an online smear campaign after pro-government religious figures [deemed](#) parts of his 2021 poetry collection *Curly* as ‘blasphemy.’ On 5 October, the Egyptian Public Prosecutor opened an investigation into complaints against Douma accusing him of writing ‘blasphemous phrases’ in his poetry collection. On 15 October,

Douma was physically assaulted by three individuals in plain clothes in an apparent targeted attack. On 10 November, the SSSP released Douma on bail of EGP 20,000 (approximately £315) after an eight-hour investigation concerning statements he made on social media earlier in November about the MV Kathrin, a cargo ship previously linked to transporting weapons to Israel, docking at Egypt's Port of Alexandria. He was not allowed to have a copy of the case file or to receive details about the complaint that spurred the investigation.

Ahmed Douma, born on 11 September 1985, wrote about his experiences, dreams, and aspirations during his prolonged imprisonment in his 2012 poetry collection صوتك طالع (*Your voice is Heard*). Security officials demanded Dar El Maraya, his publishers, to remove copies of his 2021 collection *Curly* at the 2021 Cairo International Book Fair.

IRAN

IMPRISONED

Narges MOHAMMADI

Writer, journalist, human rights defender Narges Mohammadi was free on medical grounds as of 31 December 2024, a year in which she received three new prison sentences. Held since 16 November 2021, she is serving multiple unjust sentences, totalling 35 years' imprisonment and 154 lashes, as well as two years of internal exile, a travel ban and various restrictions on her social and political activism.

In January 2024, Iranian authorities sentenced Mohammadi to a 15-month prison term. On 18 June 2024, Mohammadi's lawyer announced that Branch 29 of the Tehran Revolutionary Court had sentenced her to another year in prison for 'propaganda against the system' related to her writings criticising Iran's grim human rights record. The court ruling cited Mohammadi's calls for

Iranians to boycott parliamentary elections due to a lack of democratic guarantees, as well as her letters to the Swiss and Norwegian Parliaments. On October 19, 2024, Branch 2 of the Criminal Court of the Ghods Judicial Complex in Tehran sentenced Mohammadi to six months in prison for participating in a peaceful protest against the execution of Reza Rasai, held inside Evin Prison.

Mohammadi has faced reprisals by the Iranian authorities for her human right work for over 14 years, including multiple unjust prison terms after conviction of bogus charges including 'propaganda against the system', 'defamation' and 'rebellious conduct while incarcerated' (see Case Lists 2023/2024, 2022, and 2021). Her family believes that many of her sentences were imposed in retaliation for her book, White Torture (Oneworld, 2022), in which she documents the experienced of imprisoned Iranian women.

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. She continued to be denied medical treatment throughout 2024, resulting in further health complications. Her family reported in August that she is suffering from cardiovascular issues, gastrointestinal complications, and spinal disc herniation. On 4 December 2024, Mohammadi was temporarily released from jail on medical grounds to allow her recovery from a recent surgery.

Mohammadi, born on 21 April 1972, is an 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, winner of the 2011 Per Anger Prize and the 2009 Alexander Langer Award. In December 2022, Mohammadi was awarded the RSF Prize for Courage for her tireless fight for press freedom and

human rights. In 2023, she was awarded the [PEN/Barbey Freedom to Write Prize](#), UNESCO's [Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize](#) and in October 2023, she was awarded the [2023 Nobel Peace Prize](#).

Mahvash SABET

Mahvash Sabet is a teacher and poet serving an unjust 10-year prison sentence imposed in 2022. She has previously spent a [decade](#) in prison due solely to her religious beliefs as a member of Iran's persecuted Baha'i minority (see Case Lists [2013 – 2019](#), [2022](#) and [2023/2024](#)). Due to poor prison conditions, and to Iranian authorities repeatedly [denying](#) her access to adequate healthcare, her health deteriorated significantly in 2024.

On 31 July 2022, Iranian authorities arrested Sabet and two other members of the long-disbanded 'Yaran-i-Iran' (or 'Friends of Iran'), Fariba Kamalabadi and Afif Naemi – who helped to administer the Baha'i community's affairs in Iran until 2008 – over unfounded 'espionage' charges. According to media [sources](#), Iran's Intelligence Ministry alleged they were linked to the Baha'i Centre in Israel and had collected and transferred information there. On 21 November 2022, following an unfair trial that lasted only one hour, the Revolutionary Court's Branch 26 in Tehran sentenced Sabet and Kamalabadi to 10 years in prison. The judge rebuked the defendants for 'not learning their lesson' before handing down his harsh sentence.

In December 2024, Sabet was [sent](#) to a hospital for urgent medical treatment after her health deteriorated significantly. She was later temporarily released after undergoing open-heart [surgery](#), in order to recover at home. According to her family, among many other health complications, Sabet is suffering from pulmonary fibrosis and heart issues. PEN International remains gravely concerned about the sharp deterioration in Sabet's health and calls for her not to be returned to prison.

Sabet, born on 4 February 1953, began her professional career as a teacher and worked as a principal at several schools. She also collaborated with the National Literacy Committee of Iran. Following the Islamic Revolution in 1979, Sabet was fired from her job and blocked from working in public education, like thousands of other Iranian Baha'i educators. She served for 15 years as director of the Baha'i Institute for Higher Education, which provides alternative higher education for Baha'i youth. Mahvash Sabet began writing poetry in prison, and a collection of her [prison poems](#) was translated into English and published in 2013. Two more volumes of poems [رها](#) (*A Tale of Love – More Prison Poems*) and [حکایت عاشقی](#) (*Love Story*) were published in 2019 and 2021. She is an honorary member of Austrian PEN and Danish PEN and was named as English PEN's 2017 [Writer of Courage](#) by PEN Pinter Prize winner Michael Longley. PEN International has [campaigned](#) for her release, including through dedicating an '[Empty Chair](#)' to her at PEN's 89th International Congress.

BRIEF DETENTION

Sedigheh VASMAGHI

Sedigheh Vasmaghi is a well-known Iranian poet, writer, scholar and women's rights activist. She was [arrested](#) on 16 March 2024 and transferred to Evin Prison, where conditions are deplorable. Her health [deteriorated](#) significantly while she was detained, with complete sight loss from a genetic condition and the development of potentially life-threatening heart issues. She was conditionally released on 29 April 2024 after writing a letter to the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran, and international human rights organisations, highlighting the abuse women face in Iran and specifying that she was [tortured](#) and denied access to adequate medical care. Iranian authorities imposed stringent conditions on her release, including a ban on social media and public life, and limiting her communication to her family members only.

Vasmaghi's arrest is believed to be linked to her open criticism of Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, whom she called a 'dictator', and her criticism of the compulsory Hijab law. She faced charges including 'propaganda against the system' and 'public appearance without hijab.' Vasmaghi has endured decades of harassment and prosecution by the Iranian regime (see Case Lists 2017 - 2020).

Vasmaghi, 63, is a well-known poet, writer, and women's rights activist. She obtained her PhD in law at Tehran University and is one of a few women to have taught Islamic law in Iran. As a university lecturer, she worked to highlight and improve women's status and rights in Iranian society. She has written many articles on political, legal, Islamic, and social issues, published in various newspapers and magazines in Iran, including *Cheshm andaz Iran (Perspective in Iran)*.

Vasmaghi published her first poetry collection, *Praying for Rain* 1989, for which she received the 1991 Best Book Award from the University of Al-Zahra, Tehran. Since then, she has published five collections of poetry in addition to several academic books and translated classical Arabic poetry into Persian. One of her most famous books is زن، فقه، اسلام (*'Women, Jurisprudence, Islam'* Harrassowitz Verlag, 2014).

CONDITIONAL RELEASE

Sarvenaz AHMADI

Sarvenaz Ahmadi is an Iranian translator, journalist, and human rights defender who was conditionally released on 29 December 2024 after serving about 19 months of a six-year prison sentence. Ahmadi's recent prosecution is believed to be linked to her writings and reporting on the mass protest movement triggered by the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini in custody on 16 September 2022. While imprisoned, she faced censorship, as the prison authorities refused to deliver her translations to her family due to their content.

Ahmadi was arrested twice for covering the Mahsa Amini protests. On 6 November 2022, she and her husband, journalist **Kamyar Fakour**, were arrested only a few weeks after their wedding. The couple were released on bail almost a month later. On 3 January 2023, Ahmadi was sentenced to six years in prison, while Fakour received a one-year sentence, alongside the activation of a separate two-year sentence from 2021. They were convicted of charges including 'spreading propaganda against the system' and 'gathering and colluding against national security'.

On 10 May 2023, the couple were arrested and sent to prison to serve their sentences. They were denied amnesty on 20 August 2023 because of their alleged 'membership in hostile groups with the intention of toppling the Islamic Republic.' Ahmadi went on medical strike, refusing to take her epilepsy medication from 9 September 2024 to 6 October 2024, in protest against the denial of her medical furlough request. She was granted a three-day medical leave from prison in late October 2024.

Ahmadi, born in 1998, is known for her journalistic work and advocacy for children's rights. She has also translated several books into Persian, including *'Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle.'* by Silvia Federici (PM Press, 2012) and *'Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community'* by Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James (Falling Wall Press, 1972).

MOROCCO

HARASSED

Omar RADI

Award-winning investigative journalist Omar Radi faced smear campaigns and intimidation after release from prison in July.

On 29 July 2024, Omar Radi was released after King Mohamed IV pardoned him and over 2,000 other prisoners, including imprisoned journalists **Taoufik Bouachrine**, **Soulaiman Raissouni**, and four self-exiled journalists: **Hicham Mansouri**, **Samad Ait Aicha**, **Imad Stitou**, and **Afaf Bernani**. Radi was arrested in 2020 and sentenced to six years in prison in 2021 on sexual assault and national security charges after a highly flawed trial, which led PEN International to conclude that Radi was targeted for his criticism of the governments and to deter others (see Case Lists 2020–2023/2024). Radi continues to face the repercussions of his detention as the Moroccan authorities have not clarified whether his sentence has been quashed or not. This uncertainty hampers Radi's ability to resume his work in Morocco where journalists with criminal records cannot gain accreditation and work legally.

After his release, Radi was subjected to intensive surveillance and intimidation, and received threats warning him to remain silent following his release, continuing a previous pattern of harassment. At the time of his arrest in 2020, Radi had already been under surveillance for more than two years by the Moroccan authorities using the notorious Pegasus spyware. Shortly before his arrest, a sustained smear campaign by the Chouftv news website, known to have ties to security agencies, accused Radi of receiving foreign funds to provide espionage services to foreign companies, allegations for which he was subsequently charged and convicted.

Born on 18 July 1986, Radi's work exposes injustice, corruption, and nepotism between political powers and business elites, and highlights human rights issues, and social movements. He wrote for several websites, including Le Desk news website.

Soulaiman RAISSOUNI

Journalist, editor and writer Soulaiman Raissouni faced harassment after he was released on 29 July after receiving a royal pardon, along with 2,000 others. Raissouni had been arbitrarily detained since May 2020, when he was arrested on charges of 'sexual assault' and 'enforced confinement', part of a pattern of the Moroccan authorities' intimidation of dissenting voices through the use of sexual assault charges. He was sentenced to a five-year prison term and a fine in July 2021 (see Case Lists 2023/2024, 2022 and 2021). However, a few days after his release, he became the target of a vicious smear campaign by pro-government media following a press conference he held with **Omar Radi** (see above), and **Taoufik Bouachrine** at the Moroccan Association of Human Rights in August. In September, Raissouni was subject to further smears by pro-government media outlet after he gave an interview to the Spanish news website El Independiente criticising the three journalists' detention. He also remains unable to work in Morocco. Prior to his arrest in 2020, Raissouni had been targeted for surveillance by Pegasus spyware over a two-year period, starting in 2017.

Soulaiman Raissouni, born 5 June 1972, is a prominent Moroccan journalist and editor-in-chief of the now-closed opposition newspaper *Akhbar al-Youm*. While in prison, Raissouni wrote a prison diary, but this and a draft novel were confiscated in 2022, prompting him to refuse family visits for some weeks.

Maati MONJIB

Writer, academic, and historian Maati Monjib continued to be a target of harassment by Moroccan authorities due to his critical writings and views about the government. He remains unable to access his assets or leave the country after a ban imposed on him in October 2021, which he has protested, despite the fact that he was included in a royal pardon in September 2024, which brought to an end his prosecution begun in 2015 (see [Case Lists 2020 – 2023/2024](#)). He also continued to be subject to smear campaigns by pro-government media and remains unable to resume his job as history professor, from which he was dismissed in September 2022.

Monjib, born in 1962, is a writer, academic, historian and the president of [Freedom Now](#), an association that works to defend freedom of expression and journalism in Morocco, and is also the founder of the Ibn Rochd Center for Studies and Communication. His books include: *The Moroccan Monarchy and the Struggle for Power; A Political Biography of Mehdi Ben Barka* (with [Zakya Daoud](#)); and *Islamists Versus Secularists in Morocco*.

ISRAEL/PALESTINE**DETAINED****Mustafa SHETA**

Researcher, journalist and theatre manager Mustafa Sheta continued to be arbitrarily detained without trial at Gilbo'a prison in Israel at the end of the year, under an administrative detention order that was repeatedly renewed.

Sheta was arrested from his home on 13 December 2023 after Israeli forces broke into his 'Freedom Theatre' during a raid on Jenin refugee camp and destroyed its offices. An Israeli military court ordered his administrative detention for six months without any charges on 31 December

2023 (see [Case List 2023/2024](#)). The administrative detention order was extended three times in June, August and November 2024. His family remain unable to visit him in prison nor check on his health. However, his family told PEN International that a lawyer was able to see him and reported that he had lost considerable weight since being imprisoned.

Researcher, journalist and former political prisoner Mustafa Sheta, aged about 44, is producer and general manager of the [Freedom Theatre](#), a theatre and cultural centre in Jenin refugee camp in the occupied West Bank, founded in 2006, which stages professional theatre productions, holds theatre workshops, acting training, and exhibitions and short films.

HARASSED**Ahed TAMIMI**

Since her brief detention in November 2023, writer and prominent activist Ahed Tamimi remains under a travel ban and is unable to reach her university for study.

Held for 24 days after her arrest on 6 November 2023 until her release on 30 November as part of a temporary truce deal between Israel and Hamas (see [Case List 2023/2024](#)), Tamimi was forced to internally relocate and leave her house in the West Bank due to the Israeli authorities' escalating crackdown on Palestinians in the West Bank in 2024. She remains unable to travel to continue her studies at Birzeit University due to the arbitrary security measures Israel soldiers enforce on Palestinians at checkpoints across the West Bank. According to her family, Tamimi remains under a travel ban and is unable to travel to pursue her university studies abroad, which resulted in her losing a scholarship opportunity last year. She continues to suffer from health complications due to her prison experience in 2023, including stomach and throat issues and difficulties in sleeping.

Ahed Tamimi is a prominent Palestinian activist and co-author (with Dena Takruri) of *They Called Me a Lioness: A Palestinian Girl's Fight for Freedom* (Penguin Random House, 2022), in which she reflects on her personal experience and the daily struggles of life under Israeli occupation. She was previously arrested in December 2017, at the age of 17, following dissemination of a video of an altercation with Israeli soldiers. She was later sentenced to eight months in prison after conviction of charges including 'aggravated assault.'

Professor Nadera SHALHOUB-KEVORKIAN

Professor Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian was arrested by Israeli forces in April and held for a day, following comments she made on a podcast criticising Israeli oppression of Palestinians and stating that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza.

On 18 April 2024, Israeli police arrested Shalhoub-Kevorkian at her house in East Jerusalem, also confiscating books and posters. During her detention she was strip-searched, handcuffed tightly, denied access to food, water, and medicine for hours, and held in a cold cell without adequate clothing or blankets. She was interrogated about her academic work on suspicion of 'offences' including 'incitement of terrorism, violence, and racism.'

Shalhoub-Kevorkian was released the following day, on condition that she attend an interrogation and sign a financial guarantee, after the court concluded she posed no threat. The police immediately appealed the release decision, claiming that she engaged in 'serious incitement against the State of Israel by making statements against Zionism and even claiming that Israel is committing genocide in the Gaza Strip'. However, the court rejected the appeal due to lack of evidence.

Shalhoub-Kevorkian's arrest sparked widespread outrage among academics in Israel and the UK, where she teaches. The senior editors of the *British*

Journal of Criminology also published a supportive statement expressing concerns about her detention.

Professor Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian is a prominent Palestinian professor and leading legal and feminist scholar whose work focuses on several areas, including genocide studies, law and society, trauma, criminology, surveillance, and gendered violence. Shalhoub-Kevorkian is the Lawrence D. Biele Chair in Law at the Faculty of Law - Institute of Criminology and the School of Social Work and Public Welfare at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Global Chair in Law at Queen Mary University, London. She is also a member of the International Advisory Board of the *British Journal of Criminology*, from which she received the Radzinowicz Prize in 2017 for her article 'The Occupation of the Senses: The Prosthetic and Aesthetic of State Terror'. She has authored numerous academic publications, including 'Security Theology, Surveillance and the Politics of Fear' (2015), and 'Incarcerated Childhood and the Politics of Unchilding' (2019), both published by Cambridge University Press (CUP). She has also co-edited two books, including 'When Politics are Sacralised: Comparative Perspectives on Religious Claims and Nationalism', (CUP 2021).

WRITERS KILLED IN GAZA SINCE OCTOBER 2023

1. Omar Abu Shawish, 31 years old

Writer, poet, activist and educator – Killed by an Israeli air strike on 7 October 2023 at al-Nuseirat Refugee Camp

2. Saeed Talal al-Dahshan, 51 years old

Author and international law expert – Killed along with his mother, wife, son, two daughters, his brother's family, and neighbours by an Israeli airstrike on 11 October 2023

3. Yousef Dawas, 20 years old

Writer, poet, and guitar player – Killed on 14 October 2023 along with 27 members of his family at their home in Beit Lahia by an Israeli airstrike

4. Professor Omar Saleh Omar Ferwana, 67 years old

Writer, researcher, academic and gynaecologist – Killed on 15 October 2023 along with 14 members of his family by an Israeli airstrike

5. Mohammed Sami Qraieqa, 24 years old

Cartoonist, visual artist, and community activist – Killed on 17 October 2023 in Ahli Baptist Hospital massacre along with over 400 people

6. Heba Abu Nada, 32 years old

Writer, poet, and novelist – Killed on 20 October 2023 by Israeli airstrike in southern Gaza after fleeing the extensive Israeli bombardment of the north of the Gaza Strip

7. Abdel Karim al-Hashash, 76 years old

Writer and novelist – Killed on 23 October 2023 along with other family members in their house in Rafah by an Israeli airstrike

8. Yasser Barbakh, in his 20s

Writer and Essayist – Killed on 23 October 2023 with six members of his family by an Israeli airstrike

9. Jihad al-Masry, 60 years old

Historian, scholar and writer – Died on 29 October 2023 after succumbing to wounds sustained by Israeli shelling on Khan Younis on 17 October 2023, which also killed his wife and daughter

10. Inas al-Saqa, 53 years old

Playwright, actress and pioneer in theatre production – Killed on 31 October 2023 along with three of her children by an Israeli airstrike which left two of her daughters critically injured, one of them is suffering from a walking disability

11. Shahadah al-Buhbahan, 73 years old

Poet, researcher, and teacher – Killed on 6 November 2023 by an Israeli airstrike, along with his wife, grandchild, and extended family members

12. Professor Jihad el-Baz, 75 years old

Literary critic and Arabic literature professor – Killed on 11 November 2023 in his house in Rimal neighbourhood of Gaza City by an Israeli air strike which also killed his son-in-law and injured his three children, a six-month-old grandchild, that also left his daughter-in-law in a critical medical condition

13. Mustafa al-Sawwaf, 68 years old

Writer, political analyst, and media personality – Killed along with his wife, two of his children, and several family members on 18 November 2023 in their home in Gaza City by an Israeli airstrike which also left two of his sons injured

14. Professor Sufyan Tayeh, 52 years old

Researcher and academic – Killed on 2 December 2023 with his entire immediate family and some members of his extended family by an Israeli airstrike

15. Nooraldeen Adnan Hajjaj, 27 Years old

Playwright – Killed on 3 December 2023 by an Israeli air strike in al-Shujaiya neighbourhood

16. Professor Refaat Alareer, 44 years old

Writer, poet, academic and activist – Killed on 7 December 2023 along with his brother, brother's son, sister, and four of her children. In April 2024, an Israeli airstrike killed his daughter, her 2-month-old daughter, and her husband

17. Saleem al-Naffar, 60 years old

Novelist and poet – Killed on 7 December 2023 along with his three daughters, son, and wife, his brother, his brother's wife and their children by an Israeli airstrike on the family's house in al-Nasser neighbourhood of Gaza City

18. Nasser Ismail al-Yafawi, full name: Nasser Ismail Jarboo', 60 years old

Essayist and researcher – Killed on 6 January 2024 along with his son and nephew by an Israeli airstrike. Prior to his death, he lost over 22 family members, including his brother, his sister and her family

19. Ahmed al-Kahlout

Writer and culture worker – Killed on 4 February 2024 during Israeli bombardment two months after he survived abduction and torture by Israeli forces

20. Professor Rahaf Hneideq, 51 years old

Writer and academic – Killed on 10 February 2024 along with her husband and two children by an Israeli airstrike in Rafah

21. Mahdi Saed Hassouna, 11 years old

Writer of a war diary and the youngest writer to be killed during the ongoing war on Gaza – Killed on 24 April 2024 along with his mother, Amna Hamid, by an Israeli airstrike

22. Abd Rabbo Esleem, 62 years old

Poet and researcher – Killed on 10 August 2024 in Rafah, by an Israeli airstrike

23. Rashad Abu Sakhila, 23 years old

Poet and actor – Killed on 2 September 2024 in Al-Fakhoora School, northern Gaza, by an Israeli airstrike



PEN International has also created a digital memorial page for writers killed as a result of the war in Gaza.

Disclaimers:

* PEN International was unable to communicate with all the families of these writers due to the difficulty of communications and as many of the writers were killed along with their families.

** This list does not include artists and cultural workers; it only includes writers and poets whose PEN International was able to obtain information regarding their deaths from at least two different sources, and it does not represent an inclusive list of all writers killed since 7 October 2023.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

IMPRISONED

Mohamed Abdullah AL-ROKEN

Dr. Mohammad Abdullah Al-Roken was sentenced to life imprisonment in July, along with 42 others, following a grossly unfair trial notoriously known as [UAE 84](#). He has been held since his arrest on 17 July 2012.

The defendants, including Dr Al-Roken, were convicted on 10 July 2024 of bogus ‘charges’ of ‘establishing’ and ‘supporting’ a terrorist group, in relation to their alleged links to the Justice and Dignity Committee, a group of government critics who between 2011 and 2012 called for the respect of human rights in the UAE (see [Case Lists 2014 – 2022](#)). Most, if not all, including Al-Roken, were previously convicted of similar vague charges in the notorious ‘[UAE 94](#)’ trial and many, including Al-Roken, were being held after expiry of their sentences under a law permitting indefinite detention for ‘rehabilitation’, when news of the fresh charges broke on 10 December 2023 (World Human Rights Day) during the COP28 climate summit in Dubai. (see [Case List 2023/2024](#)). The mass trial sparked international outrage, including from UN human rights experts in [January](#) and [July 2024](#).

Al-Roken’s investigation records from 2012 reveal that he complained of being held in solitary confinement and being subjected to continuous light exposure, among methods of torture or other ill-treatment used against other ‘[UAE 94](#)’ defendants and documented by [Human Rights Watch](#). In April 2014, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) [concluded](#) that the UAE 94 defendants, including Al-Roken, were held arbitrarily, raising concerns over grave violations of the right to a fair trial, including forced confessions and reports of torture and other ill-treatment, and prolonged solitary confinement. The WGAD concluded that the charges brought against them related to acts that fall under

the rights to freedom of expression and of peaceful assembly, and urged the UAE government to release them and provide them with adequate reparation. PEN International has long campaigned for his release, including by highlighting his imprisonment in the [2021 Day of the Imprisoned Writer](#) campaign.

Dr Mohamed Abdullah Al-Roken, born 26 September 1962, is a prominent Emirati writer, academic and human rights lawyer specialising in freedom of expression and counter-terrorism. He was a member of the International Association of Lawyers (UIA), the International Bar Association, and is the former president of the [dissolved](#) UAE Jurists Association.

Ahmed MANSOOR

Emirati [poet](#), blogger and human rights activist Ahmed Mansoor continued to serve a 10-year prison term. In July, Mansoor was further convicted in the notorious UAE 84 trial (see Mohamed al-Roken above), and sentenced to an additional 15 years in prison for allegedly supporting the Justice and Dignity Committee.

On 20 March 2017, Mansoor was [arrested](#) in the middle of the night at his home where he lived with his wife and four sons. He was convicted on 29 May 2018 of ‘insulting the ‘status and prestige of the UAE and its symbols’ including its leaders’ and of ‘seeking to damage the relationship of the UAE with its neighbours by publishing false reports and information on social media.’ He was sentenced by the State Security Chamber of the Federal Appeal Court to 10 years’ imprisonment, followed by three years of surveillance and a fine of 1,000,000 Emirati Dirhams (around USD \$270,000).

The sentence was upheld on 31 December 2018 by the State Security Chamber of the Federal Supreme Court. Mansoor’s trial was widely viewed as grossly unfair and lacked the minimum international standards of fair trial and due process. The [European Parliament](#), [United Nations Special Rapporteurs](#), and [human rights organisations](#) have all called for his immediate and unconditional release.

In 2019, Mansoor started a hunger strike to protest poor prison conditions and his unfair trial. He has reportedly been kept in an isolation ward in Al-Sadr prison in Abu Dhabi, where he is being held in ‘[terrible conditions](#)’ in a cell with no bed, no water and no access to a shower, which has significantly impacted his health. The UAE has repeatedly denied him access to family visits.

In September 2024, the annual report of the UN Secretary-General about reprisals against those who cooperate with the UN mechanisms [cited](#) Mansoor’s case. This was the eighth time that the Secretary-General had denounced reprisals against him, having previously raised concerns in 2014, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022.

Mansoor’s literary analysis and poetry were [published](#) in many Emirati newspapers and a collection of his poems [مدع ندم دعاب](#) *Beyond Failure* was published in **2010**. The 2015 Martin Ennals Laureate, and a member of the advisory boards of the Gulf Centre for Human Rights and Human Rights Watch, Mansoor was the last human rights defender openly working in the UAE. His love for poetry contributed to his fierce defence of freedom of expression and human rights.

PEN ACTIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

In addition to its advocacy for the writers referred to in this list, PEN International also took action on behalf of journalists and others at risk in the Middle East and North Africa, some in collaboration with other organisations, details of which can be found in the links provided below. In 2024, PEN International also regularly posted information about writers at risk in the Middle East and North Africa region on dedicated social media accounts, [@Pen_mena](#) (X) and [penintmena](#) (Facebook).

EGYPT

Lina ATTALAH: *prosecuted journalist and chief editor of independent media outlet Mada Masr*

Action:

February 2024: Statement: [Egypt: Editor of independent news outlet face charges in renewed attack on press freedom](#)

VARIOUS: *escalating attacks on freedom of expression*

Action:

August 2024: Statement: [Egypt: Alarm over government’s escalating attacks on freedom of expression](#)

PALESTINE

Hanan AWWAD: *President of PEN Palestine, poet, and writer held at gunpoint*

Action:

July 2024: Statement: [OPT/Israel: Writer and President of PEN Palestine held at gunpoint by Israeli soldiers](#)

VARIOUS: *protection of writers and journalists and others in the war in Gaza*

Action:

February 2024: Statement: [OPT/Israel: PEN International supports the ICJ ruling, continues call for an immediate ceasefire, protection of civilians and release of hostages](#)

February 2024: Joint letter: [PEN International joins CPJ and partners calling on the EU to help journalists in Israel-Gaza war](#)

September 2024: PEN International Resolution: [Global call to protect writers and uphold freedom of expression in Palestine, Israel, and beyond](#)

BAHRAIN

Various: *continued arbitrary detention of human rights defenders and opposition leaders*

Action:

June 2024: Joint letter: [Bahrain: Joint Letter on Human Rights Situation to Member and Observer States of the United Nations Human Rights Council](#)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

At the start of 2025 the world has been thrown into deliberate chaos, challenging the rules-based international order that began with the adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights soon after the end of the Second World War, which PEN International was instrumental in creating, and the human rights framework developed subsequently. Wars and conflicts have doubled in the last five years, but cultural life – part of the social glue of communities – is rarely prioritised in reconstruction efforts.

The machinery of governments is being outsourced and privatised to the power and benefit of techbros and fossil fuel companies. Mis- and disinformation abound, often a deliberate strategy to hide the increasing and unchecked power of oligarchs to keep consolidating their wealth at the expense of the rest of the world, with no regard to the true cost of their actions, putting the entire planet at risk. The regional overviews in this Case List show the challenges we face in bringing to fruition the ideals of the PEN Charter: to oppose ‘mendacious publication, deliberate falsehood and distortion of facts for political and personal ends’. PEN International pledges to continue developing innovative ways to use literature and its influence to break down the silos of social media and to counter the hate speech and disinformation peddled by those trying to sow discord and to profit from societal collapse. PEN International’s [Campaigning Handbook](#) and recent [move away](#) from X to Bluesky are good examples of this in practice.

As this Case List shows, those who dare to challenge these developments and to speak truth to power, are at risk of being silenced: through weaponization of legal systems and lawfare by rulers and the companies that profit from their close associations with them, or through imprisonment, arbitrary

detention, stigmatization (especially for those already marginalised and discriminated against). Leading to ‘othering’, all this can give the green light to physical and psychological threats and most chillingly and permanently to death. Yet it also shows that international solidarity, support, campaigning and advocacy can and does bear positive results – demonstrated by the releases and acquittals documented.

When a rules-based order starts to break down, accountability for the persecution of writers becomes an ever more distant prospect. Compiling the Case List is always challenging when deciding how to approach issues of impunity – how long to keep a writer on the Case List when there is no movement towards resolution or justice, while continuing to honour their work and memory? Going forward, PEN International could usefully consider how it might respectfully honour the memory of writers killed in war or targeted for their work, as a means of ensuring their words are not forgotten and to remind us all of the immense losses the world has suffered through these untimely deaths.

Scaling up attention on anniversaries, multilingual translations, as well as organising events and sharing commentary could be a sobering reminder of the horrors of war and killing and could act as a clarion call for peace and justice. It would also provide opportunities for current and future generations of writers to ensure that for those whose lives were cut far too short through warfare and murder, their literature will know no frontiers and their ideas will remain common currency, despite the efforts of those who silenced them.

To these ends, PEN International makes the following recommendations to the international community:

TO FOSTER PEACE

- Do all within their power to bring about an immediate end to all armed conflicts, especially to end indiscriminate attacks on civilians including writers, artists, and cultural workers
 - As a matter of urgency, establish a permanent ceasefire between Israel and the Hamas authorities in Gaza; between the warring parties in Sudan; restore peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo; and work towards an end to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.
- Use all avenues to seek the release of hostages and work to ensure timely delivery of adequate humanitarian aid to civilian populations in conflict zones.
- Ensure the right to freedom of expression and access to information at times of conflict, and that any limitations continue to meet the three-part test focused on the principles of legality, necessity and proportionality, as accorded under Article 19(3) of the ICCPR.
- Publicly call on all parties to armed conflicts to respect the right of journalists to report on the hostilities, ensure journalists' safety, allow all journalists seeking to evacuate from conflict zones to do so, abjure the deliberate killing of journalists, promptly and thoroughly investigate all attacks on journalists, and hold accountable individuals found to be responsible for them.
- Work to ensure that schools, cultural institutions, cultural heritage sites, and other civilian infrastructure are not targeted and that children's right to education during times of conflict is protected, including in situations of internal and cross-border displacement.
- Support all efforts to ensure accountability, at the national and international level, for

international crimes, including all acts of genocide, and violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law committed during armed conflicts.

- Work collectively towards provision of remedy, redress and reparation for past violations and the prevention of further international crimes and violations;
 - Respect the independence of the ICC and the ICJ and their ongoing investigations, including by desisting from intimidation and smear campaigns against court officials.

In post-conflict situations, PEN International also calls on governments and authorities to:

- Ensure reconstruction efforts are planned and implemented with the meaningful participation of local populations, and include adequate resources for the reconstruction of the cultural sector, in line with the recommendation of the UN Special Rapporteur in the field of Cultural Rights, to pursue cultural development as a pillar of sustainable development on a par with its social, economic, and environmental pillars;
- immediately end propaganda for war, incitement to genocide, and hate speech, including the advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence.

With respect to the situation in Israel and Palestine:

- Work towards an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestine and an end to systems of racial segregation and apartheid as practised by Israel, in accordance with the ICJ's Advisory Opinion of 19 July 2024.
- Support efforts to remove unexploded ordnance and rubble and begin the

reconstruction phase, with meaningful participation of Gazans, while ensuring the population has adequate access to food, drinking water, safe shelters and basic services, including medical care and education.

- Take necessary measures to protect the Palestinian people from the risk of genocide and urge Israel to immediately and unconditionally fully adhere to the provisional measures indicated by the ICJ in January, March, and May 2024 in relation to the application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip.

TO PROTECT WRITERS

- Immediately and unconditionally release all writers, journalists, activists, artists, bloggers and other cultural workers unjustly imprisoned or detained without trial, simply for exercising their legitimate right to freedom of expression, including all detained and imprisoned writers listed in this Case List, and drop charges against any writer facing trial solely on account of their work or the peaceful expression of their opinions.
- End the practice of banishment and ‘civil death’ through forced deportation, refusal of entry and stripping of citizenship and civil rights, which can amount to a crime against humanity if applied for political reasons.
- Repeal all legislation, including criminal defamation and insult laws, and desist from introducing new laws that unduly restrict the right to freedom of expression, including online, and ensure adequate protections for a free press in all countries, in line with states’ international human rights obligations.
- Introduce procedural and punitive measures to address the growing use of SLAPPs, which have become a

significant threat to media freedom and advocacy rights, as well as providing assistance, support, and protection for SLAPP targets, including legal advice free of charge.

- As outlined in PEN International’s 2024 resolution on protection measures for writers at risk, ensure a comprehensive, fair and systematic response to all writers and creatives fleeing persecution:
 - Investigate barriers to mobility of writers at risk with a view to removing them;
 - Establish and strengthen humanitarian pathways to refuge for persecuted writers and creatives, including through visa code provisions and clear guidelines for diplomatic missions on the provision of and access to emergency assistance, with a special focus on writers facing intersecting forms of discrimination and persecution;
 - Cultural sector businesses and institutions should actively consider where and how they can support persecuted writers.

TO ENHANCE THE CULTURAL ROLE OF MINORITIZED COMMUNITIES

Recognise and celebrate the role of minoritized communities in advancing the culture of all states, including by:

- Taking effective measures to stem and reverse the rising tide in many countries of xenophobia, antisemitism, islamophobia and anti-LGBTQI sentiments;
- Facilitating mother tongue education, which enables members to celebrate their life, language, culture and heritage;

- Promoting translation of literatures to and from minoritized languages;
- Protecting the cultural heritage of minoritized communities;
- Ending the persecution of any writer solely on the grounds of their background and protecting the right of writers from minoritized communities to advocate for their community's rights without fear of reprisals.

TO PROMOTE AND PROTECT WOMEN WRITERS

Implement the calls of PEN International's Women's Manifesto, specifically by:

- Ending all forms of violence against women and girls;
- Protecting women writers and journalists and combating impunity for attacks against them, including online;
- Eliminating gender disparity at all levels of education;
- Ensuring full equality of women in both law and practice, including by addressing structural barriers to women writers and ensuring parity for them in employment and remuneration as writers.

TO PROTECT CIVIC SPACE AS A BULWARK FOR THE REALISATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

- Reaffirm the importance of civic space as a foundation for an authentic democracy that respects, protects and facilitates the human rights of citizens and civil society organisations to safely speak out, organise, associate, participate and claim their rights, including the right to express their opinion, views and criticism of the political, social, economic and cultural structures around them, and put in place adequate measures to nurture and protect it.
- Develop and implement bolder and better coordinated responses to the global rise in authoritarianism and the widespread emergency of shrinking civic space that imperil and significantly threaten to erode gains made in many countries over decades of struggle, solidarity and emerging global consensus on democratic governance and respect for human rights as foundational for peaceful, open, and just societies.
- End the use of smear campaigns that put writers at risk of physical and digital harassment and attacks, and which disproportionately affect women.
- Desist from banning books and other forms of artistic expression that do not constitute hate speech.

OUR FUNDING

PEN International relies on voluntary donations to deliver our mission.

We receive support from writers, publishers, and others who care about the issues we stand for and respond to: from literature, literacy, and threatened languages to our humanitarian and campaigning work.

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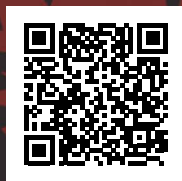
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