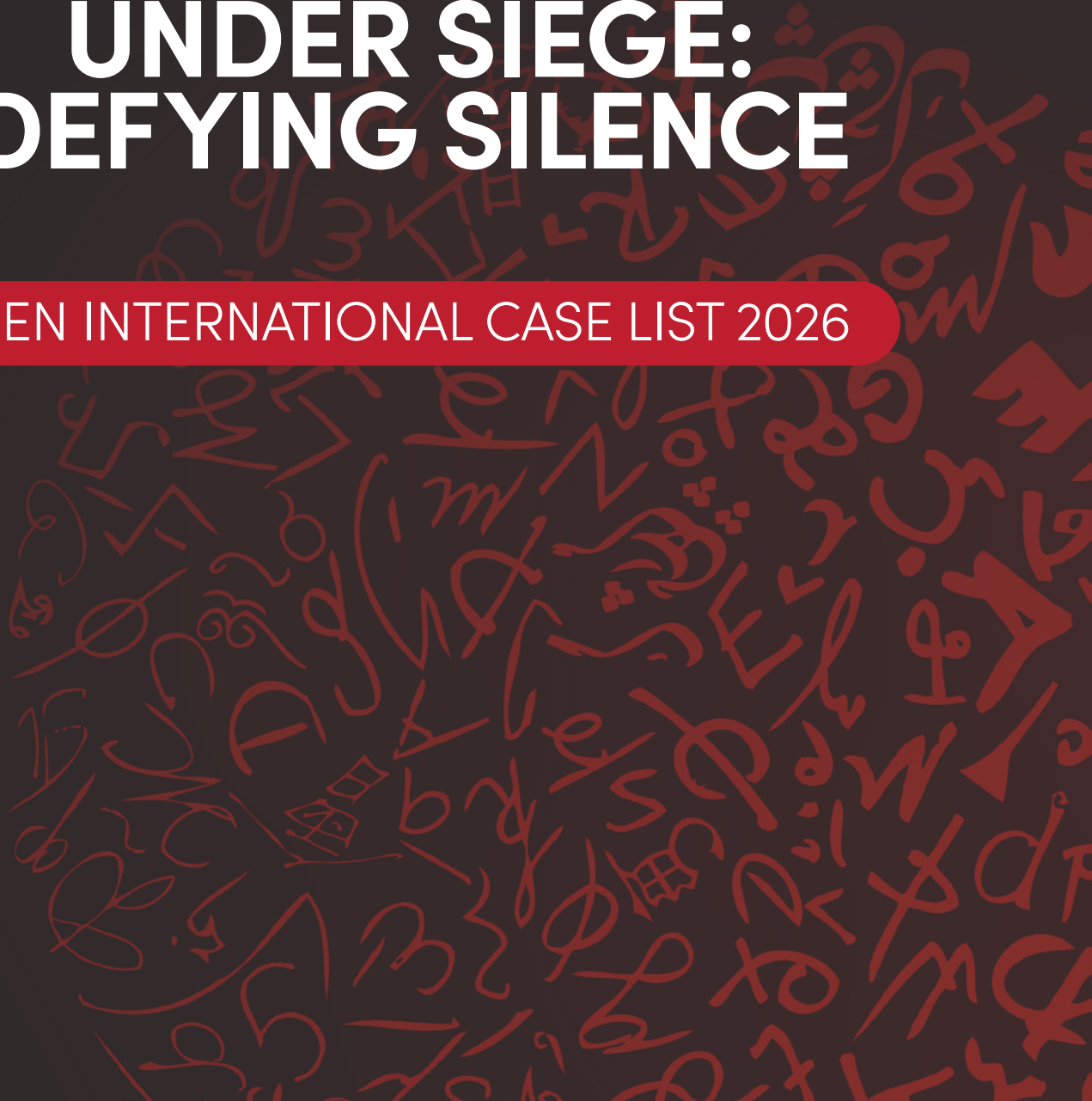




WRITERS UNDER SIEGE: DEFYING SILENCE

PEN INTERNATIONAL CASE LIST 2026



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SPECIAL THANKS TO: PEN Centres and Committees across regions.
All PEN International staff.

PEN International is a non-political organisation that holds Observer Status with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, Special Consultative Status at the United Nations, and Associate Status at UNESCO. PEN International is a registered charity in England and Wales with registration number 1117088.

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 more than 100 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 over 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 1960, 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 2025, 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 impacting 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 2025, 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 Writers in Prison Committee

Freedom of expression is a foundational right that underpins the enjoyment of all others, and in 2025, it has been under sustained, systematic and increasingly sophisticated assault. The threats facing writers today are no longer limited to the acts of repressive governments acting in isolation. They reflect a broader, accelerating pattern, one defined by the deliberate erosion of the very conditions necessary for independent thought, storytelling, and the kinds of open discourse essential to a free society.

Wars, displacement, and protracted humanitarian crises continue to foster environments in which writers are persecuted. Misinformation, disinformation, and state-sponsored propaganda have become increasingly technologically potent and even more difficult to counter. Artificial intelligence is being harnessed to generate narratives at an industrial speed and scale, only to be dispersed into an online ecosystem that financially incentivises societal division and polarisation. In this complex environment, the need for a collective, principled, and urgent response has never been clearer.

The assault on cultural and linguistic rights continues to deepen in scope and severity. In countries around the world, we are witnessing the deliberate targeting of cultural institutions, the erasure of minority literary traditions, the banning of books, and the criminalisation of creative expression.

These are not incidental acts of censorship. They are calculated efforts to narrow the breadth of what can be thought, imagined, remembered and expressed. When literary heritage and expression are attacked, our capacity to develop the narratives and ideas necessary to understand and address the world's seemingly intractable challenges is diminished, resulting in a cost borne by us all.

PEN International Case List 2026 provides a stark illustration of this complex and troubling landscape. It documents the deepening repression faced by writers - not only impacting their writing, but their lives, loved ones and communities. The deliberate targeting of those whose words illuminate the world around us continues unabated in far too many places. Writers from marginalised communities continue to face intersecting and compounding acts of discrimination, their vulnerability amplified by gender, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, and other dimensions of identity. The growing transnational reach of repressive states, and their ability to extend their repressive apparatus far beyond their own borders, continues to expand, enabled by insufficient international accountability and, at times, the complicity of the very countries where writers have sought refuge.

Yet the Case List also bears witness to resilience and resistance. In 2025, we celebrated the release of five writers whose entries document the repression they have been subjected to and for whom PEN Centres and members around the world have supported through advocacy and campaigning. I express my heartfelt gratitude to the PEN movement for its commitment. This is the work of PEN International, painstaking, unrelenting and sustained by the solidarity shown by writers and advocates around the world who refuse to be silenced.

PEN International will continue to advocate, campaign and provide emergency assistance to writers and others persecuted for their peaceful expression. We will press for stronger protections for writers and the right to freedom of expression in law, policy, and practice. And we will hold fast to the conviction that literature, in its unique power to foster empathy, preserve memory, and imagine other worlds, is not a luxury but a necessity for our shared humanity.

GLOBAL OVERVIEW

ANN HARRISON

Case List Editor

The challenges to the rules-based international order that were coming into view during the preparation of the previous Case List have been consolidated and entrenched in countries in all regions of the world.

Many governments no longer feel the need to pay even lip service to human rights, and some have left international bodies and mechanisms, undermining the checks and balances that have been in place for the past 80 years. This 2026 Case List illustrates how persecution of writers continues and takes new forms that can spread like wildfire among states seeking to repress dissent and opposition. Yet it also shows that international solidarity, support, campaigning and advocacy remains crucial – as shown by the releases, acquittals and legal reforms documented despite the increasingly challenging global context.

Internal and international conflicts, the majority taking place in **Africa**, continued unabated, often fuelled by geopolitical fault lines linked to competition for resources – whether for the fossil fuel industry or for critical minerals essential for the transition to renewable energy or for technological or military purposes. As in previous years, such conflict all but destroyed cultural life in the **Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar, Palestine, Sudan, and Ukraine**, and curtailed it in other places where gang violence runs rampant, such as **Haiti**. At the same time, **cuts to international aid**, most notably by the **United States of America**, but also by **Canada, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom**, devastated the provision of humanitarian support, which impacted education and cultural life, often with women and girls suffering the worst impacts, as in **Afghanistan**.

On the other hand, the fact that protests around the world continued at a high level, driven both by opposition to Israel's genocide against Palestinians in Gaza and dissatisfaction with corruption and economic and social conditions, shows that people have not been fully cowed into silence. Many of these protests were characterised by the leadership of young activists from the Gen Z generation who used digital platforms to organise and share symbols of solidarity, such as the Straw Hat Pirate flag, from a popular Japanese anime. These protests led to the removal of officials, and in some cases governments, in countries such as **Bulgaria, Indonesia, Madagascar, Nepal and Serbia**, as well as concessions or reforms in **Morocco, the Philippines, and Togo**. Elections were also a flash point for protests in **Cameroon, Tanzania and Uganda** that were met with unlawful use of force. Governments also used **internet shutdowns or social media bans** to hamper these and other protests, particularly in **Afghanistan, Cameroon, Nepal, India, Iran, Indonesia and Tanzania**. Some Gen Z activists faced reprisals for their activism, such as poet **Mohamed Tadjadit** in **Algeria**, who was sentenced to a lengthy prison term for his participation in the #Manich Radi movement.

Journalists around the world, particularly in **Mexico** and other countries 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**. Despite positive, albeit limited, developments in trials for the murders of journalists in **Malta** and **Serbia**, little progress was made in addressing **impunity** for past attacks in **Brazil, Mexico, Norway**, and **Türkiye**. Such a lack of accountability sends a chilling message to all writers.

Governments and official bodies continued to engage in acts of **transnational repression** in 2025 in attempts to silence dissent abroad. Methods used included collusion in arrests and suspicious deaths in custody, and in *absentia* trials, with the linked threat of extradition, as used by the **Russian Federation** against Georgia-based journalist **Larisa Tuptsokova** and **Türkiye**. Other writers forcibly transported across borders in previous years remained in various forms of detention, including in **China** and the **UAE**.

Weaponisation of the judicial system to crush dissent remained a common practice. Repressive **cybercrime laws and regulations** that are incompatible with freedom of expression remained in force in many countries. Signs arose of a continuum of repression developing from smear campaigns and hostile rhetoric against writers and journalists (**Argentina, Bangladesh, Mexico, Serbia, Türkiye, USA**) and eventually to civil and criminal defamation claims (often a legacy of colonial laws) or other kinds of often trumped-up criminal charges, highlighting the increasing use of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs). Journalist and author **Óscar Martínez** left **El Salvador** to avoid the risk of an arrest warrant in connection with a series of interviews with organised crime members he had published, which alleged official corruption.

Stigmatisation was often the precursor to writers and journalists being threatened, including with rape and death, for example in **Argentina, Mexico, Honduras, Israel, Mali, Peru** and **Serbia**. Writer **Rana Ayyub** received death threats targeting her and her father in relation to her human rights reporting in **India**.

WHEN LITERARY HERITAGE AND EXPRESSION ARE ATTACKED, OUR CAPACITY TO DEVELOP THE NARRATIVES AND IDEAS NECESSARY TO UNDERSTAND AND ADDRESS THE WORLD'S SEEMINGLY INTRACTABLE CHALLENGES IS DIMINISHED, RESULTING IN A COST BORNE BY US ALL.

MA THIDA

Chair of PEN International's Writers in Prison Committee

Such threats caused some writers to leave their countries for their own safety, including **Étienne Fakaba Sissoko**, who left **Mali** after receiving threats after his release from a prison term imposed in relation to a book he wrote.

Administrative measures, such as removal from jobs, and blocking of journalists' access or denial of visas, were also used to curtail freedom of expression in **Argentina, Bangladesh, Honduras** and the **USA**. **Judicial harassment** was documented in **Argentina** (where President Milei was a frequent instigator), **Belarus, Egypt, Guatemala, Iran, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, Serbia**, the **Philippines** (where the stigmatising use of 'red-tagging' continued), and **Türkiye**.

However, in a welcome sign that, in at least some countries, the courts are the final protector of freedom of expression, writers and authors in **Bangladesh, Mozambique, and the Philippines** had their convictions overturned, and **Malawi's** criminal defamation laws were ruled as unconstitutional. Two writers in **Algeria** and **Egypt** were released after pardons and were able to reunite with their families in other countries. However, writers and artists in **Belarus, Cuba, Egypt, India, Iran, Venezuela** and **Türkiye**, released conditionally, faced other forms of harassment such as enforced exile, travel bans or prohibition on work.

Prolonged detention without trial or imprisonment, sometimes coupled with **poor prison conditions** that put the lives of writers at risk, remained the most common form of persecution, including in **Algeria, Belarus, China, Cuba, India, Iran, Israel, the Russian Federation, Thailand, Türkiye, the UAE** and **Venezuela**. In **Eritrea**, 12 writers and journalists detained almost 25 years ago remain held in conditions amounting to **enforced disappearance**. Many were held on the basis of **vaguely worded national security or anti-terror legislation**, such as **Dong Yuyu**, serving a seven-year prison term following a conviction of 'espionage' after he lunched with a Japanese diplomat. They also included journalist **Ismail Alexandrani**, long persecuted for his investigative work in **Egypt**, who was detained on fresh national security charges in 2025.

In other countries, authorities resorted to bogus criminal charges or excessively long penalties to lock up writers, including in **Egypt, Georgia, Morocco**, and the **Russian Federation**. In **Cuba**, poet and academic **José Gabriel Barrenechea Chávez** was sentenced to the maximum six-year prison term for his participation in a peaceful protest. In **Belarus** and **Cuba**, imprisoned writers were released from long prison terms after negotiations with other countries, particularly the **USA**, but many, such as prominent **Belarus** opposition figure and Nobel Peace Prize winner **Ales Bialiatski**, were **forced into exile** as part of the conditions of their release.

The spread of mis- and disinformation, increasingly generated by artificial intelligence (AI), continued to gather pace and was

sometimes used in smear campaigns. Often driven by corporate actors seeking to undermine challenges to their market domination in addition to state actors challenging dissent, it affected public debate on matters of global and national importance, including human-induced climate change and the use of medical interventions that protect individual and public health, such as vaccines. With disinformation sometimes feeding into conservative campaigns that challenged progressive concepts of gender and racial equality, the year saw further increases in censorship of books and other cultural mediums such as film, especially in the **USA** and **Canada**, but also in **Cuba, Mexico** and **Türkiye**. **Israeli forces** confiscated books from a well-known Palestinian bookshop in East Jerusalem, and briefly detained its co-owners.

Finally, as in all walks of life, identity plays a part in persecution. Only a quarter of the individual writers featured in the 2026 Case List are women. However, they were more likely to be on trial or suffer various kinds of harassment, including death threats or gender-based violence. Writers who were members of minorities such as the Baha'i minority in **Iran**, Uyghur and Tibetan writers in **China** and Kurdish writers in **Türkiye** also continued to face persecution for expressing those identities, including long prison terms. Writers discussing themes of gender identity, sexual orientation and sexual abuse, as well as non-binary writers, also faced repression, including censorship and harassment in **Canada, Nigeria, Peru, Türkiye**, and the **USA**.

In 2025, PEN International continued its decades-long close cooperation with PEN Centres, the PEN Emergency Fund (PEF) and partners to provide life-saving support to writers and their families, including 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 (see graphic). The largest number of the 84 PEF grants went to assist **Palestinian** writers trying to flee Israel's ongoing genocide in Gaza (21), while severe restrictions on free speech in **Myanmar**

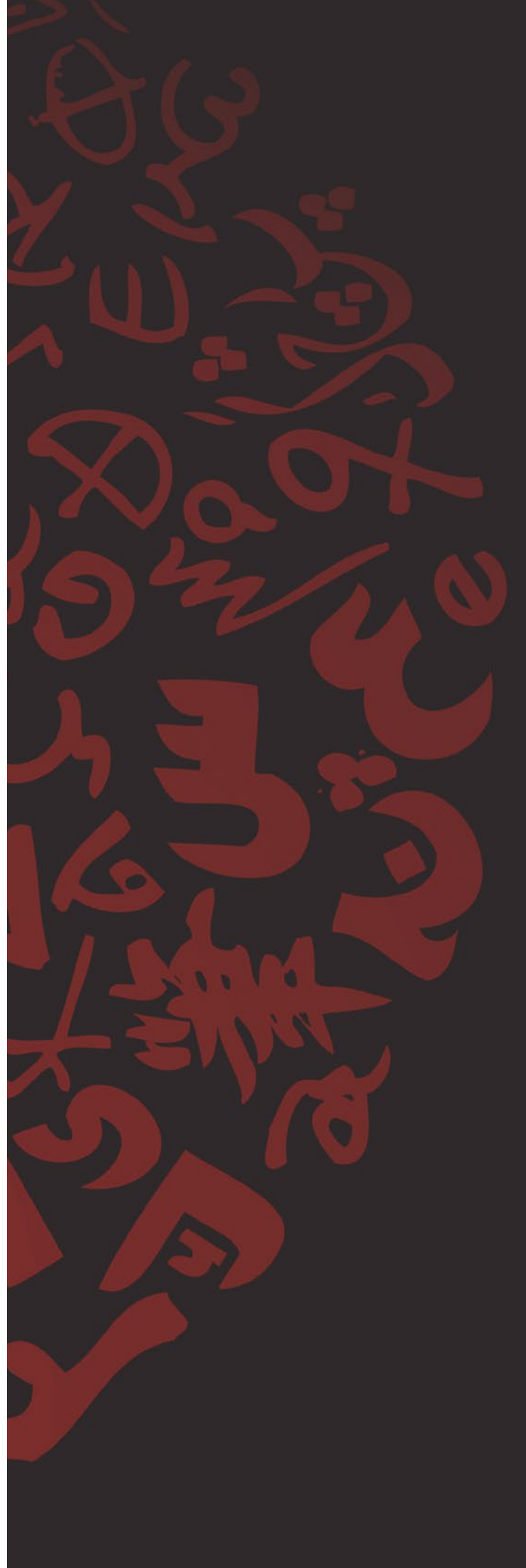
(16), **Afghanistan** (7), **Türkiye** (6), **Belarus** (4), **Ethiopia** (2) and **Nicaragua** (2) meant that the grants continued to be a lifeline for persecuted writers there. Writers from 17 other countries also received support. Six additional emergency grants were provided to persecuted writers from Belarus via PEN International's Civil Society Programme, following their release and forced exile in 2025.

As this Case List documents, the continued high numbers of grants to writers from countries in crisis, as well as the overall number of countries of origin of the writers seeking support, is illustrative of the persecution faced by writers around the world. As conflict intensifies and the impact of humanitarian aid cuts are felt, it is likely that the need for emergency support will grow in 2026 and beyond. Urgent and sustained fundraising is essential to boost the supply of finance for these lifesaving grants.

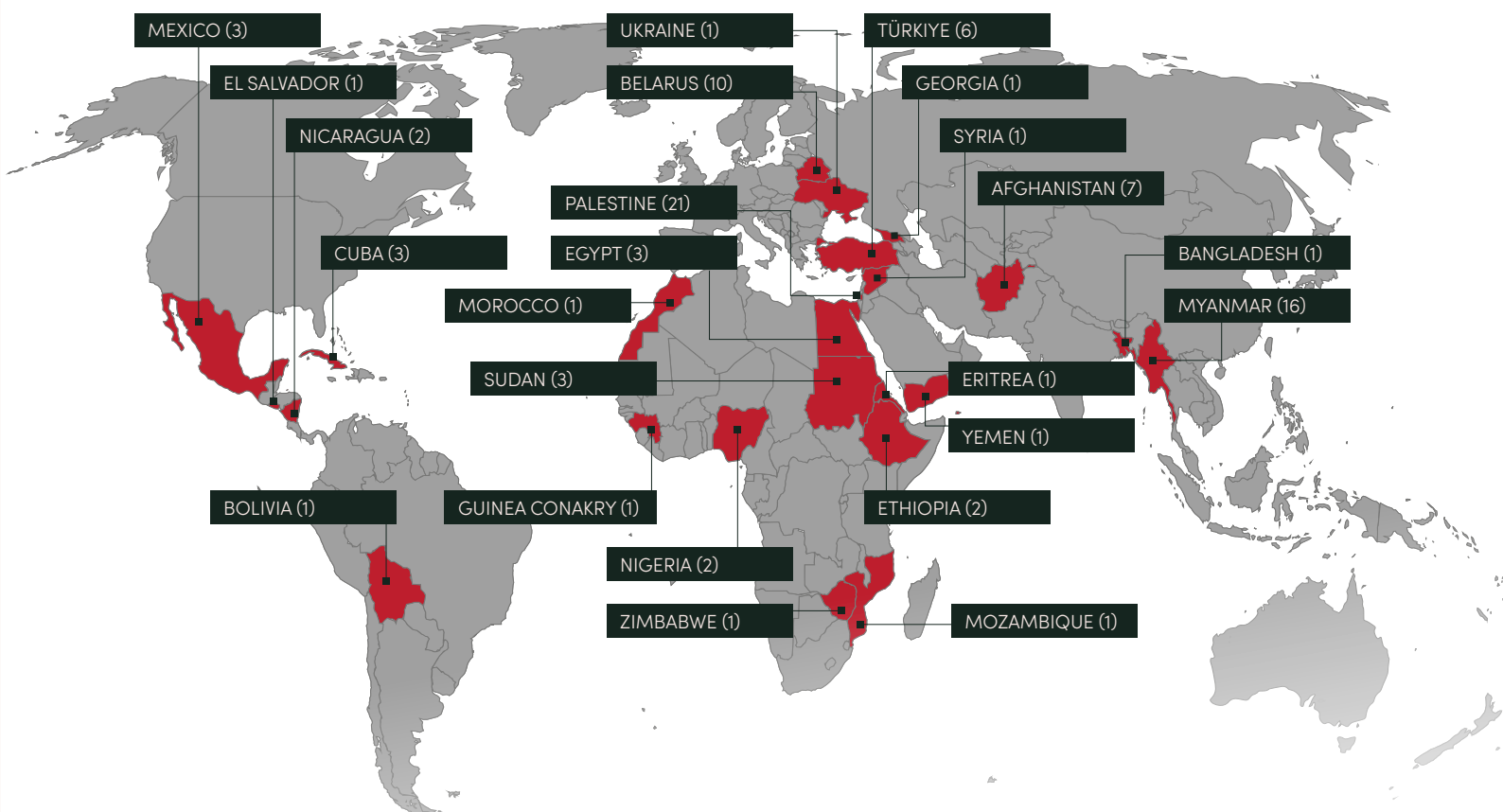
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MA THIDA

*Chair of PEN International's
Writers in Prison Committee*



EMERGENCY GRANTS BY REGION AND COUNTRY 2025



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

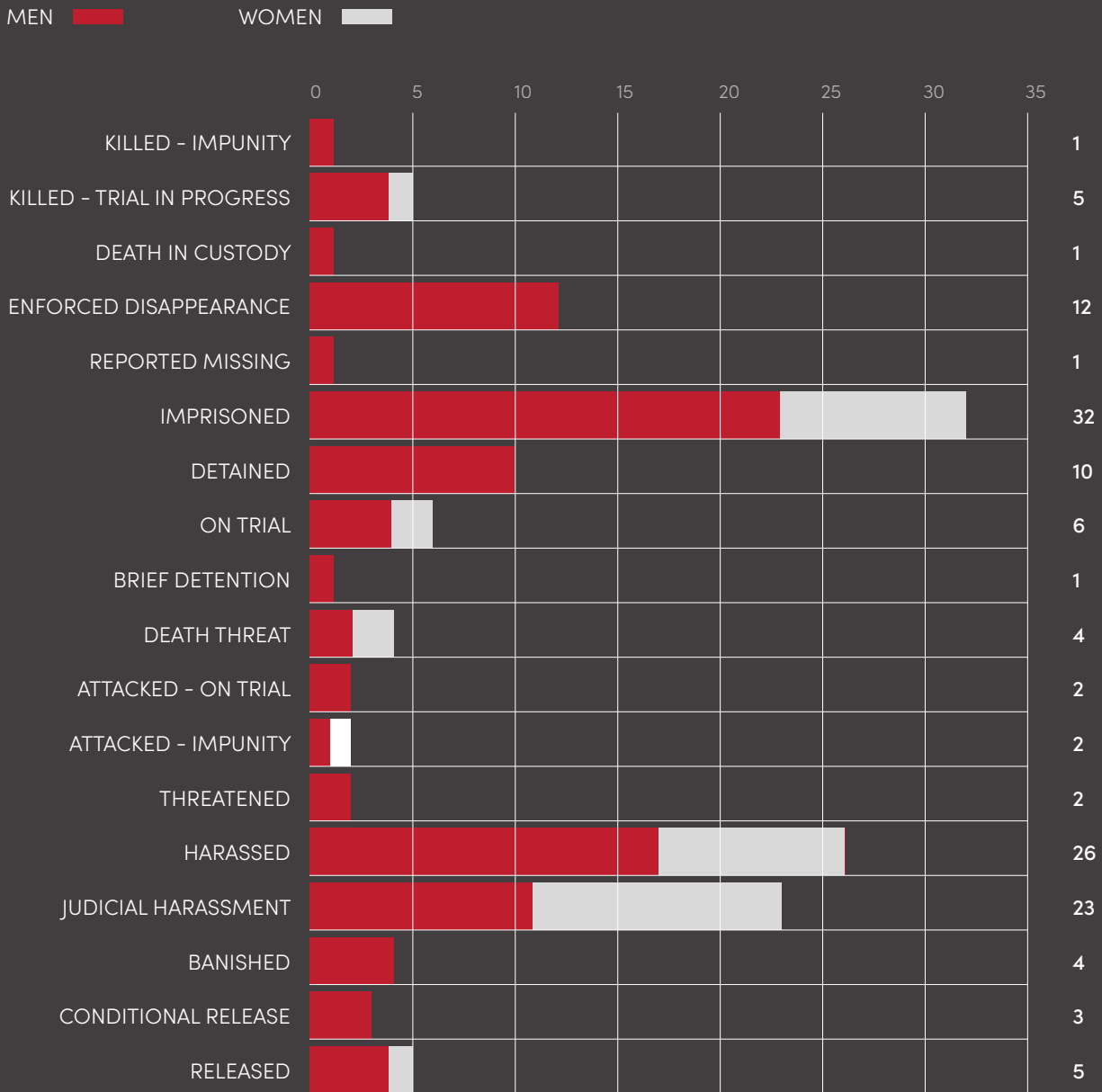
GRANTS BY REGION

AFRICA	11
AMERICAS	10
ASIA	24
EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA	18
MENA	27

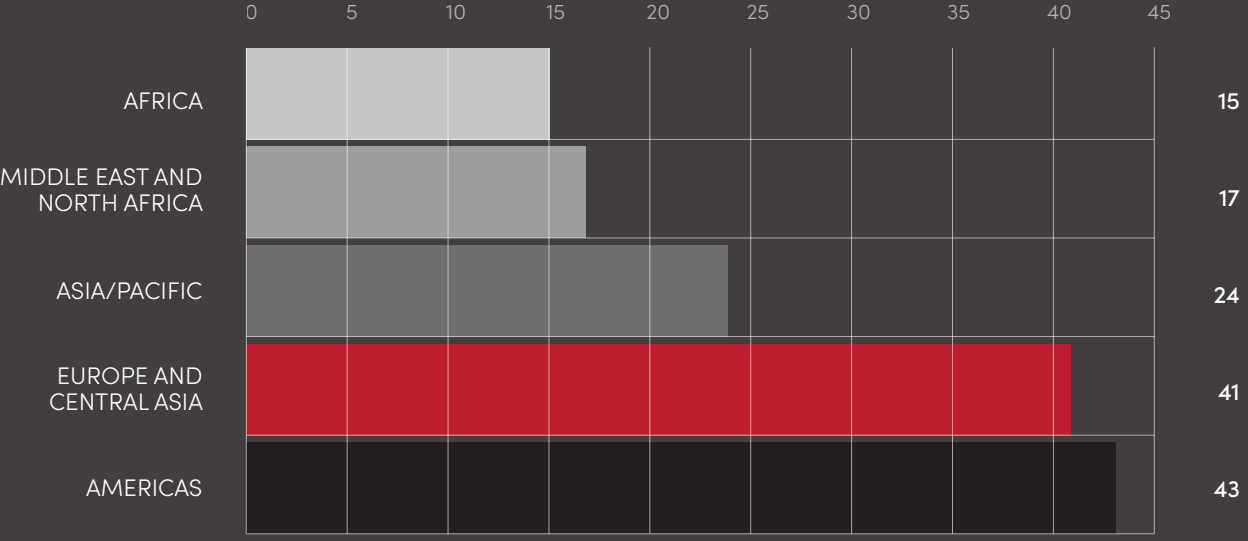
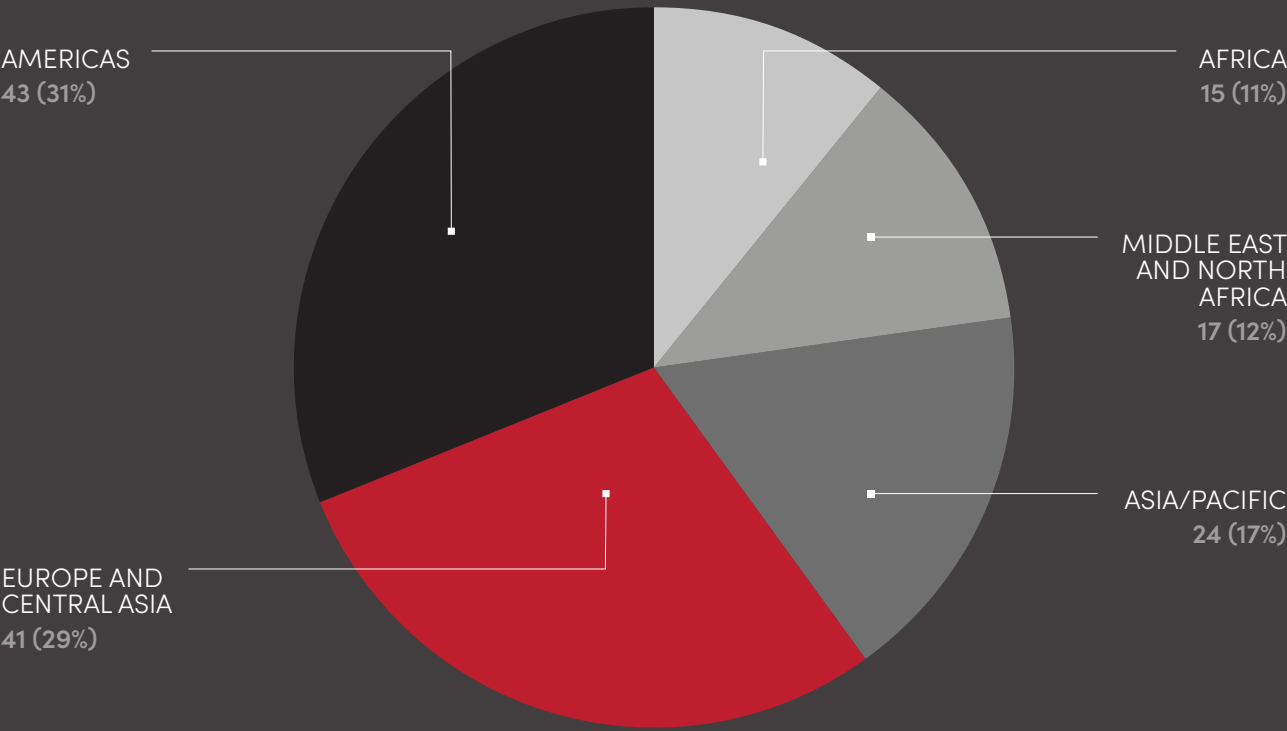
THE CASE LIST IN NUMBERS

PEN International Case List 2026 records 140 attacks on writers that were reported in 2025. 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 2025)



ATTACKS ON WRITERS BY REGION (JANUARY-DECEMBER 2025)



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 International 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 International is certain the individual was a writer and that their disappearance was carried out by the authorities or with their acquiescence)

ABDUCTION (PEN International 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 International 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 International 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 International 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 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 should be recorded as harassment)

DEATH THREAT (Writers who have received targeted threats or warnings expressing an intent to kill directed at them specifically. This can include statements or warnings made in-person or online, including suggestive use of imagery)

ATTACKED (Indicates a use of force or violence causing physical damage to the individual or destruction of personal property e.g. arson; attack took place in the period of this case list)

ATTACKED: TRIAL IN PROGRESS

ATTACKED: IMPUNITY (Attack did not occur in the period of this case list but there is ongoing impunity for the attack i.e. no investigation has taken place or an investigation has been closed without anyone brought to account)

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, stripping 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 opened or suspended which can be reopened at any time, acting as a form of deterrence on the writer. Also includes in absentia proceedings against writers not in the country. Includes writers whose works are banned individually and collectively from sale or access as a result of a court order, 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)

15 NOV - 10 DEC 2025

DAY OF THE IMPRISONED WRITER



DAY OF THE IMPRISONED WRITER 2025

Mzia Amaglobeli (Georgia), Rory Branker (Venezuela), Yalqun Rozi (China) and Mohamed Tadjadit (Algeria) were the focus of Day of the Imprisoned Writer 2025, PEN International's annual campaign in solidarity with writers who are imprisoned or persecuted for their work. Established in 1981 by PEN International's Writers in Prison Committee and observed each year on 15 November, the campaign highlights emblematic cases of writers and journalists targeted for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression.

From 15 November to 10 December 2025, the PEN movement called for justice and freedom for Mzia Amaglobeli, Rory Branker, Yalqun Rozi, Mohamed Tadjadit. PEN Centres and Committees, members and supporters around the world mobilised in support of these writers by sending appeals to governments, sharing their stories on social media, writing messages of solidarity, signing petitions, and organising events and public discussions to raise awareness of their cases.

Internationally renowned writers also expressed their solidarity by sending letters of support to colleagues imprisoned for their words:

- **Lauren Groff** wrote to **Mohamed Tadjadit**
- **Maaza Mengiste** wrote to **Rory Branker**

Through these letters and global advocacy actions, PEN International and its network reaffirmed their commitment to defending writers who face persecution for speaking truth to power.

For more information about the four focus cases, see the regional overviews below. To read the letters by Lauren Groff and Maaza Mengiste, visit [PEN International's Day of the Imprisoned Writer 2025](#) campaign page.

Mohamed Tadjadit. Photo Credit: Lydia Saidi
Rory Branker. Photo Credit: La Patilla
Mzia Amaglobeli.
Photo Credit: Zurab Tsertsvadze
Yalqun Rozi. Photo Credit: Kamaltürk Yalqun

AFRICA REGIONAL OVERVIEW

NDUKO O'MATIGERE
Head of Africa Region

For a majority of sub-Saharan African countries, pressures and constraints on civic space were shaped by the omnipresence of authoritarian rule in a majority of nations and armed conflict in 14 states. In 2025, inhabitants of 44 out of 50 sub-Saharan African countries lived under civic space conditions assessed by CIVICUS as either 'Closed' (seven countries, namely **Burundi, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia and Sudan**); 'Repressed' (22 countries); or 'Obstructed' (15 countries). Only two countries - **Cape Verde and Sao Tome and Principe** - were assessed as 'Open' while the civic space in **Botswana, Mauritius, Namibia, and Seychelles** was assessed as 'Narrowed'. Despite the grim picture, PEN International celebrated positive developments in the situation of some writers in the region.

A common feature among the countries where civic space is under significant pressure is that they are controlled by authoritarian governments that do not uphold international human rights standards. Many of these governments are in power through electoral processes that Africa Union observer missions and other independent groups declared to fall short of standards for free, fair and democratic elections, as in the case of **Tanzania, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire** and **Guinea-Bissau**; or through military coups in the case of **Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali, Chad, Sudan, Gabon, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, and Madagascar**, and in extreme cases like **Eritrea**, where there has been single-party totalitarian rule since the country gained independence in 1991. For government authorities in power through illegitimate means, and for objectives other than democratic governance and protection of human rights, critical opinion and expression through literature, art, or traditional and digital media continued to be systematically dealt with as irritations and inconveniences to be crushed. For other countries, protracted armed conflict and war continued without an end in sight for resolution, often leaving civilians with restricted access to cultural life and opportunities, as well as limitations on their access to information.

Repressive patterns observed in previous years, such as misuse of laws and the justice system against critics; politically motivated intimidation and violence targeting independent journalists; and weaponisation of technological infrastructure through unlawful digital surveillance, arbitrary internet shutdowns and network throttling persisted as the major strategies used by authorities to curtail free speech and legitimate civic engagement. As the trends in the persecution of writers highlighted in this Case List will attest, across sub-Saharan Africa, legitimate exercise of freedom of expression, in particular that which is critical of the powerful, remained a dangerous undertaking for writers, journalists, and civic commentators in general.

UNRESOLVED ARMED CONFLICTS AND WAR

Protracted wars and persistent armed conflicts across the region continued to make the exercise of freedom of expression dangerous, with press freedom constantly under attack and access to information severely hampered. The unresolved conflicts in **Burkina Faso**, the **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)**, **Ethiopia**, **Sudan**, **Mali**, **Mozambique**, **Niger**, **Nigeria** **Somalia**, and **South Sudan** made sub-Saharan Africa the region with the [highest number of active armed conflicts](#) globally in 2025 according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. What is common among countries in armed conflict is their poor rating in relation to civic space conditions. Across these countries, common [conflict dynamics](#) included political instability, democratic backsliding and the attendant abuse of power, conducted with impunity; violent competition for control of land and mineral resources featuring rivalries, often ethnic in nature, both within fundamentally artificial nation-states created by the 1884–1885 colonial partitioning of Africa and across their unnatural borders; the continued rise in the influence of Islamist insurgent groups; and the weakness of regional and international multilateral peace and security mandates which limited their ability to effectively respond to the complexities involved. As a result of these conflicts, the year closed with hundreds of millions of Africans facing acute human rights and humanitarian crises. One hundred and seventy million were facing dire [food insecurity](#), including famine; 45.7 million were [forcefully displaced](#); and hundreds of thousands of civilian were killed – with the UN declaring **Sudan** as the [worst humanitarian crisis](#) in the world. The latest [report](#) of the UN Independent Fact-Finding Mission for the Sudan concluded that mass killings and other [atrocities committed by the Rapid Support Forces \(RSF\)](#) during its siege of El-Fasher for 18 months and eventual takeover in October 2025 pointed to a genocide targeting the Zaghawa and Fur communities. This finding

replicates the repeated early warnings and appeals for action by Sudanese civil society and international human rights and humanitarian groups that went unheeded by regional and international peace and security mechanisms.

Journalists reporting on some of these conflicts bore the brunt of repression, with journalists killed in **Somalia** and **Sudan**, jailed in **Ethiopia** and **Niger**, and subjected to harassment and intimidation all the countries facing armed conflict. In April, the [Sudan Media Forum](#) estimated that up to 90% of Sudanese media houses have been destroyed, including 27 newspapers that have been forced to stop operations. The number of journalists able to work has dropped from 1500 in the pre-war period to between 250 and 300 journalists, with only about 70 working in the country.

ABUSE OF LEGAL AND JUSTICE SYSTEMS TO PUNISH DISSENT

Repressive governments continued to weaponise justice systems to suppress free speech – including critical reporting on the conduct of powerful state and non-state actors – and the right to peaceful protest. Despite the 2010 ACHPR [resolution](#) calling for the repeal of insult and criminal defamation laws by member states, countries like **Angola**, **DRC**, **Nigeria**, **South Sudan**, and **Zambia** still retain the laws while **Kenya** regressed from its positive trajectory. Provisions of Kenya’s Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes (Amendment Act 2024) criminalise ‘false information’ and ‘offensive or indecent posts’. On a positive note, these were a subject of litigation in 2025, with some sections [suspended](#) by the High Court of Kenya for violating constitutional provisions on free speech. Misuse of cybercrime laws to prosecute individuals for online expression continued in **Nigeria** and **Uganda** under provisions that punish vaguely defined offences like ‘online defamation’; ‘hate speech’; ‘insulting the president and officials on social media’, among others.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalist's latest [report](#) on imprisoned journalists, 42 journalists were imprisoned because of their work across Africa at the end of the year, with **Eritrea** accounting for 16 who have been arbitrarily detained without trial and held incommunicado since September 2001. **Ethiopia**, **Niger** and **Rwanda** were incarcerating five journalists each; **Cameroon** four and **Senegal** two. With the exception of the Eritrean writers, the rest of the journalists highlighted - and hundreds of others in at least 44 countries who suffered non-custodial judicial harassment - were arrested and prosecuted on ambiguously worded offences. This trend, as highlighted in previous Case Lists, has become all too common, through national laws tailored to repress press freedom, including under vague and overbroad legislation covering public order, and security offences, anti-terrorism laws and provisions prohibiting 'undermining the authorities', as well as insult and defamation, misuse of computer and electronic equipment, harassment by electronic means, and 'spreading false news', among others.

Brutal suppression of peaceful protests, often with the pretext of public security, maintained its place in the authoritarian repression playbook across the region. In **Tanzania**, a [brutal crackdown](#) in which security forces used [unlawful lethal force](#) against protesters following the disputed 29 October general election, leading to the [killing or serious injury](#) of hundreds, if not thousands of people. Thousands were arrested and prosecuted on trumped up charges under Tanzania's anti-terrorism and treason laws, while there were reports of enforced disappearances. Earlier, in June, **Kenya** brutally clamped down on commemoration protests called in honour of victims of police brutality during the 25 June 2024 Gen Z-led protests, resulting in at least 10 fatalities and more than 400 injuries, including from gunshot wounds, according to the [Kenya National Commission on Human Rights \(KNHCR\)](#). **Cameroon**, **Madagascar** and **Togo** also responded with unlawful lethal force to peaceful protests about poor public service delivery and concerns about management of elections.

INTIMIDATION AND LETHAL VIOLENCE

According to the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), at least eight journalists were killed in Africa in relation to their work, with **Sudan** accounting for four of those killed, and **Mozambique**, **Somalia**, **Tanzania** and **Zimbabwe** one each. Journalists across the continent were also targeted and violently assaulted by state security forces across the region, with an overall trend of impunity for perpetrators. The highest number of incidents were documented in [DRC](#), [Ghana](#), [Kenya](#), [Nigeria](#), [Somalia](#), as well as [Uganda](#) - where both [security forces and state-sanctioned civilian actors](#) were involved.

In **Mali**, although author, academic, activist, and publisher Professor **Étienne Fakaba Sissoko** - featured in the [2025 Case List](#), was [released](#) from prison on 27 March 2025 after serving a one-year [prison sentence](#), new threats to his safety and liberty forced him into [exile](#) in September.

WEAPONISATION OF DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Internet shutdowns and restrictions of social media as tools to restrict information flow and restrict freedom expression surged in the region with [Surfshark](#) monitoring and documenting total shutdowns, throttling or restriction in **Sudan** (throughout the year); **Cameroon**, **Equatorial Guinea** (Annobon Island), **Guinea**, **Guinea-Bissau**, and **Tanzania** (5 days); **DRC** (3 days); **Togo** (2 days); **South Sudan** and **Kenya** (1 day). Elections, protests, military coups, and conflict were the main contexts in which internet shutdowns and restrictions of mobile telecommunication services were implemented by authorities. A 2025 Amnesty International [report](#) concluded that on top of effecting an internet shutdown during protests in June and July 2024, authorities in **Kenya** adopted technology-facilitated violence to suppress

Gen Z-led protests against government corruption, state violence and impunity – a trend that continued into 2025. Through use of state-sponsored trolls, the state deployed viral disinformation and hate campaigns, online harassment and discrediting of perceived protest organisers, and issuing death threats.

Artistic expression – through song, digital tools, graffiti, and performance – was massively used to articulate the governance and public accountability concerns driving the Gen Z protests, particularly in the **Kenya** protests of 2024 and 2025. In the context of state clampdowns on protest, creators and users of protest art were targeted for repression alongside individuals perceived to be the leaders of the protests. In November, during the post-election crackdown on protestors, **Tanzania** **arrested and prosecuted** a popular Tik-Toker on trumped-up charges of treason and ‘destruction of infrastructure’ after she posted herself performing a viral Tik-Tok dance challenge that satirises a speech made by the president. The charges were dropped a month later.

CHALLENGING THE VIOLATIONS

PEN International continued to provide material and advisory support to writers and journalists at risk of persecution from state authorities because of their written work (**Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Eritrea** and **Guinea**); or facing disruptions to their livelihoods and safety as a result of armed conflict, war and displacement in **Sudan**; and in **Nigeria**, writers at risk from community pressure because of their non-binary gender identities.

On the horrific crisis in Sudan, in April, PEN International joined voices with Sudanese-led international coalitions in public statements warning of the genocidal intent of the RSF and calling for urgent international action to **end the atrocities in Darfur**. In September, the organisation also joined calls for action by the Sudanese Telecommunications

and Post Regulatory Authority to end the suspension of **WhatsApp voice and video calls**. On 1 October, PEN International joined a statement **appealing for safe passage and protection for civilians under siege in El Fasher**, yet another atrocity that went unheeded by the international community.

GOOD NEWS

Writer **Alex Barga** (see below), who had been **detained facing trumped up charges** since 12 January, was **acquitted** of all charges and unconditionally freed by a **Mozambique** court in September. In **Malawi**, the Constitutional Court **ruled** the country’s criminal defamation laws to be unconstitutional and, with orders that no further criminal defamation prosecutions should be brought before court.

In a glimmer of cautious hope, in December, **Eritrea** **released 13 individuals** who had been held in arbitrary detention for over 18 years. The UN made a **new call** on the authorities to release all individuals still held arbitrarily across the country, including the group of over 12 writers and journalists imprisoned without trial since 2001 (see Eritrea entry below).

2026 CASE LIST AFRICA

EMBLEMATIC CASES



ERITREA

Collective case of 12 Writers

Writers and journalists subjected to enforced disappearance for almost 25 years

Twelve writers and journalists: **Amanuel Asrat**; **Dawit Habtemichael**; **Dawit Isaak**; **Fessehaye 'Joshua' Yohannes**; **Matheos Habteab**; **Methanie Haile**; **Sahle 'Wedi-Itay' Tsefezab**; **Said Abdelkadir**; **Said Idris 'Aba Are'**; **Seyoum Tsehaye**; **Temesken Ghebreyesus**; and **Yousif Mohammed Ali**, were arbitrarily detained in September and October 2001 in a massive crackdown by authorities on dissent and the independent press. For close to 25 years, the state of Eritrea has detained them incommunicado without trial in conditions amounting to enforced disappearance.

Dawit Isaak. Photo Credit: Kallen/Donald Ahlsen



MALI

Professor Étienne Fakaba SISSOKO

Author, academic, activist and publisher threatened for his writing.

Étienne Fakaba Sissoko (b.1983) is a non-fiction author, academic, activist, and publisher **forced into exile** in September 2025, together with his family, after being targeted afresh by authorities following the announcement of his plans to publish new books he had written in prison. He had served a one-year prison sentence in connection with a 2023 book which criticises the military government and was released in March 2025.

Étienne Fakaba Sissoko.

Photo credit: Etioo/WikkiCommons

ERITREA

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE

Collective case of writers and journalists detained incommunicado without trial for almost 25 years.

2025 saw the 24th anniversary of the detention without trial of over 12 writers and journalists: **Amanuel Asrat** (writer, critic and Editor-in-Chief of *Zemen* newspaper); **Dawit Habtemichael** (teacher and journalist for *Meqaleh* weekly, believed to have died in 2012); **Dawit Isaak** (Swedish-Eritrean co-owner and editor of *Setit*); **Fessehaye 'Joshua' Yohannes** (journalist, poet, playwright, story writer, lyricist and co-owner of *Setit*); **Matheos Habteab** (deputy editor of *Keste-Demena*); **Methanie Haile** (co-founder and editor of *Meqaleh* weekly, believed to have died in 2010); **Sahle 'Wed-Itay' Tsefezab** (writer and freelance journalist for the newspapers *Keste Debena* and *Hadas Eritrea*); **Said Abdelkadir** (chief editor of the *Admas* newspaper); **Said Idris 'Aba Arre'** (writer, journalist, translator and mother-tongue advocate arrested after denouncing the arrests of other journalists); **Seyoum Tsehaye** (freelance journalist who had written articles critical of authorities); **Temesgen Ghebreyesus** (journalist, writer, comedian, actor and photographer believed to have died in detention); and **Yousif Mohammed Ali** (editor of *Tsigenay*).

On 18 September 2001, Eritrean authorities launched a massive crackdown on government critics rounding up a group of dissenting members of the ruling party who had published an open letter criticising the government and calling for peaceful democratic reforms.

Over 12 journalists and writers - all associated with independent media outlets that were banned after publishing the letter - were rounded up by security forces and detained. In April 2002, the detainees were separated and reportedly moved to different prisons and detention centres across Eritrea following a hunger strike in protest at their prolonged incommunicado detention.

For almost 25 years, Eritrean authorities have held these writers and journalists in incommunicado detention without trial, in conditions amounting to [enforced disappearance](#). Government officials have denied that a clampdown took place in 2001, saying that the detainees had been sent to perform national service. The whereabouts, state of health and wellbeing or fate of all 12 remained unknown at the end of the year.

PEN International has consistently [campaigned](#) on behalf of the detained writers and advocated for their release at regional and international human rights forums and bodies. (see PEN International [Case lists](#)).

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 unidentified 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 switched 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 has been featured as one of the Empty Chairs at key PEN events (see PEN International Case List [2021](#), [2023](#), [2024](#) and [2025](#)).

Innocent Bahati (age 33 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 in a [newspaper article](#) as a satire about the church; and '[Uwenda Ngomba u Rwanda](#)' (*The Debt I Need for Rwanda*), among others.

MALI

THREATENED

Professor Étienne Fakaba SISSOKO

Prominent Malian author, academic and political activist Étienne Fakaba Sissoko [fled into exile](#) together with his family in September over safety and liberty concerns.

Arrested on 25 March 2024, Sissoko was [released](#) from prison on 27 March 2025 after serving a one-year [prison sentence](#) (with a further year suspended) at the Kéniéroba Central Prison following a conviction of fabricated charges of 'harming the reputation of the state', 'defamation' and 'dissemination of false news disturbing the public peace'. This was 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 denounces alleged propaganda in the Malian government's public information campaign. He was also fined XOF three million (about USD5,200) for 'damages' to the state.

After his release, he was subjected to severe harassment. He escaped two attempted abductions and faced intimidation through surveillance by security agents, and threats delivered via anonymous phone calls, social media messages and by unidentified individuals at his home. Fearing for his safety, he and his family left the country in September.

Sissoko has been a target of judicial harassment since the 2020 military coup. In 2022, he was [detained](#) for close to six months without trial for alleged 'subversive' speech after he publicly criticised the government. 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 Malian authorities to discredit Sissoko's academic credentials. He faced a travel ban after his release (see PEN International Case List [2025](#)).

Étienne Fakaba Sissoko, born on 2 February 1983 has written on the economic and development crises in Mali. His persecution is a typical example of the Malian military government's weaponisation of law and the justice system to silence the few voices still criticising the abuses and excesses of the junta.

MOZAMBIQUE

DETAINED

Alex BARGA

After nine months of unlawful detention on trumped-up charges, Mozambican writer, editor, publisher and political activist Alex Barga was [acquitted and freed](#) by the Maputo City Judicial Court on 15 September 2025. **The court [dismissed charges](#) of “conspiracy to commit crimes against state security, violent alteration of the rule of law, and criminal association.”** Earlier, on 8 September, the same court had **declared the charge of ‘planning a coup d’ état’ a ‘total nullity’ for lack of evidence.**

Barga had been detained since he was [arbitrarily arrested](#) on 12 January 2025 in the context of a nation-wide crackdown on dissent after the disputed October 2024 elections. He was held at the Cadeia Civil Prison in the capital Maputo, awaiting trial on a trumped-up charge of ‘planning a coup d’etat’.

PEN International believes that Barga’s persecution was in retaliation for his [role in the publication](#) of the book *Um Olhar Sociológico Sobre o Carisma de Venâncio Mondlane* (A sociological approach to the charisma of Venâncio Mondlane), authored by the Mozambican sociologist Mártir das Letras, and [called for his release](#). Venâncio was the main opposition presidential candidate in Mozambique’s 9 October 2024 national elections. The book was edited and promoted by LitterArte Edições, a section of the literary agency, Agência Literária Alex Barga which Barga owns. He was part of a team that planned the launch of the book on 7 October 2024, which the Mozambique Prosecutor’s Office ordered to be cancelled without explanation. Barga and his colleagues disregarded the arbitrary order and continued to promote the book on a pavement close to the hotel where the launch had been planned.

Alex Barga is the author of six books, including *Leis do Amor* (The Laws of Love), a poetry collection.

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 at risk in the Africa region through emergency humanitarian assistance. A total of 17 writers and journalists at risk were supported in this way, either through material support, or provision of asylum support letters or referral to other avenues of support.

THE AMERICAS REGIONAL OVERVIEW

ALICIA QUIÑONES

Head of the Americas Region

Overall, PEN International's documentation in the Americas in 2025 reveals four main types of persecution: criminalisation of critical voices through laws restricting peaceful protest and freedom of artistic expression; strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) by powerful individuals or companies – often for alleged insult or defamation – that drain defendants' resources; restrictive or punitive administrative measures including publishing prohibitions and book bans; and increasing online harassment and stigmatisation, with women writers often facing digital gender-based violence. The year saw a worrying rise in killings of journalists, mostly with impunity, to the highest level since 2021.

THE PUNISHMENT IS THE PROCESS: LEGAL AND CRIMINAL HARASSMENT

In 2025, PEN International documented a continued use of judicial systems to intimidate, discredit or punish journalists, writers and other critical voices in the region, with judicial harassment one of the most common mechanisms used to censor authors, artists and journalists in the region. Such persecution not only impacts art, literature or journalism but also often forces individuals to leave their countries for their own safety.

The cross-border displacement of journalists has consequently become a regional phenomenon; the Migrant Journalists' Network estimates that at least [913 journalists from 15 countries](#) in Latin America and the Caribbean, especially **Venezuela** (477), **Nicaragua** (268) and **Cuba** (98), have been forced to leave their countries since 2018, mainly due to political persecution, the criminalisation of journalism and threats from non-state actors, including organised crime. Some governments, such as **Nicaragua**, have also refined methods of [transnational repression](#), placing writers at risk even when abroad.

JUDICIAL ONSLAUGHT ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Many countries in the region have long abused the criminal justice system to repress dissent. A more recent development is the increase in [SLAPPs](#), where officials, powerful private individuals or corporations intimidate or silence critical voices through costly, protracted and generally vexatious litigation. Together, they represent a judicial onslaught on freedom of expression.

The situation of persecuted writers in the Americas below confirms this trend. **Cuba** leads the way, with the highest number of prison sentences (often for national security related charges); open-ended or protracted trials; arbitrary detentions; surveillance; and restrictions on movement, turning the criminal justice system into an apparatus for controlling cultural, artistic and access to information rights.

Mexico shows a convergence between threats and abuse of judicial channels (sanctioning procedures, complaints of defamation, complaints of ‘gender-based political violence’, and civil and criminal litigation to stop publications). ARTICLE 19 [documented](#) a worrying and sustained increase in [judicial harassment](#) against journalists in the first half of the year. In total, 39 journalists (28 men and 11 women) and 12 media outlets were notified of legal proceedings against them. Such judicial harassment seriously jeopardises freedom of expression and the right to information, as exemplified by the criminal cases against [Rodolfo Ruiz and Rafael León Segovia](#).

In November, PEN International and the National Chamber of the Mexican Publishing Industry [established](#) an agreement to combat the increase in judicial harassment affecting books and publishing houses in Mexico. This collaboration aims not only to serve as a bridge between PEN Centres, writers and the publishing sector, but also to expand advocacy in support of persecuted writers and editors.

Elsewhere, **Argentina** combined smear campaigns with often multiple, simultaneous lawsuits for slander, libel or defamation against critical voices, while in **Peru**, at least eight investigative journalists faced [harassment and threats](#). Others, such as **Paola Ugaz** (see below) were subjected to repeated litigation as punishment for their investigations.

Journalist **Jose Rubén Zamora Marroquín** (see below), founder of *elPeriódico*, is one of the most emblematic cases of judicial harassment in **Guatemala**. Arrested in July 2022, he has faced procedural

irregularities, obstacles to his defence and prolonged use of preventive detention.

In 2025, **El Salvador** [consolidated](#) a more hostile environment for civil society and journalists with the approval of the [Foreign Agents Law](#), which imposes mandatory registration for those who receive funds from abroad and broad state powers to sanction or even dissolve organisations. This increasingly restrictive environment saw the forced exile of at least 40 journalists and the decision by the Association of Journalists of El Salvador (APES) to [leave](#) the country.

Persecution in **Nicaragua** continued to intensify. In May, a [constitutional reform](#) prohibited dual citizenship. This measure exacerbates the situation of journalists, human rights defenders and opponents in exile, many of whom already face de facto denationalisation through the refusal to renew their passports. The Foundation for Freedom of Expression and Democracy (FLED) [documented](#) 115 violations of press freedom in 2025, [including](#) the arbitrary detention of a journalist. The report also shows how ‘information deserts’ have expanded to affect 65% of the country.

Independent journalism in **Venezuela** continued to face a climate of hostility marked by criminalisation and arbitrary detention of journalists. PEN International, together with the organisation Espacio Público, [documented](#) the detention of at least 12 journalists allegedly in connection with their reporting, many of them accused of serious crimes such as ‘terrorism’ or ‘incitement to hatred’ and facing unfair trials. Although some individuals have been released from prison, such as [Rory Branker](#) (see below), many continue to be subject to restrictions and threats, or face criminal charges, reflecting the systematic pattern of criminal harassment used for censorship.

SMEAR CAMPAIGNS, THREATS AND ADMINISTRATIVE SANCTIONS AS A STRATEGY OF REPRESSION

In **Argentina**, the [deterioration](#) of the climate for freedom of expression was marked by the normalisation of public insults, disparagement and stigmatisation from the highest levels of political power. This type of rhetoric acts as an umbrella that enables other silencing strategies. According to the Argentine Journalism Forum (FOPEA), 2025 was the most [devastating](#) year for press freedom in the country since the organisation began recording attacks in 2008, with 278 documented attacks. President Milei was linked to 43% of the attacks, mainly through stigmatising speeches, insults and public disparagement of journalists. Attacks on women often included AI-generated sexually denigrating images.

In **Mexico**, 338 attacks against women journalists were [documented](#) between January and December 2025. The most common attacks included threats, smear campaigns, intimidation and harassment, and often came from public officials or powerful actors. This violence stems from longstanding structural inequalities and unbalanced gender power relations. Its impact transcends the persecution of the journalists affected as it also limits the right of all to be informed.

During 2025, a rise in authoritarian practices in the **United States of America (USA)** led to a growing pattern of political, judicial and administrative pressure against media outlets and journalists, driven mainly by the executive branch and federal agencies. This contributed to a marked chilling effect on the press, encouraging self-censorship by both individual journalists and in editorial decisions by media outlets. Officials [combined](#) hostile rhetoric, defamation lawsuits sometimes

resulting in multimillion-pound legal settlements, and regulatory pressure, such as threats to broadcasting licences, to intimidate critics. Other measures included limitation of access by journalists and media to official spaces or activities, including through proposals to limit press visas and even [deportations](#) such as of journalist [Mario Guevara](#). In September 2025, PEN International adopted a [resolution](#) condemning the growing deterioration of freedom of expression in the USA and warning against the abuse of federal government functions to pressure media, cultural and academic institutions to conform to the government's views, as well as warning against the banning of books.

NORTH AMERICA: INCREASING BOOK CENSORSHIP - A SIGN OF INTOLERANCE

In 2025, book censorship in the **USA** was [rampant](#). Since 2021, nearly 23,000 book bans have been banned, primarily driven by conservative groups and politicians using the rhetoric of 'parents' rights' to have ideological control. This trend has escalated from local disputes to state and federal levels, directly threatening freedom of expression and children's access to stories and non-fiction that reflect their diverse cultural histories, identities and life experiences.

During the year, almost 600 books were removed from schools on USA military bases, while states such as Utah and South Carolina introduced statewide 'no-read' lists. According to PEN America, 97% of cases involved school officials taking books off the shelves preventively, often out of fear of legal complaints, political backlash or the loss of funding. Many of the targeted books feature LGBTQ+ characters or themes, with even children's picture books being labelled 'sexually explicit' simply for showing diverse families.

In 2025, **Canada** experienced one of the most intense [debates](#) in decades on book censorship in school libraries. A [controversy](#) arose following a ministerial [order](#) issued by Alberta's Ministry of Education seeking to remove books containing 'explicit sexual content' from libraries. The new rules were to take effect on [1 October 2025](#) and reflected proposals from socially conservative ['parental rights' groups](#) in the province.

However, the inclusion of numerous literary classics in a list of [over 200 books](#) to be removed in the province of Edmonton, sparked protests from various public figures, including PEN International Vice-President [Margaret Atwood](#), as well as [concrete action](#) from PEN Canada. Faced with national controversy, on 3 September 2025, the Alberta government announced that it would temporarily [pause](#) implementation of the policy to review its wording. Nevertheless, at least 56 book removals or restrictions took place in school and public libraries following complaints about content (see box).

These book bans underscore a critical reality: access to knowledge is power, and its restriction carries profound consequences. Book bans do not merely remove titles from shelves – they limit students' ability to engage with diverse perspectives, understand complex social realities, and develop independent thought. Fiction plays a vital role in exposing young readers to new identities, experiences, and ideas, and can validate their own lived realities. At the same time, non-fiction – encompassing biographies, memoirs, and historical or educational works – is essential for young people seeking to interpret the world around them and to develop informed opinions, particularly within a context of political polarisation and social tensions.

KILLING JOURNALISTS DOES NOT KILL THE TRUTH

Deadly violence against journalists remains one of the most worrying issues in the Americas. On 9 December 2025, Reporters without Borders presented a [global analysis](#) of murders of journalists. Of at least 67 killings worldwide, 26% were recorded on the continent with **Mexico** being the second deadliest country in the world (9) after Palestine. According to [RSF's barometer](#), in 2025, nine other journalists were also killed in **Peru (4)**, **Ecuador (2)**, **Guatemala (1)**, **Colombia (1)**, and **Honduras (1)**, the worst year for killings in the region since 2021.

On 31 October 2025, on the [Day of the Dead](#), ARTICLE 19, Amnesty International, English PEN, PEN Chiapas Pluricultural, PEN San Miguel, PEN Guadalajara and PEN International honoured the journalists in Mexico who have been killed for their work in the previous year and calling for urgent action to end the violence. The brutality of the attacks, combined with entrenched impunity, has created a perpetual cycle of violence that undermines not only the right to freedom of expression but also the public's right to be informed.

IMPORTANCE OF MULTILATERALISM AMID A DECLINE IN COOPERATION

2025 saw a growing trend among some states to reduce or abandon their cooperation with international human rights mechanisms. In February 2025, [Nicaragua's](#) withdrawal from the UN Human Rights Council following a [critical report](#) by independent experts, and subsequent failure to participate in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process in March, generated strong criticism from international press freedom organisations. On 4 May 2025, Nicaragua also [withdrew](#) from UNESCO, just

days after the organisation announced that the 2025 UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize would be awarded to the Nicaraguan newspaper *La Prensa*.

Meanwhile, the **USA** also announced in 2025 that it would not participate in either the UN Human Rights Council or UNESCO, or in its upcoming UPR, regrettably becoming the first state not to participate in its own review. PEN America and PEN International's [joint UPR shadow report](#) documents violations of the rights to free expression, education, and non-discrimination, highlighting the profound impact of educational gag orders, diversity, equity, and inclusion bans, curriculum restrictions, and attacks on tenure, faculty rights, and institutional autonomy. These measures disproportionately affect students from marginalised communities, including students of colour, women, LGBTQ+ students, students with disabilities, and those from low-income backgrounds.

During 2025, PEN International's shadow UPR report on [Honduras](#) showed how the conditions for the exercise of freedom of expression and of press freedom have deteriorated amid ongoing political polarisation, rising levels of impunity, and the imposition of an extended state of emergency, all of which raised serious concerns in the lead-up to the general elections on 30 November 2025. PEN International's advocacy since the previous review contributed to 21 states making recommendations on freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and the protection of journalists, as well as increased attention to the situation in Honduras by the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

GOOD NEWS!

Hadi Matar was [convicted](#) in February of attempted murder and assault for the 2022 stabbing that left writer **Salman Rushdie** severely injured. Matar was subsequently sentenced to 25 years in prison, while also facing separate federal terrorism-related charges. This was a rare moment of accountability for attacks on writers, though Rushdie remains at risk of threats and attacks in relation to the publication of his 1988 novel *The Satanic Verses* which had led to the imposition of a fatwa from the late leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, calling for his killing. Rushdie however, continues to receive threats and is at risk of further attacks.

2026 CASE LIST AMERICAS

EMBLEMATIC CASES



EL SALVADOR

Óscar Enrique MARTÍNEZ D'AUBUISSON

Judicial harassment of author and journalist for his work

Journalist and author Óscar Martínez received threats after publishing a series of interviews with leaders of a gang, who recounted pacts made with the government. Spokespersons publicly accused Óscar Martínez, along with El Faro's director, of 'apology for crime and illicit groups'. He left El Salvador temporarily following reports of an arrest warrant, but in July 2025 he announced that he would stay abroad indefinitely for fear of reprisals.

Óscar Enrique Martínez D'Aubuisson.
Photo Credit: Anonymous



CUBA

José Gabriel Barrenechea Chávez

Writer imprisoned

Poet and academic José Gabriel Barrenechea Chávez is serving a six-year prison sentence, the maximum penalty, after conviction of 'public disorder' in relation to his critical literature and activism. He was detained on 8 November 2024 following his participation in a peaceful protest. Barrenechea has faced systematic harassment since 2019 for his critical journalism, including a travel ban, employment restrictions, and the censorship of his books in Cuba.

José Gabriel Barrenechea Chávez.
Photo Credit: José Gabriel Barrenechea Chávez

ARGENTINA

HARASSED

Jorge FERNÁNDEZ DÍAZ

Novelist and journalist Jorge Fernández Díaz continued to be the subject of harassment from President Javier Milei in 2025. In April 2025, Milei once again insulted and [discredited](#) Fernández Díaz' work as a columnist and journalist after the latter had published several [opinion pieces criticising](#) the president. Such attacks contribute to an increasingly hostile environment for free expression in the country. Many authors [condemned](#) the criticism. Fernández Díaz had suffered similar harassment from President Milei in 2024 (see Case List [2025](#)).

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, works of investigative journalism, short stories, and essays, such as: *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 Martín Fierro Award, the Silver Laurel for Personality of the Year, the Argentores Award for screenwriting, the Bicentennial Medal for his journalistic and literary work, and the Cross of the Order of Isabel the Catholic, in recognition of his contributions to culture.

Joaquín MORALES SOLÁ

Writer and journalist Joaquín Morales Solá continued to be subjected to stigmatisation in 2025 (see Case List [2025](#)). On 18 April 2025, President Javier Milei [attacked](#) the author, calling him 'an imbecile who poisons Argentinians with his pen.'

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).

Ceferino REATO

In 2025, journalist and editor Ceferino Reato became one of the targets of public, stigmatising attacks by President Javier Milei amid his sustained confrontation with critical media outlets. On 9 May 2025, the president [publicly accused](#) him of having attempted to 'extort' him in order to obtain state advertising for *Fortuna* magazine, a claim the journalist rejected. President Milei portrayed him as part of an alleged media pressure scheme, questioning his professional qualifications and integrity. Reato was mentioned on more than one occasion within an ongoing official narrative that accused certain journalists of operating against the government.

Ceferino Reato (1960) is a journalist, writer and historian, recognised for his investigations into political violence, terrorism and human rights in Argentina's recent history. He is the author of several investigative books that became key references in Argentine public debate, particularly those focusing on the 1970s and the political violence before and after the 1976 coup d'état. Among his best-known works are *Operación Traviata (Operation Traviata)*, *Disposición Final (Final Disposition)*, *Viva la sangre (Long Live the Blood)*, and *Masacre en el comedor (Massacre in the Dining Hall)*, which examine both the actions of armed organisations and the state's illegal repression.

Camilo Joaquín VILLARRUEL (known as Milo J)

Singer Milo J claimed that the government interfered with his right to perform his own work in February in relation to an event he had planned at a cultural site.

On 12 February 2025, Milo J announced the [suspension](#) of the listening preview of his new album *166 – Deluxe Retirada*, a few minutes before the event was scheduled to take place at the Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos in Buenos Aires. He held the national Government responsible for the cancellation. The artist stated that the authorities submitted [false reports](#) to the courts alleging supposed

security irregularities – such as deficiencies in evacuation plans and emergency exits, leading to the suspension of the free event, which some 20,000 people were expected to attend.

Milo J maintained that the decision was politically motivated and criticised President Javier Milei, suggesting that the Government ‘does not like’ large gatherings at a site of memory. He also warned his followers to leave the area due to the police presence. The episode generated [public debate](#) over the use of a symbolic historical memory site and over state intervention in the suspension of the cultural event.

Camilo Joaquín Villarruel (born in 2006), artistically known as Milo J, is a singer and songwriter. He emerged on the Argentinian urban music scene in late 2021 and gained international recognition between 2022 and 2023.

JUDICIAL HARASSMENT

Alejandro ALFIE

Journalist and writer Alejandro Alfie continued to face judicial and other forms of harassment in 2025.

On 3 May 2025, one pro-government account [posted](#) a photo of Alfie with a stigmatising caption. The same day, another pro-government account [published](#) a lengthy report that also smeared Alfie. Local organisations recorded these attacks and the stigmatising rhetoric coming from individuals close to those in power, noting that both were stigmatising a journalist investigating those behind social media accounts aligned with the official administration.

In April 2025, Alfie reported that Esteban Glavinich, (owner of the X account @TraductorTeAma) had continued his efforts to buy shares in the newspaper *El Clarín* to launch an [attempt](#) at a shareholders’ meeting in April 2025 to demand Alfie’s dismissal from the newspaper. Also, between August and October 2025, the Asociación de Entidades Periodísticas Argentinas (ADEPA – the

Association of Argentine Journalism Entities) publicly expressed its [solidarity](#) with Alfie in response to a civil lawsuit filed by Pablo Tovigino, treasurer of the Argentine Football Association (AFA), who sought 20 million pesos and a public correction from Alfie over articles linked to matters of public interest. By November 2025, various reports indicated that Alfie was facing multiple simultaneous civil proceedings, consolidating a pattern of repeated litigation, amounting to strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs), aimed at undermining his journalistic work (see Case List [2025](#)).

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 Imagineurs S.R.L, 2015)* and the novel *Hambre de piel en la sociedad de control (2004) (Hunger for flesh in the surveillance society)*.

ARI LIJALAD

On 9 May 2025, President Javier Milei [filed](#) a [complaint](#) against journalist Ari Lijalad, from the online media outlet El Destape, for the [alleged](#) offences of ‘slander or false accusation’ and ‘defamation’, in response to an [article](#) written by Lijalad on El Destape. Lijalad publicly [stated on his X account](#) that the legal action was, in his view, ‘[a]nother chapter in [Milei’s] incitement to hatred, another step in his crusade to impose his opinions as fact and to deny the existence of truthful, checked and professionally produced information from journalism’.

The criminal complaint against Lijalad was [dismissed](#) by Federal Judge Daniel Rafecas on 4 June 2025, who [ruled](#) that the journalist’s statements were protected by freedom of the press and constituted legitimate political analysis. President Milei [appealed](#) the decision, unsuccessfully. Nevertheless, in late September 2025, Federal Chamber Judge Leopoldo Bruglia [ordered](#) Judge Rafecas to hold a hearing before closing the case.

Ari Lijalad is a [journalist](#) and documentary maker specialising in investigative reporting. He is the director, researcher and screenwriter of the documentary series *Clarín. Un invento argentino* (2012) and the documentary *Viva Che Masetti*. He has conducted research for various books on Argentine political history, collaborated with journalist and writer María Seoane, and writes for *Caras y Caretas* magazine and the newspaper *Tiempo Argentino*. He is also the compiler of two books, *Plan Macri* and *Macri lo hizo*.

Julia MENGOLINI

Journalist and author Julia Mengolini was subjected to judicial and other forms of harassment in 2025. In July, President Javier Milei filed a [defamation](#) complaint against her, invoking harm to his honour and the legal standard of ‘actual malice’ in relation to comments she made in the 2023 election campaign. In parallel to the judicial action, Mengolini became the target of an intense digital [harassment](#) campaign that included the circulation of pornographic deepfake videos generated by artificial intelligence, threats of death and gender-based violence against her and her family, defamatory statements in the media, and coordinated attacks on social media. Mengolini told PEN International that there is a deliberate strategy by those responsible to ensure a constant campaign of harassment against her.

The complaint was initially dismissed, but was reopened on 18 December 2025, as the court considered that the 2023 remarks Mengolini had made about then presidential candidate Milei during the presidential election campaign were not fully in the public interest and thus could be subject to defamation laws. In mid-July 2025, Mengolini [filed](#) a criminal complaint against President Milei and a group of [pro-government individuals](#) for threats, public intimidation, incitement to commit crimes, criminal association, and the alleged misuse of public funds to finance digital harassment campaigns. In August, a judge [charged](#) President Milei and a group of officials with threatening the journalist.

Julia Mengolini is a journalist recognised as a leading figure in the Argentinian feminist movement and as co-founder of the alternative digital outlet [Futurock](#). She is the author of the book *Las caras del monstruo* (*The Faces of the Monster*) (Futurock Ediciones, 2024).

Carlos PAGNI

In 2025, journalist and author Carlos Pagni was subjected to judicial harassment. On 9 May 2025, President Javier Milei filed a [complaint](#) against Pagni, a columnist for *La Nación*, for alleged defamation. The complaint related to Pagni’s comments made on 28 April 2025 on his programme *Odisea Argentina*, linked to his [article](#) ‘La Argentina, una torre de Babel’ (Argentina, a Tower of Babel). The criminal accusation against Pagni was [rejected](#) by a judge, who ruled that the statements constituted opinions rather than malicious or defamatory assertions. President Milei [appealed](#) the closure of the case in June 2025, but on 17 July the Federal Chamber confirmed the dismissal and reaffirmed that the journalist’s conduct fell within constitutionally protected limits.

Carlos Pagni, born in 1961, is a political columnist for the newspaper *La Nación*, a contributor to *Telenoche*, the main news programme of Channel 13, and host of *Odisea Argentina* on LN+ (a programme dedicated to political and economic analysis). He is also an international columnist for the newspaper *El País* and the author of the book *El nudo* (*The Knot*) (Planeta, 2023).

BRAZIL

KILLED – TRIAL IN PROGRESS

Dom PHILLIPS

British journalist and author Dom Phillips and Indigenous issues expert Bruno Pereira were killed in [2022](#) 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. Trial proceedings against some defendants accused of their murder continued in 2025 (see Case Lists [2022-2025](#)).

In June 2025, the Federal Court in Tabatinga (Amazonas) [accepted](#) charges brought by the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office (MPF) against Rubén Dario da Silva Villar, known as 'Colômbia,' as the alleged mastermind behind the murders of Pereira and Phillips. Prosecutors allege da Silva Villar led an illegal fishing operation and provided support, ammunition, and boats to the group that carried out the killings. Evidence presented, including phone records and witness statements, identifies him as the financier and coordinator. In November 2025, the case was [transferred](#) to the Federal Regional Court of the 1st Region, with two other related charges (of organised crime and concealment of a corpse) being merged with the murder charge. Villar's jury trial had not begun by the end of the year.

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. *How to Save the Amazon*, the book Phillips had been writing before his death, was published posthumously in May 2025.

CANADA

BOOKS BANNED

In Canada, book banning escalated significantly in 2025. PEN Canada has been actively campaigning against this disturbing trend. For example, in June 2025 the PEN Centre issued a [statement](#) unequivocally condemning the Alberta government's decision to pursue policies likely to lead to widespread book bans in the province's schools, among other public actions.

The data presented below on challenges to the availability of books in libraries are drawn from the [Canadian Library Challenges Database](#).¹ At least 265 complaints, often with multiple complaints about individual titles, including some widely regarded as classics, were made about books in 2025. These resulted in removals or relocations of at least 56 titles, from shelves in school and public libraries. The most frequently cited ground, 'Explicit Content', alone accounts for 164 of the complaints, far exceeding any other category. When coupled with the categories of 'Age Inappropriate' and 'Objectionable Content', this indicates that complaints primarily focus on depictions of sexuality, the body, sex education, or intimate relationships on the grounds of their alleged unsuitability for minors, particularly in school settings or public libraries.

There is another cluster of challenges linked to contemporary debates around identity, diversity, and human rights, including against books dealing with sexual orientation and gender identity – including Pro-LGBTQIA2S+ content, alongside transphobic objections. Eighteen of the titles involved related to race, Indigenous Peoples, religion, or international political conflicts, suggesting that objections are also triggered by content perceived as politically or ideologically sensitive.

Most complaints were lodged in the province of Alberta (167), followed by Ontario (46) and British Columbia (33), affecting 85, 35 and 17 titles respectively. The list of challenged works

shows that censorship affects young adult literature, graphic novels, manga, illustrated memoirs, educational materials on sexuality, classic works, and politically engaged writing alike. Widely recognised authors also appear among the challenged titles – including contemporary classics, dystopian fiction, award-winning novels, and works addressing historical or international conflicts – indicating that challenges are not limited to marginal publications but extend to globally circulated titles. This pattern suggests that current disputes over library materials in Canada reflect a worrying spread of broader cultural tensions concerning education, historical memory, identity, and social values.

Source: [The Canadian Library Challenges Database | Centre for Free Expression](#)

Heartstopper, Vol. V,

Books removed or relocated from school or public library shelves

Home after dark, Jason Aaron; A Game of Thrones: The Graphic Novel, Vol. One, Daniel Abraham; 9, Shane Acker; Dreamer, Akim Aliu; Epileptic, David B.; Fun Home, Alison Bechdel; Fun House, Alison Bechdel; Be Gay, Do Comics, Matt Bors; David Boring, Daniel Clowes; Flamer, Mike Curato; L'Étranger (graphic adaptation), Jacques Ferrandez; Chainsaw Man, Vol. VII, Tatsuki Fujimoto; American Gods, Vol. I: Shadows, Neil Gaiman; Cartooning: The Art and the Business, Mort Gerberg; Lighter Than My Shadow, Katie Green; Claim to Fame, Margaret Peterson Haddix; Milk and Honey, Rupi Kaur; Dark Tower Beginnings, Vol. IV: Fall of Gilead, Stephen King; An Inconvenient Indian, Thomas King; Borders, Thomas King; Medicine River, Thomas King; Gender Queer, Maia Kobabe; Andy Warhol, Isabel Kuhl; Monstress, Vol. VI: The Vow, Marjorie Liu; A Court of Thorns and Roses, Sarah J. Maas; Camus for Beginners / Introducing Camus, David Zane Mairowitz & Alain Korkos; A Blue Is the Warmest Color, Jul Maroh; A Game of Thrones: The Graphic Novel, George R. R. Martin; Frank

Miller's Sin City, Vol. II: A Dame to Kill For, Frank Miller; Berserk, Vol. III, Kentaro Miura; George Orwell's 1984: The Graphic Novel, Matyáš Namai; Death to the Tsar, Fabien Nury; Artemis: Wild Goddess of the Hunt, George O'Connor; Firefly (Vol. I–II), Greg Pak; Juliet Takes a Breath, Gaby Rivera; Alice in the Country of Clover, QuinRose; Black Bird (Vol. I–XIV, XVIII), Kanoko Sakurakoji; Age of Bronze (Vol. I–III), Eric Shanower; Home After Dark, David Small; Lore Olympus, Vol. I, Rachel Smythe; Introducing the Enlightenment, Lloyd Spencer & Andrzej Krauze; Breakdowns: Portrait of the Artist as a Young %@&!, Art Spiegelman; Deogratias: A Tale of Rwanda, Jean-Philippe Stassen; ; Boundless, Jillian Tamaki; Choosing to Live, Choosing to Die: The Complexities of Assisted Dying, Nikki Tate; Blankets, Craig Thompson; Black Knight 2, Kai Tsurugi; Johnny the Walrus, Matt Walsh; Fourth Wing, Rebecca Yarros.*

CUBA

IMPRISONED

Maykel CASTILLO PÉREZ (known as Maykel Osorbo)

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](#) (see Case Lists [2021-2025](#)).

During 2025, Osorbo continued to face [threats, violence](#) and ill-treatment in prison (see Case Lists [2021-2025](#)). His family has not been granted access to his medical records, while his health continues to [worsen](#). In [April, July, August, September](#) and [October](#) he was transferred for several days to a punishment [cell](#). PEN International expressed [concern](#) for his health when he went on a

[hunger strike](#) between 20 June and 1 July, in response to ongoing ill-treatment, repeated transfers to punishment cells, and the threat of being moved to another prison.

Osorbo was [granted](#) precautionary measures on 11 February 2021 by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, which in 2025 also found he had been subjected to [violations](#) of the rights to life, liberty, security, and integrity of the person; freedom of research, opinion, expression and dissemination; to participate in the cultural life of the community; partnership; personal freedom; to a regular process; and to justice. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention had previously [concluded](#) in November 2021 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'). Since its release in February 2021, the song 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 continued to serve 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 [activism](#) and participation in peaceful demonstrations in Contramaestre during the [#11J](#) protests in 2021 (see Case List [2025](#)). In October 2025, Domínguez Aguilar was [beaten](#) by three prisoners on the orders of prison guards, after calling the Cuban government a 'regime'. Domínguez Aguilar was also reportedly beaten and went on [hunger strike](#) for several days in November 2025 in protest at his ill-treatment in prison.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) granted [precautionary](#)

[measures](#) to Domínguez Aguilar in 2022 while he was held under arbitrary pre-trial detention after his initial 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 [2021-2025](#)).

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.

María Cristina Garrido Rodríguez was born in Quivicán, Mayaguebé 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') continued to serve a four-year prison [sentence](#) throughout the year, after conviction of 'propaganda against the constitutional order' under Article 124 of the Penal Code. He has been held in the Combinado del Este Prison since 29 May 2023. In September 2025, his wife reported that he has lost a lot of weight, and she [fears](#) for his life because of his treatment in prison. She also reported that, due to lack of medical attention, he has lost [teeth](#) and faces [chronic pain](#).

González Valdés was [arrested](#) at his home on 20 April 2023 for alleged involvement in painting [anti-Cuban Communist Party graffiti](#) (see Case Lists [2023/2024-2025](#)).

On 2 February, he sent a letter from prison denouncing the violation of his rights in prison, including the [denial](#) of conditional release.

Rapper and activist Yasmani González Valdés was born in Artemisa on 2 September 1992. Previously, in 2022, González Valdés was [fined](#) CUP3,000 (about USD125) under [Decree Law 370](#) for posting denunciations against the Cuban government on social media.

Duannis Dabel LEÓN TABUADA

In 2025, poet Duannis Dabel León Taboada, was serving a 14-year prison sentence in Combinado del Este prison in Havana, imposed after he was convicted on 27 May 2022 by the People's Supreme Court of 'sedition'. He had been [arrested](#) on 16 July 2021 in relation to his participation in the 11 July 2021 protests (#11J) and held in the 100 y Aldabó detention centre for three weeks.

According to the [Inter-American Commission on Human Rights](#) (IACHR), León Tabuada has reportedly been repeatedly subjected to [torture or other ill-treatment](#) in prison. He is also said to suffer from numerous pre-existing health issues such as chronic high blood pressure, polycythaemia, and congenital kidney disease, while his mental health has deteriorated in detention. On 18 July 2025, Leon Taboada began

a [12-day hunger strike](#) to protest the conditions of his imprisonment and to demand justice and freedom. During the first few days, his mother, Yenisey Taboada, an outspoken [defender](#) of the rights of prisoners in Cuba, faced difficulties obtaining information and access to her son. After persistent efforts, she was finally allowed to speak with her son by phone. He sounded weak but unwavering in his demand: *'I want my freedom, mom. This is for all the protesters and for the mothers who continue to suffer.'*

Leon Taboada, born 1998, is a [poet](#) and activist. His tetralogy *'Despertar'*, part of the unpublished compilation *The Prisoner Who Walks at Night*, is currently being edited by Veril Editions, part of the [Cultural Rights Observatory](#) (Observatorio de Derechos Culturales).

Update

On 19 January 2026, the IACHR adopted [precautionary measures](#) on behalf of Duannis Dabel León Taboada and his mother Yenisey Taboada Ortíz, recognising that their rights to life, personal integrity, and health are at risk of irreparable harm.

DETAINED

Fernando ALMENARES RIVERA (stage name Nando OBCD)

Throughout 2025, since his [detention](#) on 31 December 2024 on suspicion of sabotage, rapper Fernando Almenares Rivera (known as Nando OBCD) was held in pre-trial detention, facing [charges](#) of 'propaganda against the constitutional order', involvement in 'subversive activities', and having ties to individuals who promote 'terrorism against the Cuban state', in relation to his artistic expression in August 2024, when he publicly displayed banners with slogans critical of those in power in the city of Havana, including 'Cuba First in the Streets for Human Rights'. At the end of the year he was held at the Cuba–Panamá Prison in the province of Mayabeque, where he went on [hunger strike](#) for a week in July 2025.

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" in connection with an alleged fire in his neighbourhood on 30 December 2024. He has been detained on numerous occasions, and received threats, and even beatings from authorities in response to his artistic and activism activities, including with other artists critical of the authorities (see Case List [2025](#)).

Nando OBDC (born 11 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.

Update

On 19 January 2026, Nando OBDC, was [sentenced](#) to five years in prison for the alleged 'offence' of '[propaganda against the constitutional order](#)' under Article 124 of the Penal Code.

José Gabriel BARRENECHA CHÁVEZ

Cuban poet José Gabriel Barrenechea Chávez was held in pre-trial detention until his trial on 24 September 2025. Barrenechea was [detained](#) on 8 November 2024 following his participation in a peaceful protest in Encrucijada, Villa Clara. Accused of leading the demonstration, [video](#) evidence [shows](#) that he neither engaged in violence nor incited disorder, but was merely exercising his right to protest peacefully. PEN International highlighted his situation on [World Press Freedom Day 2025](#).

Barrenechea's health has significantly deteriorated since his arrest. He suffers from severe malnutrition, infections, sleep disorders, anxiety, and depression. The cruelty of his imprisonment was compounded when authorities denied him the right to say goodbye to his mother before her death from cancer on 4 May 2025.

Barrenechea has faced systematic harassment since 2019 for his critical journalism, including a travel ban, employment restrictions, and the censorship of his books in Cuba—part of a broader campaign of repression against

independent journalists and government critics. He was repeatedly summoned by state security and briefly detained in attempts to intimidate him and silence his work.

José Gabriel Barrenechea Chávez, born in 1971, is a writer, academic, journalist and researcher. His published works include *Tubular Bells and Other Stories* and *Cuba, an Island Between Apathy and Revolution*, and *José Antonio Saco runs out of arguments*. Before his arrest, Barrenechea also contributed to independent Cuban and international media outlets such as *14ymedio*, *Diario de Cuba* and *Latinoamérica 21*, and co-edited the magazine *Cuadernos de Pensamiento Plural*.

Update

On 15 January 2026, the Provincial People's Court of Villa Clara convicted Barrenechea Chávez of the offence of 'public disorder' and sentenced him to a [six-year prison term](#).

HARASSED

Camila ACOSTA RODRÍGUEZ

Journalist and author Camila Acosta Rodríguez continued to be subjected to harassment by police and security forces in 2025. On 19 April 2025, she was [prevented](#) by police agents from carrying out her work as a journalist covering a story. On 20 and 22 May 2025, around Cuba's Independence Day celebrations, uniformed and plain clothes officials surveilled her house and prevented her from leaving. Similar incidents took place on 5 August 2025 – the 31st anniversary of the Maleconazo mass protests against economic conditions in Cuba after the fall of the Soviet Union – and 21 [November](#) 2025. On 21 April 2024, journalist and author Camila Acosta Rodríguez was [briefly detained](#) by police officials in Matanzas, Cuba (see Case List [2025](#)).

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 templo, silencios y escándalos de la masonería cubana* (2022).

Ángel SANTIESTEBAN PRATS

Award-winning writer Ángel Santiesteban Prats was subjected to harassment by security and other officials, including through restrictions on movement, detention, and surveillance in 2025. On 20 March 2025, Santiesteban Prats, one of the most well-known figures within Freemasonry in Cuba, was [expelled from](#) the Grand Lodge of Cuba, which is controlled by individuals close to the government, following internal proceedings. According to Santiesteban Prats and public reports by independent media, the disciplinary process was politically motivated. On 10 September 2025, Santiesteban was [briefly detained](#) for three hours in Havana by State Security agents while attempting to leave his home during a nationwide power outage. Officers were also preventing him from moving freely and detained him without providing an official order.

Santiesteban Prats has been harassed by the Cuban authorities for many years (see Case Lists [2012 \(July to December\)](#), [2015](#), [2016](#), [2018](#) and [2022](#)). For example, he was previously sentenced to five years in prison on 8 December 2012 for alleged assault and trespassing. Conditionally released on 17 July 2015, he was briefly detained again in 2016).

Ángel Santiesteban Prats, born on 2 August 1966, is an award-winning writer and author of the blog *Los Hijos que Nadie Quiso* (*The Children Whom Nobody Loved*). He has been published around the world and has received various literary prizes, including the Alejo Carpentier Award organized by the Cuban Book Institute in 2001 for his book *Los hijos que nadie quiso* (*The Children Nobody Wanted*) and the Casa de las Américas Award in 2006 for his book *Dichosos los que lloran* (*Blessed Are Those Who Mourn*). Ángel Santiesteban received the 2020 Václav Havel International Prize for Creative Dissent. He is the author of several other books, including *Sueño de un día de Verano* (*Summer Daydream*), and *Sur: latitud 13* (*South: Latitude 13*).

Orlando MORA CABRERA

In 2025, filmmaker Orlando Mora Cabrera continued to be subjected to harassment in relation to his short film *Matar a un hombre* (*To Kill a Man*) (2024) (see Case List [2025](#)).

In May 2025, the film was [invited](#) to take part in *Nórdika: Days of Diversity*, a diversity-focused festival held in Havana and organised by the Nordic Council of Ministers, with the support of the Norwegian and Swedish embassies in Cuba. The film was scheduled to be screened at Estudio 50, one of the festival venues; however, the venue received threatening calls and the screening was prohibited. The organisers resolved this internally by moving all film screenings to the 'open-air cinema' space at the Norwegian Embassy a few days later. While this prevented the incident from gaining wider visibility, it once again confirmed that the film cannot be shown in public venues in Cuba.

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. In addition to *To kill a man*, 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.

Raymar AGUADO HERNÁNDEZ

Art critic and columnist Raymar Aguado Hernández continued to be subjected to harassment by authorities after engaging in student activism during the year (see Case Lists [2023/4-2025](#)). On 10 June 2025, an [officer went to his home](#) to deliver a summons ordering him to appear at the Zanja y Dragones police station in Havana; when he refused to sign it on the grounds

that it was unlawful, he was ordered verbally to appear. On 11 June, he was [detained](#) at his residence and taken to the police station, where he was [interrogated](#) for several hours on suspicion of ‘incitement to commit a crime’ in connection with his social media activity and his support for student demonstrations. He was also subjected to threats and intimidation. Aguado Hernández stated that the authorities [confiscated](#) his documents and warned him that they could arrest and prosecute him if he left his house.

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

Historian and author Alexander Hall Lujardo continued to be subjected to a travel ban throughout 2025 (see Case Lists [2023/4-2025](#)).

In November 2025, Hall publicly stated that the travel ban, [in place since 2023](#), had prevented him from leaving the country to begin postgraduate studies in Ecuador despite having obtained a scholarship. He said that State Security officials had made the lifting of the restriction [conditional](#) on his carrying out actions he considered coercive or humiliating, including making a public self-incriminating statement and surrendering money and electronic devices, which he described as a form of political pressure.

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

In 2025, writer Jorge Fernández Era continued to be subjected to sustained harassment (see Case Lists [2023/4-2025](#)) in connection with peaceful demonstrations held on the 18th of each month demanding political reform. On 18 April, he was [detained](#) by State Security agents while heading to Central Park for a peaceful protest and held for several hours at the Aguilera police unit before being released. On 18 June, he was again [detained](#) in similar circumstances and reportedly detained for about seven hours. On 18 July, his home was placed under [police surveillance](#) from early morning and he was later [detained](#) and taken to the Zanja police station, in Havana. There, he reported being restrained and beaten by officers and receiving threats and intimidation. After his release, he attempted to file a formal complaint supported by a medical certificate documenting his injuries, but the authorities reportedly [refused to accept it](#).

On 18 August, Fernández Era was [detained](#) while attempting to protest and held for more than six hours; part of that time he was confined inside a sealed police vehicle under the sun, a form of torture known as ‘[patrol oven](#)’. In November, the Prosecutor’s Office [suspended](#) the criminal case opened in 2023 against him and lifted his house arrest and travel ban imposed in 2023. On 18 December, Fernández Era was [detained](#) in Matanzas together with other activists and released the following day.

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.

JUDICIAL HARASSMENT

Alina Bárbara LÓPEZ HERNÁNDEZ

Throughout 2025, historian and academic Alina Bárbara López Hernández remained subjected to judicial harassment relating to her June 2024 arrest, when she and fellow academic **Jenny Victoria Pantoja Torres** (see entry below) were detained while travelling to Havana for a peaceful protest and subjected to police violence (see Case Lists [2023/4-2025](#)). In May 2025, the Public Prosecutor's office sent her case for trial on charges of 'contempt', 'disobedience', and 'assault'. No trial had taken place by the end of the year.

Reports throughout the year also indicated other forms of harassment, including repeated house surveillance; temporary interruptions of internet and mobile services; pressure on her daughter; and being threatened with arrest or facing [brief detentions](#). On 18 December, state security agents [intercepted](#) and [detained](#) her in Matanzas for several hours while she was on her way to attend her regular peaceful protest. Alina's daughter, Lilian Borroto López, who came out to protest her arrest, was also detained hours later.

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.

Jenny Victoria PANTOJA TORRES

During 2025, academic and activist Jenny Victoria Pantoja Torres continued to be subjected to judicial and other forms of harassment, including arbitrary detention, surveillance, and an ongoing criminal case for the alleged offence of 'assault' (see [Case List 2025](#)).

On 18 January 2025, Pantoja Torres was arbitrarily [detained](#) in Matanzas as part of the authorities' efforts to prevent her from carrying out her monthly peaceful protest. On 18 February 2025, she was summoned for questioning at a police station in the municipality of Diez de Octubre in Havana and was subsequently arbitrarily [detained](#) outside her home. Authorities reportedly cited the non-payment of a fine imposed in 2023 as the reason for her detention. She was released after several hours.

On 17 July 2025, Pantoja Torres reported that she had been [excluded](#) from an academic event for political reasons, and prevented from presenting her work in person. On 18 November 2025, her home was reportedly placed under [police surveillance](#) in order to prevent her from carrying out her monthly peaceful protest. On 18 December 2025, Pantoja Torres was again [detained](#) in Havana while attempting to participate in a peaceful demonstration. She was reportedly held for several hours at the Dragones and Zulueta police station and released close to midnight.

In May 2025, the Matanzas Prosecutor's Office sent her case for trial, [formally requesting a sentence](#) of up to three years' imprisonment or corrective labour, under charges including 'assault', linked to an incident in June 2024 (see **Alina Bárbara López Hernández** above). No trial had taken place by the end of the year.

Essayist, historian and academic Jenny Pantoja Torres is a specialist in Cuban religious practices of African origin. Her book *Del Templo al templo. Silencios y escándalos de la masonería cubana* (Editorial Primigenios) was published in 2022.

CONDITIONAL RELEASE

Randy ARTEAGA RIVERA`

Musician and rapper Randy Arteaga Rivera was [conditionally released](#) on 16 January 2025, following [negotiations](#) between the USA, the Vatican and Cuba. Arteaga Rivera was [convicted](#) of ‘contempt’ and ‘public disorder’ in April 2022 and sentenced to five years in prison in relation to his while participation 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 (see Case Lists [2023/4-2025](#)).

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.

Marco Antonio PINTUELES MARRERO

Rapper and activist Marco Antonio Pintueles Marrero was [conditionally released](#) on 17 January 2025 following negotiations between the USA, the Vatican and Cuba. He was serving a five-year sentence of [correctional](#) labour in ‘La Aguada’ camp for the crime of ‘sedition’ that was converted to a [suspended sentence](#) prior to his release. 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 Lists [2022-2025](#)).

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.

EL SALVADOR

HARASSED

Óscar Enrique MARTÍNEZ D’ AUBUISSON

Author Óscar Martínez D’Aubisson, editor-in-chief of the online media outlet El Faro received [threats](#) in 2025 as a consequence of the former’s journalistic investigations. On 1 May 2025, El Faro published a series of interviews with two fugitive leaders of the Barrio 18 Revolucionarios gang. The interviewees recount the pacts they made with President Nayib Bukele’s government. Shortly afterwards, pro-government officials and spokespersons threatened and smeared Martínez, along with Carlos Martínez, ,accusing him of being an apologist for crime and illicit groups. In May, faced with a threat of criminal charges, they both [left](#) El Salvador for their own safety.

Staff at El Faro have suffered attacks for many years, including surveillance, smear campaigns and judicial harassment. In January 2021, the IACHR granted [precautionary measures](#) to 34 of its journalists.

Award-winning journalist Óscar Martínez, born in 1983, is a founding member of *Sala Negra*, project covering violence in Central America (2011–2018), and Head of Special Investigations at ElFaro.net (2018–2021). He has been editor-in-chief of *El Faro* since 2021. He is the author of the books *Los migrantes que no importan (The Migrants Who Do Not Matter)* (2021), *A History of Violence* (2017), and *(Los muertos y el periodista) (The Dead and the Journalist)* (2021), among others. He received the *Fernando Benítez National Prize for Cultural Journalism* (2018), the *King of Spain International Journalism Prize* (2019); and the *Gabo Prize* for Best Coverage in 2020, among others.

GUATEMALA

HARASSED

Marvin DEL CID

Sonny FIGUEROA

Guatemalan journalists Marvin Del Cid and Sonny Figueroa faced continuing harassment in 2025, because of their work. On 16 January 2026, the two Vox Populi journalists were subjected to [homophobic insults](#) in an article on the platform Xela NEWS. The same webpage spread disinformation and stigmatising attacks on other independent media outlets in Guatemala.

In August 2025, the Ministry of the Interior, unilaterally withdrew the security protection that had been provided through the National Civil Police (PNC). The journalists told PEN International that the publisher of their third book, *Miguel Martínez: el ascenso al poder*, was threatened and that they had received ongoing attacks on social media. They left Guatemala in October 2025, fearing for their safety.

Earlier, in 2023, both journalists had also left Guatemala temporarily, due to safety concerns; they returned later the same year (see Case Lists [2023/4-2025](#)). 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')*.

Update:

The two journalists returned to Guatemala in January 2026.

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 (see Case Lists [2017-2025](#).)

Dina Meza told PEN International that she received stigmatising messages and was subjected to harassment in the context of the November 2025 elections, including the denial of accreditation before the National Electoral Council. She also faced restrictions on her reporting at the National Congress, where she was placed under surveillance and instructed not to give statements to the press.

In December 2025, Meza was further subjected to online [gender-based harassment and stigmatising attacks](#) on social media, particularly on Facebook. The fresh round of harassment reportedly began shortly after Meza – together with human rights defender Jorge Jiménez – filed a formal complaint on 17 December 2025, accusing the Chief of the Armed Forces, Roosevelt Hernández, of intimidation, indirect threats, stigmatisation, and violations of freedom of expression against journalist Renato Álvarez.

Following the filing of the complaint, Meza reportedly received numerous hostile and stigmatising messages, including gender-based insults and accusations, aimed at discrediting her work and professional credibility as a journalist and human rights defender.

Meza (1963) runs and writes for the website [pasosdeanimalgrande.com](#). 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 the recipient of the 2007 [Amnesty International UK's](#) 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. In April 2025, Dina Meza received the San Oscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdámez Award from the Central American Parliament. She is an Honorary Member of PEN Català.

MEXICO

DEATH THREAT

Adela NAVARRO BELLO

Investigative journalist Adela Navarro Bello, director of the weekly magazine *ZETA Tijuana*, faced [threats](#) and intimidation in 2025.

Between 29 April and 16 May, she received [eight](#) threatening phone calls. In each call, a male voice repeated the [phrase](#): ‘tell Adela Navarro to be careful.’ The threats began following the [publication](#) of investigations into the alleged concealment of official information related to a clandestine mass grave, as well as other reports on corruption.

On 31 October 2025, businessman [Manuel Cisneros Romero](#) went to Zeta’s offices accompanied by armed men, asking to see Navarro, following the publication of a report linking his son to criminal networks. The journalist filed a complaint for intimidation and gender-based violence, and the state prosecutor’s office opened an investigation. Earlier, in January 2025, the weekly had already been mentioned in a [narco-banner](#) – cloth banners with intimidating messages hung in public places.

Adela Navarro Bello (born 1968) is an investigative journalist and columnist, and the editor-in-chief of *ZETA Tijuana*. She is co-author of *#JournalistsToo – Women Journalists – Women Working* (2021). Throughout her career she has received numerous [awards](#), including the International Press Freedom Award from the Committee to Protect Journalists and the [Courage in Journalism Award](#) granted by the International Women’s Media Foundation.

THREATENED

Sandra ROMANDÍA

Mexican author and journalist Sandra Romandía reported to PEN International that during 2025 she was forced to leave Mexico around the time her most recent book was due to be published, for fear of physical threats. After the book was published, she faced surveillance, telephone threats and monitoring by criminal groups.

Since March 2025, while investigating the case of Rancho Izaguirre in Teuchitlán, Jalisco – a site where families of disappeared persons uncovered evidence believed to be linked to forced recruitment and killings by drug cartels – she has reportedly been followed by unidentified individuals, received indirect warnings not to publish her findings, and received direct threats via her mobile phone from numbers linked to Michoacán state. According to the threats, her movements were being monitored and her life would be at risk if she continued her investigation.

Her latest book, *Witnesses of Horror* (Grijalbo/Penguin Random House, 2025) shows how municipal, state and federal authorities allegedly permitted the operation of the clandestine site through collusion or systematic neglect.

Romandía has faced threats and harassment linked to her investigative work and books covering corruption, violence, drug trafficking and human rights violations since at least 2019.

Sandra Romandía, born in 1983, is a prominent Mexican investigative journalist and author based in Mexico City. She is the author of the books *Las 7 Mafias Chilangas*, *Narco CDMX*, and co-author of *The 12 poorest Mexicans*. She co-founded Opinión 51 (www.opinion51.com) and founded the microsite *La Cadera de Eva* (Eva’s Hip), the first within a media outlet in Mexico dedicated exclusively to gender equality issues and women’s stories. She received the 2020 Maria Moors Cabot scholarship, she studied at Columbia University and is an alumna of its Latin American Investigative Journalism program, as well as a scholarship recipient at Universidad Iberoamericana.

JUDICIAL HARASSMENT

Héctor DE MAULEÓN

Journalist, historian and writer Héctor de Mauleón faced [judicial harassment](#) in 2025 in connection with his journalistic reporting. On 1 May 2025, De Mauleón published his regular [column](#) *En tercera persona (In Third Person)* in the Mexican daily *El Universal*, in which he reported on alleged corruption and family links between public officials and Tania Contreras López, the ruling political party's candidate for magistrate in the upcoming elections.

The candidate filed a formal [complaint](#) for defamation and political gender-based violence against the journalist. Although the complaint was initially dismissed by the authorities, the candidate appealed the decision, which overturned the ruling and ordered the initiation of a special sanctioning procedure against de Mauleón and *El Universal*.

On 15 May 2025, the Electoral Institute of Tamaulipas (IETAM) imposed precautionary measures on the journalist, ordering the removal of the article from *El Universal's* website and instructing him to refrain from publishing further content concerning Contreras López, but the newspaper didn't remove the article.

Héctor de Mauleón (1963) is the author of the books *La perfecta espiral*, *Como nada en el mundo*, and *El secreto de la Noche Triste*, among others. He began his career in journalism in 1989. Since then, he has written about the past and present of Mexico City in the country's most important newspapers and magazines.

Maria Amparo CASAR

The Mexican sociologist, columnist, activist and writer continued to face judicial harassment in 2025 in relation to the April 2024 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). In the book, Amparo Casar documents and criticises in the lack of transparency in former President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's

government. Mexico's Federal Prosecutor's Office (FGR) advanced criminal proceedings against María Amparo Casar. Following an investigation launched in May 2024 into alleged pension fraud, the case was brought before a judge in September 2025; however, a scheduled hearing in December was [suspended](#) when the investigation was placed on hold.

María Amparo Casar had been subjected to a smear campaign from then President López Obrador and other state officials in May 2024 (see Case List [2025](#)). 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.

Hernán GOMEZ BRUERA

During 2025, Mexican journalist and political analyst Hernán Gómez Bruera continue facing judicial harassment and threats following the publication of his books *Traición en Palacio (Grijalbo, 2023)* and *El ministro del poder: un infiltrado en la 4T (The Minister of Power: An Infiltrator in the Fourth Transformation) (Grijalbo, 2025)*. These works allege instances of corruption and influence-peddling within the Mexican judiciary and Supreme Court.

During the [launch event](#) for the second book on 20 May 2025, the author publicly denounced judicial harassment from the former legal adviser to the Mexican Presidency, Julio Scherer Ibarra, and other judicial authorities, aimed at preventing the book's publication and promotion. Despite ongoing legal proceedings, threats and intimidation, the book was [published](#).

At the event, Gómez Bruera stated that he and Penguin Random House Mexico were facing three [lawsuits](#) -- two civil and

one criminal -- which he believed was part of a broader strategy to suppress publication and limit his journalistic work.

Hernán Gómez Bruera faced a previous [defamation suit](#) in relation to his 2023 book, *Traición en Palacio: El negocio de la justicia en la 4T (Betrayal in the Palace: The Business of Justice in the Fourth Transformation)*.

Hernán Gómez Bruera (1976) is a political analyst, academic, and investigative journalist specialising in corruption within Mexico's justice system. He has been a columnist for newspapers such as *El Universal*, *The New York Times*, *Milenio*, and *La Jornada*, among others.

ATTACKED - IMPUNITY

Lydia CACHO RIBEIRO

Impunity for the arrest and torture of Lydia Cacho Ribeiro continued in 2025. 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 after an Interpol arrest warrant for the men implicated in the child abuse, she went into exile in 2019 (see [Case Lists 2010-2025](#)), after an attack by armed men who entered her home.

In April 2025, former Puebla governor Mario Marín, accused of ordering Cacho's illegal detention and torture, was [returned](#) to a maximum-security prison after his house-arrest measure was revoked. However, in July 2025, a Mexican court [acquitted](#) former police commander Juan Sánchez Moreno, one of the officials implicated in the torture of Lydia Cacho in 2005, marking a serious setback in the search for justice.

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.

CIRO GOMEZ LEYVA

Journalist Ciro Gómez Leyva survived an [attempted murder](#) on 15 December 2022 in Mexico City, when gunmen on a motorcycle fired multiple shots at his armoured vehicle while he was driving home. Mexican authorities opened an investigation and classified the attack as attempted homicide linked to organised crime.

Throughout 2024 and 2025, multiple defendants accepted responsibility through abbreviated judicial procedures, allowing courts to issue prison sentences against several of them. On 16 December 2025, a Mexican judge [sentenced](#) Armando Escárcega, [identified](#) by prosecutors as the leader of the criminal cell that organised the attack, to 14 years' imprisonment. Twelve other individuals also received prison terms. However, concerns remain regarding the full motive for the attack and whether all intellectual authors have been identified, an issue that continues to be raised publicly in connection with the case and the broader climate of violence against journalists in Mexico.

Ciro Gómez Leyva (1957) is one of Mexico's most prominent journalists with decades of experience in print, radio and television journalism. He is the author of the book *No me pudiste matar (You couldn't kill me)* (Editorial Planeta, 2025).

PERU

JUDICIAL HARASSMENT

Paola Margot UGAZ CRUZ

Investigative journalist, editor and writer Paola Ugaz continued to face [judicial harassment](#) in 2025, in relation to an ongoing investigation for alleged 'illicit enrichment' opened in 2023.

In January 2025, the Pope [dissolved](#) the Sodalicio de Vida movement 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.

In a moving [letter](#) dated June 2025, Pope Leo XIV recognized Ugaz's pathbreaking journalism, stating 'The truth does not belong to anyone—it is the responsibility of everyone to seek it, preserve it, and serve it'. In June 2025, the statement was [read](#) at the premiere of [Proyecto Ugaz](#), a play honouring the courage of whistleblowers and journalists that was inspired by Ugaz's instrumental role in exposing systemic abuses that led to the Vatican's intervention.

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 organization 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 – 2025](#)).

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.

DEATH THREAT

Gustavo Andrés GORRITI ELLENBOGEN

On 10 September 2025, the Mayor of Lima, Rafael López Aliaga, held a press conference in which he smeared and [threatened](#) investigative journalist Gustavo Gorriti with death using Peruvian criminal slang. 'We have to take the gentleman out once and for all,' he said. At the same event, he [linked](#) Gorriti to former mayor Susana Villarán, who faces trial over alleged illegal contributions from the Brazilian construction companies Odebrecht and OAS. 'She is his partner (Gorriti), and both form part of a group of corrupt people who have turned against Peru,' the Mayor of Lima asserted, without presenting evidence to support the claim.

On 27 March 2024, Gorriti faced judicial harassment that sought to undermine his work as a journalist (see [Case List 2024/2025](#)).

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. Gorriti, born in San Isidro on the 4 February 1948, is the author of several books such as *Sendero* (*Path*), *La Calavera en negro* (*The Skull in Black*), and *La Batalla* (*The Battle*).

Most banned books of the 2024-2025 school year, by district



Data from PEN America Index of School Book Bans, July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

BOOKS BANNED

According to the latest [report](#) by PEN America, the 2024–2025 school year saw a total of 6,870 book bans, affecting 3,752 unique titles in 87 school districts across the country, bringing the total number of book bans since July 2021 to 22,810 across 45 states and 451 public school districts.

Notably, this reporting period saw a marked increase in the banning of non-fiction titles for the first time since systematic tracking began in 2021. This trend is especially concerning given the broader socio-political context in the USA, where ongoing legislative measures have targeted LGBTQ+ communities and communities of colour. In parallel, there has been a rise in the removal of books featuring LGBTQ+ themes, as well as narratives centred on race, racism, migration, and social justice movements.

These developments reveal a clear and troubling pattern: literary censorship is increasingly intertwined with efforts to suppress marginalised voices and restrict access to educational content that challenges dominant narratives. As such, book bans must be understood not as isolated incidents, but as part of a wider ecosystem of control over information, identity, and public discourse.

Most Banned Books of the 2024–2025 School Year

(source: [PEN America](#))

1. *A Clockwork Orange*, by Anthony Burgess, 23 bans
- 2 (tie). *Breathless*, by Jennifer Niven, 20 bans
- 2 (tie). *Sold*, by Patricia McCormick, 20 bans
4. *Last Night at the Telegraph Club*, by Malinda Lo, 19 bans
5. *A Court of Mist and Fury*, by Sarah J. Maas, 18 bans
- 6 (tie). *Crank*, by Ellen Hopkins, 17 bans
- 6 (tie). *Forever...*, by Judy Blume, 17 bans
- 6 (tie). *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, by Stephen Chbosky, 17 bans
- 6 (tie). *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West*, by Gregory Maguire, 17 bans
- 10 (tie). *All Boys Aren't Blue*, by George M. Johnson, 16 bans
- 10 (tie). *A Court of Thorns and Roses*, by Sarah J. Maas, 16 bans
- 10 (tie). *Damsel*, by Elana K. Arnold, 16 bans
- 10 (tie). *The DUFF: Designated Ugly Fat Friend*, by Kody Keplinger, 16 bans
- 10 (tie). *Nineteen Minutes*, by Jodi Picoult, 16 bans
- 10 (tie). *Storm and Fury*, by Jennifer L. Armentrout, 16 bans

HARASSED**Alistair KITCHEN**

In June 2025, Australian writer Alistair Kitchen, was [detained](#) at the USA border and deported, reportedly based upon his personal writings about student protests and President Donald Trump's administration while enrolled as a masters student at Columbia University. In a [blog post](#), Kitchen said he left Melbourne for New York on 12 June and was detained for 12 hours by USA Customs and Border Protection officials during a layover in Los Angeles after being pulled aside for secondary screening. He was [questioned](#) in connection with his reporting on pro-Palestinian student protests at Columbia, which he published on his personal blog, [Kitchen Counter](#). Kitchen, who had moved back to Australia from New York in 2024, [said](#) that interrogators asked him about his views on a one-state versus two-state solution in relation to Israel and Palestine.

Alistair Kitchen is a journalist, writer and photographer, working mostly in essay, reportage, and criticism. His work has appeared in *The Saturday Paper*, *The New Yorker*, *New York Magazine*, [Meanjin](#), [Overland](#), *Island*, and [Kitchen Counter](#).

VENEZUELA**DETAINED****Rory Daniel BRANKER**

On 20 February 2025, officers from Venezuela's Bolivarian Intelligence Service (SEBIN) [intercepted](#) Rory Branker in Caracas and forced him into a vehicle. Authorities also raided his home, confiscating two laptops and two mobile phones.

On 26 February 2025, Venezuela's Minister of the Interior and Justice, Diosdado Cabello, stated on his television programme *Con el mazo dando* that Branker 'was captured for extorting people through the publication of false information and other crimes (...) to create media narratives against the government and the people of Venezuela'.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) [granted](#) precautionary measures in favour of Rory Branker, in the belief that he faces a serious, urgent risk of suffering irreparable harm to his rights to life and personal integrity, on 29 August 2025.

Initially held at Maripérez Police Base, after seven months Branker was transferred between several jails before he was finally transferred to the [Tocorón Penitentiary Centre](#) in Aragua state. Branker's arbitrary detention was marked by enforced disappearance, transfers without notification, prolonged incommunicado detention, procedural opacity and the absence of full guarantees of legal defence. Rory Daniel Branker, born in 1978, is a columnist in various platforms, journalist, and editor of *La Patilla*.

Update

Branker was [released](#) on 4 February 2026, after being subjected to arbitrary [detention](#) for almost a year. He was formally charged the following day with five offences, including 'financing terrorism' and 'treason'. He remains subject to a travel ban, is barred from speaking to the press and has to report to the authorities approximately once a month.

Leocenis Manuel GARCÍA OSORIO

Leocenis Manuel García Osorio, a Venezuelan journalist, writer, and political activist, spent 2025 in [incommunicado detention](#) at El Rodeo I, a detention centre in Miranda state under the control of the Directorate of Military Counterintelligence. He was [detained](#) on 11 September 2024 by SEBIN agents after posting a video on social media accusing the government of violating the Constitution following the 28 July presidential elections. In October 2024, the IACHR [granted precautionary](#) measures in his favour, in the belief that he was facing a serious, urgent risk of suffering irreparable harm to his rights.

Leocenis García Osorio, born in 1981, is the founder of the weekly news magazine *6to Poder*. He has authored numerous articles, essays, and books, including *Estamos Unidos* (2022) and *La Rebelión de los Tejones* (2019), focused on politics and human rights.

Update

PEN International learned that García Osorio was [conditionally released](#) on 8 February 2026.

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 BlueSky Account: [@penamericas.bsky.social](#) and an [Instagram account](#), where it regularly posts information about writers at risk in the Americas Region.

Lucero DÍAZ ESTRADA: *Journalist threatened***Action:**

11 March 2025. Statement. [PEN International denounces threats against journalist Lucero Díaz Estrada and calls for protection](#)

Kristian Uriel MARTÍNEZ**ZAVALA: *Journalist killed*****Action:**

31 October 2025:

Campaign: [Day of the Dead 2025: PEN International, Amnesty International, ARTICLE 19, and PEN Centres honour journalists killed in Mexico](#)

Calletano DE JESÚS GUERRERO:***Journalist killed*****Action:**

31 October 2025:

Campaign: [Day of the Dead 2025: PEN International, Amnesty International, ARTICLE 19, and PEN Centres honour journalists killed in Mexico](#)

GUATEMALA**Jose Rubén Zamora Marroquín:*****Journalist detained*****Action:**

12 March and 8 August 2025.

Statement. [Guatemala: Court's order to return José Rubén Zamora Marroquín back to prison condemned](#)

VENEZUELA

Various: *Journalists detained, some released*

Action:

1 August 2025: Statement. [PEN International calls for the release of journalists detained amid deepening crackdown.](#)

ASIA/ PACIFIC REGIONAL OVERVIEW

ROSS HOLDER,
*Head of Research,
Policy and Advocacy*

In several countries across the Asia/Pacific region, including **Indonesia, Malaysia, the Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal, the Philippines, and Timor Leste**, 2025 was marked by protests often about corruption, inequality, and unpopular legislation or politicians. They were frequently organised by young people in the Gen Z age group using a variety of social media platforms and taking inspiration from similar protests elsewhere. They were met by an increased willingness by governments to impose sweeping and indiscriminate restrictions on online expression. As with previous years, the use of long-term prison sentences as a means to silence writers, journalists and others remains a pressing concern for the region, which has been exacerbated by appalling reports of the dire detention conditions that many have been subjected to. Transnational repression continued its global march as a tool of persecution, once again rearing its ugly head in the region this year. PEN International celebrated several releases and acquittals during the year.

ONLINE CENSORSHIP IN TIMES OF PROTEST

Over the course of 2025, concerns around online expression have been a key factor in youth-led protests that have taken place in several countries across the region, with governments frequently resorting to sweeping acts of censorship on the basis of national security and public order laws.

In **Nepal**, the government's ban of 26 social media platforms sparked demonstrations by thousands of the country's Gen Z population, which escalated into mass protests over a broader range of socio-economic grievances, including rising inequality and youth unemployment. Many viewed the government's social media ban as an act of online censorship and an attempt to stifle viral social media posts of alleged corruption and nepotism by Nepal's ruling political elites. Authorities responded to the protests by imposing a violent crackdown, including a military curfew and permitting the use of lethal force against unarmed protestors, resulting in 77 deaths and hundreds more injured over the course of two days of protests. During the turmoil, Nepal's Prime Minister was forced to resign, with the social media ban reversed soon afterwards.

Youth-led Gen Z protests also took place in **Indonesia** in August and September, spurred by similar discontent over socio-economic inequality, resulting in 10 deaths and a temporary suspension of TikTok's live streaming service after footage was circulated online showing the death of a 21-year-old gig economy worker who was run over by a police vehicle during the protests.

There are also ongoing concerns over the overbroad use of legislation to curb online expression in **Sri Lanka** following the rushed promulgation of the Online Safety Act (OSA) in February 2024. Implemented following anti-government protests in 2022 that resulted

in a [government crackdown](#) and ultimately, the [resignation](#) of Sri Lanka's then president, the OSA has been heavily [criticised](#) for its vague offences, overbroad enforcement provisions, disproportionate penalties and lack of judicial oversight. The UN's human rights office called in August for its '[amendment or repeal](#)'. Despite the government [reiterating](#) its [manifesto commitment](#) to revise the OSA as recently as August 2025, along with support for its repeal from the government's [opposition](#), progress has been [slow](#).

In **Pakistan**, [protests and sit-ins](#) by activists against the use of police violence in the conflict-affected Balochistan province led to the [arrest and detention](#) of woman human rights defender **Mahrang Baloch** in March 2025. Previously charged with sedition in 2024 after she returned from Norway, where she participated in [events](#) organised by WEXFO and PEN Norway, Baloch remained in prison at the time of writing.

Meanwhile in **India**, [demonstrations](#) in territories across the country over a wide range of concerns, including the ongoing crackdown on journalists, have been met with efforts to silence dissenting expression. In Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir, authorities [blocked](#) some 300 social media accounts that were found to circulate content that allegedly provoked unrest, while also [banning](#) the use of VPNs as a means to bypass state censors. Indiscriminate internet shutdowns continue to be implemented across the country despite previous [strong criticism](#) from UN experts, with internet users in India reportedly facing [more internet restrictions](#) than any other country in 2025.

LONG-TERM IMPRISONMENT AS AN INSTRUMENT OF SILENCE

Across the region, writers and others continue to be subjected to long-term prison sentences for their peaceful expression. In **Thailand**, new convictions in 2025 for poet and human rights lawyer **Arnon Nampha** (see below), resulted in a cumulative sentence of over 29 years' imprisonment for royal defamation (*lèse-majesté*) in retaliation for his peaceful expression and [participation in demonstrations](#) that called for wide-ranging reforms, including the repeal of Thailand's *lèse-majesté* legislation. At the end of the year, Arnon faced four further royal defamation charges, with each carrying a potential 15-year prison sentence.

In **China**, imprisoned writer and journalist **Dong Yuyu** (see below), serving a seven-year prison sentence, had his appeal rejected by the Beijing High Court on 13 November 2025. In response to the court's ruling, his family released a [statement](#) calling it a 'shameless act of persecution' that was carried out against Yuyu due to his 'lifelong outspokenness for democracy, human rights, and political reforms in China'.

In **Vietnam**, 2025 marked writer and activist **Pham Doan Trang's** (see below) fifth year in prison serving a nine-year sentence for 'anti-state propaganda', which has been widely condemned by [civil society](#) and the United Nations [Working Group on Arbitrary Detention](#). In recognition of her dedicated writing and struggle for freedom of expression in Vietnam, Trang was awarded PEN Sweden's [2025 Tucholsky Prize](#).

UNBEARABLE CONDITIONS OF DETENTION

All too often, imprisoned writers are subjected to appalling prison conditions, compounding the injustice of their incarceration. In **Myanmar**, imprisoned writer and activist **Wai Moe Naing**, currently serving a combined sentence of 74 years in prison, was reportedly [assaulted](#) by prison officials in June 2025. Despite suffering from a fractured wrist and other serious injuries, he was denied adequate medical care and at the end of the year was held in solitary confinement, which caused further health problems.

In **Hong Kong**, there were increasing concerns over the health and wellbeing of writer and media publisher **Jimmy Lai**. Aged 78, Lai had been continuously held in [solitary confinement](#) for over five years at the end of 2025, with his [health rapidly deteriorating](#) over the course of his long-running national security trial. Throughout the year, PEN International has continued to amplify the voices of Jimmy Lai's son [Sebastien](#) and [representatives](#) of his international legal team by facilitating their attendance at UN meetings where they drew attention to Lai's arbitrary detention and urged UN member states to do more to secure his release.

Elsewhere in **China**, there are also mounting concerns for the well-being of imprisoned writer and activist, **Yang Hengjun** (see below), who continued to serve a suspended death sentence. In early 2025, reports emerged of the impact that his [worsening health](#) has had on his ability to engage in prison labour, preventing him from being able to purchase basic amenities through the prison system, including toothpaste and winter gloves, which has forced him to resort to wearing socks on his hands. A [letter](#) penned by Yang was made public in May 2025, providing a powerful expression of his resolve despite the appalling conditions he had been subjected to. In the letter, Yang provides a deeply moving account of the 'hardest and darkest chapter of his life', and his hope that he can be returned to Australia where he can be reunited with his family and receive medical care.

AID CUTS A CALAMITY FOR EXILE MEDIA AND WRITERS FLEEING PERSECUTION

In January, the **USA** government's decision to [freeze foreign aid](#), along with a subsequent decision in March to [slash funding](#) to news services including Voice of America and [Radio Free Asia](#), had a [calamitous impact](#) on media outlets operating in exile (exile media) and [hundreds](#) of at-risk journalists, writers and others. This damage was exacerbated by similar aid cuts from several other countries, including [Canada](#), [France](#), [Germany](#), and the [United Kingdom](#).

In **Myanmar**, exile media outlets that were established along the Thai-Myanmar border in the wake of the 2021 coup have served as a vital source of independent news reporting on a country gripped by civil war and brutal military rule. The funding cuts have had a devastating impact on many of these media outlets, resulting in the suspension of salaries for dozens of at-risk Myanmar media workers who now face the risk of [deportation](#) to Myanmar if they cannot afford the renewal costs for their Thai visas.

Meanwhile, in **Afghanistan**, USAID cuts have [compounded](#) the country's humanitarian and human rights crises, which have [disproportionately impacted](#) Afghan women and girls, who face overwhelming restrictions on their ability to engage in any form of expression, by shutting down one of their last remaining [avenues](#) to access education or healthcare through women-led, community-based programmes that were funded by humanitarian aid programmes. Cuts to international aid have coincided with the suspension or tightening of humanitarian visa programmes that were a vital lifeline for Afghan writers, journalists and others at risk of persecution from the Taliban for their peaceful expression.

In **Pakistan**, the government's [mass deportation](#) regime has been a source of grave concern for many at-risk Afghan writers, journalists and others who fled to Pakistan in search of safety and stability due to their public criticism of the Taliban.

STIFLING CAMPAIGNS OF MISOGYNISTIC HARASSMENT AND INTIMIDATION

In several countries across the region, targeted campaigns of harassment and intimidation, both [online](#) and offline, have continued to be used as a means to silence writers and others engaged in public expression, which [disproportionately](#) impact [women and girls](#).

In **Bangladesh**, writer **Nadira Yeasmin** (see below) has faced a [sustained](#) campaign of harassment from conservative groups after she criticised a conservative rally that sought the dissolution of a Commission that was established to advance women's rights and gender equality. In **Afghanistan**, the Taliban's campaign to erase women from public life through what amounts to [gender apartheid](#) has continued unabated, including a [decree](#) issued in August demanding the removal of books authored by women from the country's university system. In **India**, journalist and writer **Rana Ayyub** (see below) has continued to face ongoing [harassment and intimidation](#) after her personal details were deliberately [leaked](#) online last year, resulting in her being [stalked](#) and [threatened](#) with rape and murder.

ALARMING RISE IN THE USE OF TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION

This year has seen a significant rise in transnational repression in countries across the region, resulting in UN independent experts submitting [parallel communications](#) to the governments of China, and several countries in south-east Asia, detailing dozens of instances where dissidents, members of marginalised communities and family members have been subjected to transnational human rights violations, including acts of intimidation, assaults, enforced disappearance and murder.

In **Vietnam**, Tibetan writer, educator and religious leader **Humkar Dorje Rinpoche** (see below) [died](#) under suspicious circumstances while in custody in March 2025, just days after he was reportedly arrested by Vietnamese authorities in the presence of Chinese officials. Several months previously, Humkar Dorje Rinpoche had reportedly fled to Vietnam after being interrogated by Chinese authorities.

While in **Thailand**, Australian writer and journalist **Murray Hunter** (see below) was indicted on four counts of criminal defamation proceedings following police complaints lodged by a state regulator in **Malaysia** over several of his self-published articles concerning the regulator's past conduct. The transnational pursuit of [criminal defamation](#) charges against Hunter over his public interest commentary poses an alarming precedent for the region.

JOURNALISTS FACE LETHAL CONSEQUENCES FOR THEIR REPORTING

Over the course of 2025, media NGOs have [reported](#) that at least 10 journalists have been killed in the Asia/ Pacific region. While the region's death toll pales in comparison to those killed during the ongoing genocide in Gaza or the appalling conflicts in Yemen and Ukraine, many of the killings have occurred in countries at times of nominal peace, where journalists have been murdered for their reporting on issues ranging from corruption to local politics, with those responsible all too often escaping legal consequences. In **Bangladesh**, a journalist was [brutally killed](#) by machete-wielding attackers in apparent retaliation for his investigative journalism. Meanwhile, in the **Philippines**, [three journalists](#) were shot dead in a series of seemingly unrelated targeted killings, with just one suspected assailant [arrested](#) at the time of writing.

GOOD NEWS

PEN International welcomed positive developments in the region, including the [acquittal](#) of writer and activist **Amanda Echanis** (see below) in December, over five years after she was detained on a spurious charge of 'illegal possession of firearms and explosives', which is frequently deployed against [journalists](#), [writers](#) and others in the **Philippines** who have been 'red-tagged', or accused of being communist sympathisers. In August, the long-running case against photojournalist, writer and activist **Shahidul Alam** (see below) was [dismissed](#) by the High Court of **Bangladesh**, over seven years after he was initially detained for allegedly violating a law that was repealed in 2018. Elsewhere, in **India**, academic and activist **Hany Babu** (see below) was [granted bail](#) by Bombay's High Court in December after having spent over five years in prison without trial. Babu joins a growing number of the 16 writers, poets and activists, referred to collectively as the BK 16, who have been released on bail but remained subject to restrictions on their movement and expression at the end of the year.

2026 CASE LIST ASIA/PACIFIC

EMBLEMATIC CASES



CHINA

Dong Yuyu

Writer and journalist imprisoned on espionage charges for his expression

Writer and journalist Dong Yuyu is serving a seven-year prison sentence for ‘espionage’ and has been denied regular family visits and meaningful access to legal counsel. Detained in February 2022 while meeting with a Japanese diplomat, Dong was subsequently held incommunicado for six months in conditions tantamount to enforced disappearance. His imprisonment is emblematic of the Chinese authorities’ use of national security charges to criminalise writing and journalistic work, and to silence independent expression.

Dong Yuyu. Photo Credit: Courtesy of family



INDIA

Rana Ayyub

Investigative journalist facing death threats for her reporting

Indian writer and journalist Rana Ayyub’s life and safety have been threatened in retaliation for her human rights reporting. In November 2025, after she publicly commented on the legacy of the 1984 anti-Sikh pogrom, Ayyub received a series of death threats targeting her and her father. Indian authorities have failed to bring those responsible to justice, reflecting the broader impunity surrounding threats against journalists in India that are used to silence critical reporting.

Rana Ayyub. Photo Credit: Mohit Varu

BANGLADESH

HARASSED

Nadira YEASMIN

A writer, academic, and women's rights activist, Nadira Yeasmin has been subjected to an escalating campaign of harassment in response to her peaceful advocacy for gender equality in Bangladesh. In May 2025, Yeasmin, who at the time was an assistant professor of Bangla at Narsingdi Government College, became the target of coordinated attacks by conservative religious groups after publicly [supporting](#) a [landmark report](#) by the Women's Affairs Reform Commission. The report proposed wide-ranging [reforms](#) to advance women's rights, including the repeal of laws that undermine freedom of expression, the enactment of new legislation to prevent sexual harassment, and reforms to ensure equal inheritance rights.

In response, Islamist groups, including Hefazat-e-Islam, accused Yeasmin of promoting views they claimed contradicted Islamic law. On 3 May 2025, Hefazat-e-Islam organised a [large rally](#) in Dhaka calling for the dissolution of the Commission. Shortly thereafter, Yeasmin [criticised](#) the rally on social media, prompting an intensified backlash.

On 25 May 2025, members of Hefazat-e-Islam issued a [48-hour ultimatum](#) demanding Yeasmin's dismissal from her teaching post. The following day, the Ministry of Education [transferred](#) her to Satkhira Government College—more than 250 kilometres from her previous post—and placed her on 'Officer on Special Duty' status, effectively suspending her from teaching and other academic duties. Yeasmin has also faced sustained [online harassment](#) and [threats](#) to her personal safety.

Despite widespread condemnation from academics, [student organisations](#), and women's rights groups, the interim government has failed to reinstate Yeasmin or publicly address the campaign against her, a clear demonstration of the shrinking space for women's freedom of expression in Bangladesh and the growing influence of reactionary pressure groups.

In addition to her academic work, Yeasmin is the founder of the women's rights organisation Nari Ongan and the editor of Hisya, the organisation's literary magazine. In that role, she published articles supporting gender equality in family and property law.

RELEASED

Shahidul ALAM

On 7 August 2025, the High Court of Bangladesh [dismissed](#) the case against photojournalist and social activist Shahidul Alam, who had been under investigation since 2018 on suspicion of 'giving false information', 'hurting the image of the nation', and 'causing deterioration of law and order' by 'making provocative comments' on his social media account, under Section 57 of Bangladesh's since-repealed Information and Communication Technology Act (ICT) 2006 (see Case Lists [2018-2025](#)). Earlier, on 4 November 2024, the High Court [stayed](#) the investigation into the case and lifted restrictions on his personal freedoms. The case has now been closed.

Alam was picked up by men in plain clothes on 5 August 2018, hours after giving an [interview](#) to *Al Jazeera* in which he described his experience documenting street protests over road safety. On 6 August, he was brought before a court in Dhaka, where he first learned of the accusations against him. Alam was granted bail in November 2018 after five rejected applications and more than 100 days in detention. In the years that followed, he repeatedly [challenged](#) the legality of the continued investigation.

On 8 October 2025, Alam was briefly [detained](#) by Israeli forces while aboard an aid flotilla headed for Gaza. He was [released](#) on 10 October and returned to Dhaka (see MENA regional overview).

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 in Dhaka, which has trained hundreds of photographers. His 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 contribution to Bangladeshi culture. In 2018, he received the [Lucie Award](#) and the Frontline Club's [Tribute Award](#), and was named among *TIME* magazine's [Persons of the Year](#). In 2020, the Committee to Protect Journalists awarded him its [International Press Freedom Award](#).

CHINA

IMPRISONED

Professor Rahile Dawut

Rahile Dawut, a renowned anthropologist and leading expert on Uyghur folklore, remained in incommunicado detention throughout 2025, reportedly serving a life sentence after she was convicted on charges of 'endangering state security'. In late 2017, Rahile Dawut disappeared shortly after making plans to travel from the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region to Beijing to attend an academic conference. She was subsequently held in secret by Chinese authorities, with no official confirmation of her detention for more than five years, despite international media attention and an advocacy campaign led by her daughter [calling for her release](#).

In September 2023, reports emerged indicating that Rahile Dawut had been [sentenced to life imprisonment](#) and that her appeal had been rejected by the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region High People's Court (see Case Lists [2018-2025](#)). Her family has not been informed of her place of detention or the conditions of her detention.

Born on 20 May 1966, Rahile Dawut is an associate professor at Xinjiang University and the founder of the university's research centre on minority folklore. She is recognised around the world for her groundbreaking contributions to the study and preservation of Uyghur cultural heritage. Her work includes the influential book *Uyghur Shrines (Uyghur Mazarliri)*, published in Uyghur in 2001, which catalogues sacred sites and religious practices across the region.

Rahile Dawut's scholarship was widely respected internationally and by the Chinese government. In 2016, just one year before her detention, she received a major research grant from the Chinese Ministry of Culture, reportedly the largest ever awarded to a [Uyghur research project](#). In recognition of her courage and contribution to cultural preservation, Rahile Dawut was awarded English PEN's [Writer of Courage Award](#) in 2023.

DONG Yuyu

A writer and journalist, Dong Yuyu remained in prison serving a seven-year sentence after he was convicted of 'espionage' in November 2024 (see Case Lists [2023/4-2025](#)). His appeal was [rejected](#) by the Beijing High Court on 13 November 2025. Afterwards, through his family, he [said](#), 'This case is not about justice. It is about silencing voices that speak freely, and it is about warning others not to engage with the outside world.'

Denied family visits and granted only limited access to legal counsel since his detention on 21 February 2022 at a hotel in Beijing while having lunch with a Japanese diplomat, who was also briefly [detained](#), Dong was held incommunicado for the first six months in 'residential surveillance at a designated location,' which UN human rights experts have [described](#) as 'tantamount to enforced disappearance'.

Dong Yuyu, born on 21 April 1962, is a writer and journalist. Prior to his arrest, he served as deputy head of the editorial department for *Guangming Daily*, a state-owned newspaper. In 1998, he co-edited [Political China: Facing an Era of Choices for a New System](#), which included essays by liberal scholars about judicial independence. Dong also wrote columns for *The New York Times* Chinese website between 2012 and 2014, including the widely circulated piece '[我要送儿子去美国读大学 \(I want to send my son to study in the United States\)](#)'. A 2017 book review he authored, '[从国家政治的角度看文革—读麦克法夸尔的《文化大革命的起源》 \(Viewing the Cultural Revolution from the Perspective of National Politics\)](#),'

led to him being labelled ‘anti-Socialist’.

Dong was a [Nieman Fellow](#) at Harvard University in 2006 and has been a visiting scholar at two Japanese universities. In 2025, he received the Committee to Protect Journalists’ [International Press Freedom Award](#) and the Press Freedom Centre’s [President’s Award](#).

Professor Ilham Tohti

A writer, academic and public intellectual, Ilham Tohti remained in prison serving a life sentence after being convicted on charges of ‘separatism’. He is believed to be [held](#) in Urumqi No.1 Prison in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. He was detained on [15 January 2014](#), when police raided his home in Beijing. Since his initial detention, he has been allowed only limited access to his [family](#) and [legal representatives](#). Despite an April 2014 UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention determination that his detention was [arbitrary](#), Ilham Tohti was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment following a two-day trial in September 2014 that failed to meet international fair trial standards. In 2024, PEN International [called for his release](#) during China’s Fourth Universal Periodic Review at the UN Human Rights Council (see Case Lists [2014-2025](#)).

Born on 25 October 1969, [Ilham Tohti](#) is an academic committed to promoting inter-ethnic dialogue and advocating for the rights of Uyghurs and other minority communities in China. An economics professor at Beijing’s Minzu University, he devoted much of his academic work to examining how state policies contributed to the systematic persecution of Uyghurs and other ethnic minority groups. His writings, some of which are collected in his book [We Uyghurs Have No Say](#), provide nuanced analysis of [relations](#) between ethnic groups in Xinjiang and the role that ethnic policy played in exacerbating the social and economic marginalisation of Uyghurs.

In 2006, Ilham Tohti founded *Uyghur Online*, a bilingual website intended to foster mutual understanding by reporting on human rights issues and advocating for fair treatment of China’s minority populations. Despite

repeated attempts by authorities to shut it down, the website became an important platform for inter-ethnic dialogue, particularly through its discussion forums. However, 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 pro-democracy activist with UK citizenship, Jimmy Lai has been held in prolonged solitary confinement since December 2020 for his journalism and peaceful activism (see Case Lists [2020-2025](#)).

After four earlier convictions, he was sentenced on [10 December 2022](#) to five years and nine months’ imprisonment for allegedly violating the terms of a commercial lease. On 18 December 2023, Lai was charged with two counts of ‘conspiracy to collude with foreign forces’ under Hong Kong’s National Security Law (NSL), and one count of ‘conspiracy to produce seditious publications’ under Hong Kong’s [colonial-era sedition law](#). Prosecutors [cited 161 editions](#) of *Apple Daily*, the newspaper Lai founded in 1995, as evidence of sedition. Lai pleaded not guilty to all charges. On 30 August 2024, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found his detention to be arbitrary and [called for his immediate release](#).

On [15 December 2025](#), Hong Kong’s High Court found Lai guilty on all three charges, a move [widely condemned](#) by international human rights and press freedom organisations. Now 78, Lai will likely spend the [remainder of his life in prison](#). PEN International has called for his immediate and unconditional release, warning that his prolonged solitary confinement and deteriorating health place him at serious risk.

Jimmy Lai, born on 8 December 1947, is a veteran advocate for human rights and freedom of expression. *Apple Daily* was once Hong Kong’s most influential pro-democracy newspaper before it was forced to close on [24 June 2021](#). Lai is also the author of more than 20 books. On 21 September 2024, Lai was named as the recipient of PEN Canada’s

[One Humanity Award](#) in recognition of his courage and commitment to free expression.

Update:

On 9 February 2026, Lai was [sentenced](#) to 20 years' imprisonment on national security charges. The penalty is the [harshest sentence](#) handed down in a national security case in Hong Kong.

Go Sherab Gyatso (known as Gosher)

A prominent Tibetan writer, educator and public intellectual, throughout 2025, Gosher continued to serve a [10-year prison sentence](#) reportedly imposed following a secret trial held in December 2021. According to the Chinese government, he was [detained](#) by state security services on 26 October 2020 in Chengdu, Sichuan province, on suspicion of 'inciting secession'. He was later transferred to the Tibet Autonomous Region, where he was formally charged on 3 February 2021 (see Case Lists [2021-2025](#)).

Serious concerns persist regarding Gosher's health and access to adequate medical care. At the time of his detention, he was reportedly [seeking medical treatment](#) for a chronic lung condition. In July 2024, PEN International raised Gosher's case and [called for his release](#) during the adoption of China's Universal Periodic Review at the UN Human Rights Council.

Born on 9 September 1976, Gosher is the author of more than [10 books](#), including [Wake Up](#) (2007), [General Knowledge & the Path](#) (2011) and [Insights of a Thinker](#) (2013). His writing focuses primarily on Tibetan Buddhism, language, and culture. An outspoken intellectual and advocate for Tibetan monastic education, Gosher has been repeatedly targeted by the authorities. This is the fourth time he has been imprisoned by Chinese authorities, having previously been detained in 1998, 2008, and [2011](#) for criticising 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 following his conviction on [national security charges](#) on 24 February 2020 (see Case Lists [2015-2025](#)). In August 2025, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention [concluded](#) that Gui's detention constitutes an 'arbitrary deprivation of liberty' and called on China to release him, provide compensation, and investigate the circumstances of his detention.

Gui is one of five Hong Kong booksellers who were forcibly disappeared in late 2015. He was [abducted from his vacation home](#) in Thailand by Chinese security services and was not seen in public for three months, until Chinese state media aired a [forced confession](#) in which Gui claimed to have voluntarily returned to China to turn himself in for a 2003 traffic offence. Briefly released under continued surveillance in late 2017, Gui was [detained](#) again by plain-clothes police officers on 20 January 2018 while travelling with two Swedish diplomats to Beijing for medical testing for a neurodegenerative disease. In July 2024, PEN International called for Gui Minhai's [release](#) during the adoption of China's Universal Periodic Review at the UN 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 on the private lives of China's political leadership, while Causeway Bay Books was a popular destination for readers seeking titles banned or otherwise unavailable in mainland China. A prolific author prior to his arrest, Gui wrote several poems during his initial detention, which were published in 2020 as a poetry collection titled [I Draw a Door on the Wall with My Finger](#) (2020). In 2019, he was awarded PEN Sweden's [Tucholsky Prize](#).

Yalqun Rozi

A Uyghur writer, journalist, editor, and literary critic, Yalqun Rozi continued to serve a 15-year prison sentence in Xinjiang, China at the end of 2025 following his [conviction](#) for ‘inciting subversion of state power’. PEN International believes that Yalqun Rozi has been targeted for his peaceful efforts to promote Uyghur language, culture, and education.

Yalqun Rozi was [detained without a warrant](#) at his home in Urumqi on 6 October 2016, reportedly after he and several colleagues from the state-run Xinjiang Education Press were [questioned](#) by authorities about Uyghur-language textbooks used in schools across the region. He had previously served as an [editor](#) in the publisher’s Uyghur Textbook Department, overseeing the preparation of literature textbooks and teaching materials approved by China’s Ministry of Education.

According to [UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention](#), following his detention, Yalqun Rozi was held incommunicado and subjected to repeated interrogations. He was formally arrested on 30 December 2016 and held in pre-trial detention for an additional two years. On 3 January 2018, a court in Urumqi convicted him of ‘inciting subversion of state power’ and sentenced him to 15 years in prison. In November 2025, PEN International [called for his release](#) as part of its Day of the Imprisoned Writer campaign.

Born in 1966 in Atush, Xinjiang, Yalqun Rozi graduated from Xinjiang University in 1987 and began his career as a journalist at Urumqi People’s Radio Broadcasting. He later worked for the Xinjiang Education Press, where he played a central role in developing Uyghur-language educational materials. Yalqun Rozi is the author of several Uyghur-language books, including *The Golden Temple in Taklimakan*, *Secret of Clay Castle*, and *Philosophy of Life*. Dozens of his commentaries and literary critiques addressing Uyghur literature, history, and society have been published in newspapers and magazines.

YANG Hengjun (legal name, Yang Jun)

A writer, scholar, and political commentator with Australian citizenship, at the end of the year Yang Hengjun continued to be held under a suspended death sentence with reprieve after he was convicted of espionage. Detained [since January 2019](#), Yang was initially held for six months at a secret location under ‘[residential surveillance at a designated location](#)’, a form of incommunicado detention during which he was [reportedly tortured](#). In August 2019, he was [formally arrested](#) on suspicion of espionage, though no evidence was disclosed to his family or Australian consular representatives. On 5 February 2024, reports emerged that Yang had been sentenced to death with reprieve, a penalty under Chinese law that may be commuted to life imprisonment after a two-year period of ‘good behaviour’ (see Case Lists [2019–2020 and 2022–2025](#)).

In a 10 January 2025 letter addressed to Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, Yang [expressed](#) deep appreciation for Albanese’s support during what he described as the ‘hardest and darkest chapter’ of his life. Yang’s health has [deteriorated](#) significantly in detention, and he urged the Australian government to secure his return so he can access medical care and reunite with his family.

During more than two years of pre-trial detention, Yang was denied family visits and granted only [limited access](#) to legal counsel and consular assistance. He was reportedly subjected to more than [300 interrogation sessions](#), and his request to [exclude testimony allegedly obtained under torture](#) was denied. On 27 May 2021, Yang’s [closed-door trial](#) reportedly lasted less than seven hours, with Australian consular representatives [barred from attending](#).

Yang Hengjun, born on 18 April 1965, is a novelist, scholar, and political commentator committed to advancing human rights and democratic values in China. He is the author of the *Fatal Weakness* spy trilogy, reportedly banned in China but widely circulated online. Prior to his arrest, he also had a significant following on Chinese social media, where his [blog posts](#) frequently highlighted democratic values.

ZHANG Guiqi (Pen name, Lu Yang)

A poet, teacher and member of the Independent Chinese PEN Centre (ICPC), Zhang Guiqi is serving a [six-year prison sentence](#) imposed on 26 July 2022 following a closed-door trial in which he was convicted of ‘inciting subversion of state power’. He was also sentenced to three years of deprivation of his political rights, including his rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Zhang was detained in May 2020, just hours after he posted a video on social media calling for President Xi Jinping to step down and for an end to the ‘CCP’s regime’. On 29 March 2023, he was transferred from Liaocheng Detention Centre to Shandong Provincial Prison to serve his sentence (see Case Lists [2020-2025](#)). Zhang remained imprisoned at the end of 2025 and is expected to be released in May 2026.

Born on 4 January 1971, Zhang Guiqi is a poet and former teacher from Shandong province in eastern China. He founded, edited, and published several online poetry platforms, including the Chinese Contemporary Poetry Platform, which was forced to [shut down in 2007](#) following a directive from Chinese government censors. In 2008, Zhang became a signatory to *Charter 08*, the landmark manifesto calling for political reform and greater protection of human rights in China.

Following the detention of writer, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, and former ICPC president Liu Xiaobo—one of *Charter 08*’s principal authors—Zhang joined the ICPC as a member. In the years that followed, he became an outspoken advocate for freedom of expression in China, supporting [writers and activists](#) persecuted for their peaceful expression.

INDIA

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. He was initially arrested under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) on [3 October 2023](#), after Delhi Police’s Special Cell conducted coordinated raids targeting journalists, writers, and contributors associated with *NewsClick*. During the raid on Purkayastha’s home, police seized his electronic devices without providing seizure memos and hash values—procedural safeguards intended to prevent [evidence tampering](#).

On 11 October 2023, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) conducted [further raids](#) on Purkayastha’s home and office as part of an investigation into whether *NewsClick* violated [foreign funding regulations](#) under the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) (see Case Lists [2023-2025](#)).

On [15 May 2024](#), Purkayastha was released on strict bail conditions hours after the Supreme Court ruled that his arrest under the UAPA was invalid and [ordered his release](#). In July 2025, the Delhi High Court granted him [anticipatory \(pre-arrest\) bail](#) in connection with the ongoing FCRA investigation, providing protection from arrest while proceedings continue. Justice Neena Bansal Krishna also granted him anticipatory bail in a related money laundering case brought by the Enforcement Directorate.

The actions against Purkayastha form part of a broader investigation into *NewsClick*, which, according to [media reports](#), relates to [alleged funding](#) from individuals purportedly connected to the Chinese Communist Party. *NewsClick* staff have consistently [rejected](#) these allegations.

Born in 1952, Prabir Purkayastha is a journalist, writer, and activist. He is the author of several books, including [Knowledge as Commons: Towards Inclusive Science and Technology](#) (2023), and co-author of [Enron Blowout](#):

Corporate Capitalism and Theft of the Global Commons (2002) and *Uncle Sam's Nuclear Cabin* (2007). He founded *NewsClick* in 2009 to platform independent journalism focused on progressive movements in India and internationally. In 2023, he published his memoir, *Keeping Up the Good Fight: From the Emergency to the Present*.

Varavara RAO

A writer, poet, and activist, Varavara Rao remained on trial at the end of the year while released on medical bail. He is one of 16 writers, scholars, and activists charged under India's counterterrorism law, the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). The charges against the group, commonly referred to as the **BK-16**, stem from their alleged involvement in 'inciting violence' at a public event held on 31 December 2017, organised to advocate for the rights of Dalits and other marginalised communities. Riots broke out the next day between Dalits and Hindu nationalists. Rao has categorically **denied all charges**, and the case is widely regarded as **politically motivated** and emblematic of a **broader crackdown on dissent** in India.

Rao was arrested on 28 August 2018 and spent more than two years detained in **abhorrent conditions**, contracting COVID-19 and suffering serious health complications. Despite repeated requests, he was denied adequate medical care until the Supreme Court granted him **medical bail** in August 2022. He remains subject to strict bail conditions, including a requirement that he reside in Mumbai, restrictions on his movement, and a prohibition on public commentary about his case (see Case Lists **2021-2025**).

In **September** and **October** 2025, the Supreme Court and a National Investigation Agency court respectively declined to modify Rao's bail conditions to allow him to relocate to Hyderabad for medical and dental treatment. These decisions have effectively confined the 85-year-old poet to Mumbai, where he has limited access to family support and financial resources.

Born on 3 November 1940, Varavara Rao is a major figure in Telugu literature and a

founding member of the Revolutionary Writers Association (Virasum). He is the author of 17 poetry collections and 19 works of prose in Telugu, and served as editor of the literary journal *Srujana*, which played a formative role in shaping modern Telugu literature.

Teesta SETALVAD

A writer and activist who has campaigned for the rights of women and **marginalised communities**, Teesta Setalvad remained on trial at the end of the year while subject to onerous bail conditions that curtailed her freedom of movement. She was detained on **25 June 2022** by Gujarat anti-terror police at her home in Mumbai. The detention was linked to allegations of 'criminal conspiracy' and 'forging evidence', related to her long-standing efforts to seek government accountability for the 2002 Gujarat Riots, during which hundreds of people were killed in inter-communal violence. Setalvad has **alleged that she was assaulted** by two officers when she requested to speak with her lawyer.

Her detention came one day after the Supreme Court **rejected a plea** submitted by Setalvad and co-petitioner Zakia Jafri seeking to reopen investigations into the possible involvement of local government officials in the Gujarat Riots. Setalvad was released on interim bail on 2 September 2022 and **formally charged** on 20 September 2022 under Sections 194, 218, and 468 of the Indian Penal Code for alleged 'fabrication of evidence'. On **19 July 2023**, the Supreme Court granted her bail.

In October 2023, Delhi Police's Special Cell searched Setalvad's home and seized her phone without a warrant. At the same time, **mass raids** were carried out against journalists and contributors associated with the independent news outlet *NewsClick* (see Prabir Purkayastha above and Case Lists **2022-2025**). Setalvad has continued her activism despite her persecution. Most recently, in December 2025, she **led protests** in Mumbai against the persecution of India's Christian community.

Born on 9 February 1962, Teesta Setalvad is one of India's most high-profile human

rights defenders. She began her career in journalism in the early 1980s, writing for *The Daily*, *The Indian Express*, and *Business India*. Following the 1992 demolition of the Babri Masjid, she left mainstream journalism to found [Communalism Combat](#), a monthly magazine that examined religious intolerance and the role of political actors in fomenting inter-religious conflict. In 2017, Setalvad published her memoir, [Foot Soldier of the Constitution](#).

HARASSED

Rana AYYUB

A writer and investigative journalist, Rana Ayyub has faced escalating threats to her life and safety, underscoring the severe risks confronting independent journalists in India. On [2 November 2025](#), she received a series of death threats via phone calls, messages, voice notes, and video calls from a Canadian phone number. The unidentified caller revealed knowledge of Ayyub's home address and her father's whereabouts, threatening to kill them both if she did not publish an article glorifying the 41st anniversary of the assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

The threats began shortly after Ayyub shared an Instagram post reflecting on the legacy of the 1984 anti-Sikh pogrom and its links to later communal violence. After blocking the number, Ayyub received security alerts suggesting attempts to access her phone and personal accounts.

On 19 November 2025, PEN International, together with other international and Indian civil society organisations, [wrote](#) to the Navi Mumbai Police Commissioner calling for a formal investigation into the threats and for immediate protection for Ayyub and her family. While police registered her complaint and provided limited protection, [concerns remain](#) about the adequacy, transparency, and effectiveness of the investigation.

These threats form part of a [long-standing pattern of harassment](#) of Ayyub as PEN International documented in a [2018 report](#)

on freedom of expression in India. She has been subjected to coordinated online abuse; doxxing; and rape and death threats linked to her reporting on sectarian violence and human rights abuses (see [Case List 2018](#)). In 2018, UN human rights experts [called](#) for her protection.

Born on 1 May 1984, Rana Ayyub is a [contributing opinion writer for the Washington Post](#) and the author of [Gujarat Files: Anatomy of a Cover Up](#) (2016). In 2024, she received the [International Press Freedom Award](#) from Canadian Journalists for Free Expression. She was also a 2022 [John Aubuchon Award Honouree](#) and received the 2022 [Overseas Press Club Award](#). Despite sustained intimidation, she continues to report on issues of public interest.

Aakar PATEL

A writer, journalist, and political activist, Aakar Patel remains subject to bail conditions that restrict his freedom of movement. At the end of the year, Patel's passport reportedly remained confiscated, with all travel abroad requiring court approval.

Immigration authorities prevented Patel from travelling from India to the United States on [6 April 2022](#) to speak at academic conferences on civil society and the potential of social media for social and political change. Two days later, a judge ordered that Patel could not leave the country without prior permission.

Patel was later [informed](#) that the restrictions stem from ongoing litigation related to his former role as head and Chair of the Board of Amnesty International India. The organisation was [forced to cease operations](#) in September 2020 following sustained intimidation by the Indian authorities, including [raids, a smear campaign](#), and the freezing of its assets after [alleged violations](#) of the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA). In December 2023, the CBI named Patel in a [supplementary chargesheet](#) connected to its ongoing investigation into Amnesty International India (see Case Lists [2022-2025](#)).

Born on 15 December 1969, Aakar Patel is a human rights activist, [journalist](#), and writer.

He published his first novel, *After Messiah*, in September 2023, and has authored four non-fiction works, including *Price of the Modi Years* (2021), a critical assessment of the Indian government's performance since Narendra Modi's election, and *Our Hindu Rashtra* (2020), which charts the rise of Hindu majoritarian nationalism. He also authored *The Anarchist Cookbook* (2014), a guide to democratic campaigning, and edited and translated *Why I Write: Essays by Saadat Hasan Manto* into English.

CONDITIONAL RELEASE

Professor Hany BABU

On 5 December 2025, after spending more than five years in detention due to accusations of links to the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist) and of 'inciting violence', scholar and anti-caste activist Hany Babu was [released](#) on bail by the Bombay High Court, which cited his prolonged detention without trial (see Case Lists [2021-2025](#)). However, Babu remains subject to stringent bail conditions, including restrictions on his movement that prevent him from visiting his elderly mother.

Babu, [detained](#) on 28 July 2020, is one of the BK-16—writers, scholars and activists, including poet **Varavara Rao** (see above), who have been targeted under India's Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). Babu's family [issued an appeal](#) asserting his innocence.

Babu joins a growing number of BK-16 activists now released on bail. [None of the BK-16](#) has been brought to trial amid concerns that some evidence may have been [tampered with or planted](#), leaving them unable to establish their innocence.

He was held in grossly inadequate conditions in the notorious Taloja Central Jail. In May 2021, he was [repeatedly denied medical treatment](#) for a severe eye infection, which eventually required [hospitalisation](#). On 15 December 2022, he underwent surgery at his own expense following a loss of vision. In June 2024, PEN International raised concerns about

his detention conditions in a [submission](#) to the UN Human Rights Committee, the body 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 a leading advocate for anti-caste justice and the [protection of marginalised languages](#). He has used his [writing](#) to highlight [human rights and linguistic plurality](#).

MALAYSIA

JUDICIAL HARASSMENT

Murray HUNTER

An Australian writer, journalist, and academic, Murray Hunter faced an ongoing campaign of transnational legal harassment in 2025, with parallel civil and criminal defamation proceedings in Malaysia and Thailand. These SLAPPs stem from his critical reporting on matters of public interest.

In April 2024, Hunter self-published a series of articles on his Substack criticising the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) for reportedly blocking websites deemed critical of the government. He also documented the presence of MCMC officials during police raids of private homes.

On 29 September 2025, Hunter was [detained](#) by Thai police at Suvarnabhumi Airport in Bangkok while preparing to board a flight. He was [released](#) on bail the next day, though his passport was confiscated, preventing him from leaving Thailand. On 17 November 2025, a Thai court [indicted](#) Hunter on four counts of criminal defamation under [Section 328](#) of the Thai Criminal Code, following a complaint filed by the MCMC. Each count carried a potential sentence of up to two years' imprisonment and a fine.

The criminal proceedings in Thailand, where Hunter lives, followed a civil defamation case brought against him in Malaysia by the MCMC

in [April 2024](#). Hunter has [stated](#) that he was never served with court documents and was unaware of the proceedings until after the 15 October 2024 judgment had been [issued](#).

On 17 January 2026, Hunter and the MCMC reached a [settlement agreement](#), and the charges against him have been dropped. While this outcome is welcome, the proceedings remain a troubling example of a transnational SLAPP, involving the use of criminal defamation laws and cross-border legal mechanisms to intimidate and silence a writer for his work.

Murray Hunter is an independent Australian journalist and writer whose analysis of governance and politics in Malaysia has been widely published, including in [Free Malaysia Today](#) and the [Malay Mail](#). He is also the author of several books on Malaysia's history, economy, and political development.

MYANMAR

IMPRISONED

Wai Moe Naing

A writer, pro-democracy activist, and member of PEN Myanmar, Wai Moe Naing continued to serve a combined sentence of 74 years in prison at the end of the year following multiple convictions, including rioting, robbery, incitement, and murder. PEN International believes he is being targeted for his leadership in the anti-coup movement.

Wai Moe Naing was arrested [on 15 April 2021](#) during a protest in the Monywa region. According to reports, junta forces rammed him with a vehicle. When he fled, armed men assaulted him and a female protester.

Since his arrest, Wai Moe Naing has faced serious fair trial violations, including military court hearings held behind closed doors and the effective denial of legal representation after his [lawyers were arrested](#). Between August 2022 and May 2024, he was sentenced in a series of closed-door military court proceedings

(see Case Lists [2021-2025](#)). Following his transfer from Monywa Prison to Obo Prison in Mandalay on 12 June 2025, he was reportedly [beaten](#) by prison staff, sustaining a fractured wrist and head injuries requiring stitches, but was denied adequate medical care.

He is currently held in solitary confinement. His family reports that prolonged isolation, lack of movement, and poor ventilation have contributed to serious health problems, including gout and chronic skin conditions. Family visits were denied for months following his transfer and remain infrequent.

Born on 26 September 1995, Wai Moe Naing is a youth activist, writer, and member of PEN Myanmar. He began writing at age 13, publishing in *Teen Magazine*, *Khit Yanantthit Magazine*, and *Pae Tin Tharn Journal*. Following the February 2021 military coup, he emerged as a [leader of the protest movement](#) and helped popularise the practice of banging pots and pans as a form of resistance.

PHILIPPINES

JUDICIAL HARASSMENT

Maria RESSA

A journalist, writer and Nobel Peace Laureate, Maria Ressa has been the target of judicial harassment and intimidation since her initial arrest on 13 February 2019. At the end of 2025, she remained free on post-conviction bail, with one active case pending: an ongoing appeal by Ressa and a colleague against their 2020 cyber libel conviction. The conviction, upheld on appeal in [July 2022](#), carries a potential sentence of up to six years' imprisonment. In June 2025, Ressa was [acquitted](#) of a second charge under the Philippines' [Anti-Dummy Law](#), which restricts foreign ownership or control of certain enterprises.

Five counts of tax evasion filed in 2018 against Ressa and the online media outlet Rappler were dismissed in 2023, with Rappler's shutdown order overturned in 2024, both events significant

victories for press freedom in the Philippines (see Case Lists [2019-2025](#) for further details).

Maria Ressa, born on 2 October 1963, was awarded the [Nobel Peace Prize](#) in 2021 for her efforts to ‘safeguard freedom of expression, which is a precondition for democracy and lasting peace’. Since 2018, she has faced numerous spurious charges linked to her reporting, including investigations exposing government corruption and the human cost of former president Rodrigo Duterte’s ‘war on drugs’, which resulted in thousands of extrajudicial killings.

Ressa 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 also the founder and CEO of [Rappler](#), an independent online news platform.

Update:

On 9 March 2026, the Philippines’ Office of the Solicitor General filed a motion with the Supreme Court [recommending the acquittal](#) of Maria Ressa. As such, it appears likely that the long campaign of judicial harassment she has endured will finally come to an end.

RELEASED

Amanda ECHANIS

A poet, writer and activist, Amanda Echanis was [acquitted](#), on 27 December 2025, by a court in Tuguegarao City of a charge of illegal possession of firearms, ammunition and explosives and released after over five years of [pre-trial detention](#). The court found that the prosecution had failed to establish the essential elements of the offence. She had been arrested at her home on 2 December 2020 while caring for her then one-month-old child. The charge is [routinely](#) used against those who have been [‘red-tagged’](#), or publicly accused by government authorities or their proxies of links to communist insurgency groups. Echanis [rejected](#) the allegations and accused Philippine authorities of planting

evidence. Her detention was marked by repeated postponements of court hearings, resulting in years of unjustified pre-trial imprisonment (see Case List [2025](#)).

Echanis’ case reflects a deeply personal history of injustice. In 1990, when she was less than [two years old](#), she was held with her parents in custodial detention after her father, also an activist for rural workers’ rights, was arrested on the same charge later brought against her. That case was dismissed in 1992. In [August 2020](#), just months before her arrest, her father was [brutally murdered](#) in a case that remains unsolved.

Amanda Echanis continued to write from behind bars. In 2023, she published a collection of poetry and essays written in detention, *Binhi ng Paglaya* (Seeds of Liberation). She was also awarded the [2023 Southeast Asian Translation Mentorship](#), established by [The Seams](#) in conjunction with [Ethos Books](#), which is supporting Echanis’ translation of Filipino poetry. In June 2024, she participated in the *Palihang Rogelio Sicat* creative writing workshop. In 2025, she became the [first political prisoner elected](#) to the University of the Philippines Diliman Student Council.

THAILAND

IMPRISONED

Arnon NAMPHA

A poet and human rights lawyer, Arnon Nampha continued to serve a cumulative sentence of 29 years and one month in prison at the end of 2025 following 10 convictions under Article 112 (*lèse-majesté*) of the Thai Criminal Code. The convictions arose out of his [peaceful expression and participation in demonstrations](#) throughout 2020 and 2021. Nampha faces four additional *lèse-majesté* charges, each of which carries a potential sentence of up to 15 years’ imprisonment, and remains at risk of disbarment (see Case Lists [2020-2025](#)). On 25 December 2025, Thailand’s Supreme Court upheld an order [denying him bail](#) while he appeals six of his convictions.

As an activist lawyer, Nampha is known for representing clients in politically sensitive cases involving human rights violations by Thai authorities. He was first arrested on [7 August 2020](#) for calling for monarchy reform and an end to *lèse-majesté* laws. He continued to attend public rallies and was repeatedly detained, spending a total of 337 days in prison.

Thai authorities have also pursued disbarment proceedings against him. For instance, the Bangkok Criminal Court [alleged](#) that his continued representation of clients while wearing a prison uniform violated court dress codes.

Born on 18 August 1984, Arnon Nampha emerged as a leading figure in Thailand's [protest movement](#). He uses his poetry to shine a light on the struggles of marginalised communities across the country. A translated collection of his poetry, *People are Blind and Mute No Longer*, was released to coincide with the fifth anniversary of the 2006 military coup. In 2021, PEN International published [English translations](#) of two booklets containing speeches delivered by Nampha during the 2020 protests. In 2025, he received the Front Line Defenders [Award for Human Rights Defenders at Risk](#).

Update:

On 20 February 2026, Arnon Nampha was [convicted](#) on another charge of *lèse-majesté*, bringing his total number of convictions to 11. He was sentenced to an additional two years and eight months in prison, bringing his total prison sentence to more than 30 years.

VIETNAM

DEATH IN CUSTODY

Humkar Dorje Rinpoche

Tibetan writer, educator, and religious leader Humkar Dorje Rinpoche [died](#) in suspicious circumstances while in custody in Vietnam in March 2025, raising serious concerns about transnational cooperation in repression between Vietnamese and Chinese authorities.

According to [UN experts](#), Humkar Dorje Rinpoche had left the Lung Ngon Monastery in the Golok Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of Qinghai province in September 2024 after he was interrogated for failing to show sufficient deference during a visit by the CCP-appointed Panchen Lama, Gyaltzen Norbu. He reportedly travelled to Vietnam, where he was reportedly arrested on 25 March 2025 in Ho Chi Minh City by Vietnamese authorities in the presence of Chinese government agents and subjected to enforced disappearance.

Four days later, at the age of 56, he died in custody. Vietnamese officials reportedly informed Rinpoche's institute on 29 March 2025 that he had died of a heart attack. According to sources, on 1 April 2025, monks at his monastery were shown a certificate confirming his death but were given no details about the circumstances surrounding it. On 3 April 2025, the monastery issued a [statement](#), which was widely condemned as coerced, claiming he had travelled to Vietnam on a religious retreat and died of illness. He was cremated without his family's consent on 18 April 2025.

His death has drawn comparisons to previous cases involving Tibetans who died shortly after detention, including language rights activist [Gonpo Namgyal](#). In addition, Vietnamese authorities have collaborated with Chinese authorities in the forced return of at least two political dissidents from Vietnam in recent decades, including [Wang Bingzhang](#) in 2002 and [Dong Guangping](#) in 2022.

Born in 1969, Humkar Dorje Rinpoche was a prominent spiritual leader, writer, and advocate for Tibetan language and culture. He authored more than 20 works and was widely respected for his calligraphy. He believed that education was a means of cultural preservation, and oversaw the establishment of schools and a vocational centre that provided free education to Tibetan children.

IMPRISONED

Pham Doan TRANG

An author, journalist, and pro-democracy activist, Pham Doan Trang remained in prison at the end of 2025, continuing to serve a [nine-year sentence](#) for 'spreading propaganda against the State of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam' (see Case Lists [2020-2025](#)).

Trang was detained on 6 October 2020 during a raid on her Ho Chi Minh City apartment, carried out by police in coordination with the Ministry of Public Security. During her detention, she was denied access to legal counsel and adequate medical care for over a year and was only granted permission to meet with her lawyer on 19 October 2021.

Trang's ill-treatment is particularly concerning given her pre-existing health conditions, including low blood pressure and chronic pain from severe leg injuries sustained during a 2015 police assault.

On 25 October 2021, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found Trang's detention to be [arbitrary](#) and called for her immediate release. Despite this, Vietnamese authorities sentenced her on [14 December 2021](#) to nine years' imprisonment under Article 88 of the 1999 Penal Code. Her appeal was [rejected](#) by the Hanoi People's High Court on 25 August 2022. [In October 2022](#), Trang was transferred to a prison approximately 100 km north of Ho Chi Minh City, further limiting family visits and access to legal support.

Born on 27 May 1978, Pham Doan Trang has published numerous works, including *Chính trị bình dân* (Popular Politics, 2018),

Cẩm nang nuôi tù (Handbook on Supporting Prisoners, 2019), and *Phản kháng phi bạo lực* (Non-Violent Opposition, 2019). She has also written extensively online through her [blog](#) and on [social media](#) to circumvent state censorship of traditional media and raise awareness of human rights issues in Vietnam.

Trang's work has been widely recognised internationally. She is the recipient of the Reporters Without Borders 2019 [Press Freedom Prize for Impact](#), PEN America's 2024 [PEN/Barbey Freedom to Write Award](#), and PEN Sweden's 2025 [Tucholsky Prize](#).

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, including through emergency humanitarian support to 24 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.

In particular, the ongoing crises in Afghanistan and Myanmar have required urgent support for writers, poets, journalists, and scholars facing persecution. Working closely with PEN Centres, the PEN Emergency Fund, and partner NGOs, PEN International has provided lifesaving assistance, including emergency relocation, long-term resettlement, and financial aid.

Afghanistan

September 2025: Statement [Taliban imposes nationwide communications blackout, cutting off millions from the outside world](#)

Bangladesh

February 2025: Joint Statement [Joint Statement on Emerging Digital Laws in Bangladesh](#)

China

April 2025: Joint Statement [Over 40 Global Organisations Stand with Badiucao Against Legal Harassment](#)

May 2025: Joint Statement [Joint Statement from Civil Society Groups on the Chinese Government's Arbitrary Detention of Journalist Zhang Zhan](#)

September 2025: Joint Statement [PEN International joins urgent UN letter from 52 Rights Groups on systemic abuses in Hong Kong's Prisons](#)

Myanmar

February 2025: Statement [Four years on from military coup, brutal crackdown by increasingly isolated junta continues](#)

Pakistan

May 2025: Joint Statement [Mass expulsion of at-risk Afghans imperils lives of writers, journalists, human rights defenders and others persecuted by the Taliban](#)

July 2025: Statement [Mahrang Baloch's arbitrary detention highlights ongoing campaign to silence Baloch community](#)

Sri Lanka

January 2025: Joint Statement [PEN International joins 24 civil society organisations in urging new president to uphold freedom of expression](#)

Vietnam

May 2025: Joint Statement [PEN International joins letter to US Secretary of State urging support for persecuted writers and journalists](#)

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA REGIONAL OVERVIEW

AURÉLIA DONDO

Head of Europe and Central Asia Region

PEN International continued to urge the Russian Federation to end its war of aggression against Ukraine. The Belarusian authorities unleashed a new wave of repression by releasing scores of writers into exile. The right to peaceful protest remained widely restricted, while the defence of artistic freedom gained momentum amid sustained pressure across the region.

PEN International celebrated improvements for several persecuted writers.

UNWAVERING UKRAINIAN RESOLVE

The **Russian Federation's** full-scale invasion of **Ukraine** continued to bring suffering to millions of people, with Russian forces committing war crimes and other violations of international humanitarian law. 2025 was the [deadliest year](#) for civilians since the 2022 full-scale invasion. According to PEN Ukraine and partners, at least 255 cultural figures have been [killed](#) by Russian forces as of December 2025, including writers, translators, artists, musicians, photographers, and historians who played a key role in enriching Ukraine's culture and identity. PEN Ukraine member **Victoria Amelina's** *War and Justice Diary: Looking at Women Looking at War* was published posthumously in February 2025 to critical acclaim (see **Ukraine** section below).

Since 24 February 2022, at least 20 journalists and media workers have been [killed](#) by Russian forces in Ukraine while carrying out their professional duties. Ukrainian journalists **Olena Hramova**, **Yevhen Karmazin**, **Tetyana Kulyk**, and French photojournalist **Antoni Lallican** were killed in Russian drone strikes in 2025. PEN International [urged](#) the Russian authorities to investigate cases of torture and deaths in custody of all Ukrainians, including journalist **Viktoria Roshchyna**, who reportedly died in Russian custody on 19 September 2024. In April 2025, the [Viktoriia Project](#) revealed that Roshchyna had been repeatedly subjected to torture. A war crimes investigation was ongoing at the end of the year.

At least 26 Ukrainian journalists remained in Russian captivity at the end of the year, including **Iryna Danylovyh** and **Server Mustafayev**, highlighted in PEN International's [2022](#) and [2023](#) Day of the Imprisoned Writer campaigns. On 9 July 2025, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) [held](#) the Russian Federation responsible for widespread and flagrant violations of human rights in Ukraine.

A NEW TOOL OF REPRESSION: FORCED EXILE

The Belarusian authorities released scores of writers and cultural figures into exile, mirroring repressive techniques used in previous years by [other repressive governments](#). On 13 December 2025, 123 individuals were [released](#) from prison in **Belarus** following negotiations with the United States aimed at lifting economic sanctions, with 114 originally taken to Ukraine and nine to Lithuania. Among those released were writers **Ales Bialiatski**, **Aliaksandr Fiaduta** and **Maksim Znak**. Fifty-two other prisoners – including philosopher **Uladzimir Mackievič** – had been similarly [released](#) on 11 September 2025 and sent into exile in Lithuania (see **Belarus** section below). Many had their passports confiscated.

PEN International and PEN Belarus [welcomed](#) the writers' long-awaited release yet expressed deep concern at the fact that they were forced into exile, with several expressing their wish to remain in Belarus. The organisations called on the relevant governments to ensure that these individuals have the possibility to travel to the country of their choice and are provided with clear and accessible information as well as comprehensive assistance – including access to documentation, support with legalisation processes, physical and psychological health care, and effective mechanisms to protect them from further persecution.

MOUNTING ACTS OF TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION

On 13 November 2025, the European Parliament [adopted](#) its first resolution on the transnational repression of human rights defenders. The resolution was based on a June 2025 [report](#) that held ten countries around the world – including the **Russian Federation**, **Belarus** and **Türkiye** – responsible for 80% of documented cases.

In absentia proceedings against exiled writers and journalists, often coupled with extradition threats including abuse of the Interpol ‘red notice’ system and harassment of family members, are part of a growing arsenal in the **Russian Federation’s** transnational repression. In April 2025, a [new law](#) expanded the scope of trials *in absentia* to a variety of charges, including extremism, fake news and ‘foreign agent’ laws. On 14 July 2025, a military court in Moscow convicted Russian-Georgian writer **Boris Akunin** (real name Grigory Chkhartishvili) of ‘aiding and justifying terrorism’ and violating ‘foreign agents’ laws and [sentenced](#) him to 14 years in prison. United Kingdom resident Akunin has been a vocal opponent of the Russian Federation’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. In October 2025, the Russian authorities opened an investigation against Georgia-based **Larisa Tuptsokova** – an award-winning writer from the Republic of Adygea in the Russian Federation – on bogus ‘extremism’ grounds, on account of her activities in support of Circassian language and culture (see **Russian Federation** section below).

The authorities of **Türkiye** continued to target independent writers and journalists at home and abroad. PEN Sweden member **Joakim Medin** was detained on 27 March 2025 at Istanbul airport after travelling to cover nationwide protests. He received a suspended prison sentence for ‘insulting’ President Erdoğan on 30 April 2025, but remained in pre-trial detention on separate terrorism grounds, before being released and deported to **Sweden** on 16 May 2025. He was banned

from returning to the country for five years. His trial in the ‘terror’ case began *in absentia* on 25 September 2025 in Istanbul. If convicted, Medin would face years in prison and could be subject to an international arrest warrant.

AN ARSENAL OF REPRESSIVE LAWS

At the end of 2025, 148 journalists were [recorded](#) in detention, held on spurious grounds: **Russian Federation** (58, including journalists detained by the Russian authorities in the occupied territories of Ukraine), **Azerbaijan** (36), **Belarus** (27), **Türkiye** (24), **Armenia** (2) and **Georgia** (1).

In **Georgia**, the authorities adopted an [array of repressive laws](#) that crushed fundamental freedoms at an alarming speed. The May 2025 Foreign Agents Registration Act introduced criminal penalties for individuals or entities that refuse to register as ‘foreign agents’, with fines of up to 10,000 GEL (approximately 3,100 EUR) and/or to a maximum five-year prison sentence. Hastily introduced amendments to the Organic Law on Common Courts came into force on 30 June 2025, prohibiting photo, video, and audio recording or broadcasting in courthouses, courtrooms, and surrounding areas – except when authorised and conducted by the court. National organisations warned that the amendments would severely restrict media work and effectively eliminate public oversight of the judiciary.

Amid growing hostility to LGBTQ+ people, in October 2025 in **Türkiye**, a [draft law](#) that would pave the way to bring criminal charges against LGBTQ+ people was leaked to the media. If enacted, the regulation would restrict LGBTQ+ people of their right to access and share information while journalists reporting on LGBTQ+ issues would face criminal prosecution on the grounds of ‘promotion’. Earlier, journalists covering the [LGBTQ+ Pride March](#) in June 2025 in Istanbul were detained and prosecuted.

While no law had been officially proposed by the end of the year, concerns that the government would do so remained.

On 11 February 2025, in *Novaya Gazeta and Others v. Russia*, the ECtHR [found](#) that the Russian authorities' prosecution and shutdown of media for 'discrediting' the Russian military or spreading 'fake news', combined with retrospective application of the law and severe sanctions, violated Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights and formed part of a broader campaign to suppress dissent concerning military action in **Ukraine**.

ONSLAUGHT AGAINST PROTESTS

Authorities across the region cracked down on the right to peaceful protests. In **Türkiye**, [massive protests](#) erupted across the country following the arrest on 19 March 2025 of over 100 people, mostly from the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), including Istanbul's mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu, alleged 'corruption' and 'terrorism' grounds – a move widely seen as politically motivated. The authorities banned demonstrations, temporarily restricted access to social media and messaging platforms, and urged X to block access to hundreds of accounts. Journalists who covered the protests were subjected to police violence and detention. Hundreds of people [detained](#) for exercising their right to protest faced trial on charges including attending unauthorised demonstrations and failure to disperse.

In **Serbia**, rocked by student-led protests since November 2024 (part of the global trend of Gen Z protests also seen in **Bulgaria** and **France**), the authorities [targeted](#) the education system, expanding the use of politically motivated arrests and prosecutions to intimidate and silence critics. State and non-state actors stood accused of escalating violence during the protests, leading to further violations of rights. Independent journalists faced attacks, verbal threats and intimidation

by public officials, law enforcement officials and individuals. In an open letter published on 12 September 2025, PEN International [urged](#) immediate and robust EU action.

In the **United Kingdom**, PEN International joined the UK PEN Centres in [expressing deep concern](#) over the proscription of the protest group Palestine Action under terrorism legislation. The organisations warned that writers, artists, academics and others speaking out on matters of public concern would find themselves at risk of arrest or prosecution – not for acts of violence or incitement, but for association with ideas or causes deemed controversial – a serious threat to the space for open debate and civil dissent. [Court proceedings](#) against a legal challenge to the proscription were ongoing in March 2026.

In **Georgia**, veteran journalist **Mzia Amaglobeli** and renowned poet and translator **Zviad Ratiani** were sentenced to two years in prison on politically motivated grounds on 6 August 2025 and 9 October 2025, respectively (see **Georgia** section below). Amaglobeli testified about the abuse she suffered by police, with impunity. Her case highlights [broader concerns](#) of gender-based violence and reprisals against women protesters in Georgia. On 16 October 2025, the authorities [introduced](#) harsher penalties for taking part in protests, including administrative detention and one-year prison terms. On 5 November 2025, acclaimed poet and former President of PEN Georgia, **Paata Shamugia**, was [sentenced](#) to five days of administrative detention for 'blocking the roadway' in Tbilisi after protesting. Shamugia previously [wrote](#) about the critical role of writers in upholding fundamental rights.

DEFENDING ARTISTIC FREEDOM

PEN International urged authorities across the region to uphold the freedom to create. In **Türkiye**, an investigation was launched against Kurdish PEN member **Mehmet Dicle** and ZİZ Publishing House on ‘terror propaganda’ grounds in relation to Dicle’s book *Berfa Sor*. The investigation, which was closed following [PEN’s campaign](#), came amidst a growing crackdown on reading materials and the publishing landscape in the country (see **Türkiye** section below).

In **Belarus**, prison authorities systematically [confiscated and destroyed](#) the literary manuscripts and letters of those imprisoned on politically-motivated grounds, affecting writers, literary figures, and activists alike. In a briefing published in December 2025, PEN Belarus [unveiled](#) the scale of the repression unleashed by the authorities, with scores of cultural figures facing criminal or administrative charges for their creative outputs.

In the **Russian Federation**, a [new law](#) that came into effect on 1 September 2025 barred individuals labelled as ‘foreign agents’ – including writers and journalists – from engaging in any educational, pedagogical, or awareness-raising activities in state or municipal educational institutions.

In October 2025 PEN International published, *Critical Junctures: Safeguarding the Freedom to Create in Poland*, a [report](#) documenting the challenges to freedom of expression and cultural rights in **Poland** between 2015 and 2025. PEN International and Polish PEN urged the authorities to ensure that the protection of artistic freedom is accompanied not only by legal reform but by a cultural transformation that fosters inclusivity, equity, and pluralism.

PEN International welcomed the **Council of Europe’s** *CreateToBeFree* initiative – a new [discursive platform](#) inaugurated in April 2025 that aims to connect key stakeholders,

including cultural organisations, policymakers, and researchers, to facilitate exchanges on freedom of artistic expression and its role in strengthening democratic resilience. PEN International sits on the advisory board.

GOOD NEWS

PEN International joined PEN Ukraine in [welcoming](#) the release of **Vladyslav Yesypenko** (June 2025), **Dmytro Khyliuk** and **Mark Kaliush** (August 2025), three journalists from **Ukraine** who had been unlawfully detained and imprisoned in the **Russian Federation**.

On 19 June 2025, the government of **Montenegro** withdrew a de facto block on student enrolment at the Faculty of Montenegrin Language and Literature following PEN’s [campaign](#) to uphold academic freedom.

On 10 November 2025, a court in Istanbul dismissed the case against writer **Yavuz Ekinci** as the statute of limitations had expired. Ekinci faced years in prison on ‘terror propaganda’ grounds in **Türkiye** for his book, *Rüyası Bölünenler* (*Dream Divided*). PEN International – which had actively campaigned for Ekinci for years – [welcomed](#) the verdict and urged the authorities to lift their ban on *Dream Divided* (see **Türkiye** section below).

PEN International [welcomed](#) the ECtHR’s [judgment](#) in the case of *Tsaava and Others v. Georgia* handed down on 11 December 2025. The judgment reaffirmed the existence of a positive obligation on Contracting States to have effective systems for protecting journalists covering protests and set an important precedent regarding the dispersal of demonstrations using rubber bullets (‘kinetic impact projectiles’). PEN Georgia, PEN International and English PEN had [filed](#) a third-party intervention before the Court in February 2025.

2026 CASE LIST EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

EMBLEMATIC CASES



BELARUS

Ales BIALIATSKI

Writer released into exile

Writer and Nobel Peace Prize winner Ales Bialiatski was freed from his arbitrary 10-year prison sentence in Belarus on 13 December 2025 and forced into exile in Norway, via Lithuania, following negotiations between Belarus and the USA over lifting economic sanctions. His case is emblematic of the relentless crackdown on independent voices in Belarus since the fraudulent presidential election of August 2020.

Ales Bialiatski. Photo Credit: Michał Józefaciuk/WikkiCommons



RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Larisa TUPTSOKOVA

Exiled Circassian writer targeted in act of transnational repression

Larisa Tuptsokova – an award-winning writer from the Republic of Adygea in the Russian Federation, now based in Georgia – risked a six-year prison term in the Russian Federation on ‘extremism’ grounds. PEN International believes she was targeted for her activities and publications in support of Circassian language and culture. *In absentia* proceedings, with their risk of extradition, against exiled writers and journalists are part of a growing arsenal in the Russian Federation’s transnational repression.

Larisa Tuptsokova.

Photo Credit: Courtesy of Larisa Tuptsokova

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 ‘organisation of or participation in 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; however on 13 July 2022, a court in Homel [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](#) (also [imprisoned](#) on spurious grounds), 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](#).

Update: Kaciaryna Andrejeva was released from prison in Belarus on 19 March 2026 and [forced into exile](#) following ongoing negotiations between Belarus and the USA aimed at lifting economic sanctions.

Vacław AREŠKA

Editor, political scientist, and trade union activist Vacław Areška was serving an eight-year prison sentence in a medium-security penal colony in Ivacevičy, southwestern Belarus at the end of the year. He was [reportedly](#) denied appropriate medical care for his deteriorating eyesight.

Editor of the Belarusian Radio and Electronic Industry Workers’ Union (REP)’s bulletin, Vacław Areška was arrested on 19 April 2022 alongside several independent trade union leaders, as the Belarusian authorities intensified their [crackdown](#) on civil society. On 11 April 2022, REP had been declared ‘extremist’ by the authorities and promptly banned. Areška stood accused of ‘incitement of measures of a restrictive nature (sanctions) and other actions aimed at causing harm to the national security of Belarus’ (Article 361 of the Belarusian Criminal Code), ‘creation of an extremist group or participation in it’ (Article 361.1), and ‘incitement to racial, national or religious hatred or discord’ (Article 130). His trial opened in Minsk on 25 November 2022. He was found guilty on 5 January 2023 and [sentenced](#) to eight years in prison. The Supreme Court of Belarus upheld the verdict on 3 April 2023. Areška was [added](#) to the country’s [list](#) of ‘extremists’ on 5 May 2023. According to former prisoner Alaksandr Mancevič, who was released and forced into exile in Lithuania on 11 September 2025, Areška’s eyesight deteriorating in detention: *‘During the day, he asks: “Is there sun in the sky today?” The most terrible thing is that at night he must feel his way to the toilet in the dark. He falls, injures himself, and bleeds.’*

Born on 18 January 1955, Vacłaŭ Areška graduated from the Belarusian State Academy of Arts with a major in theatre studies. He taught at the Belarusian State Academy of Arts and translated works of the Belarusian Baroque from the Old Polish language. His texts were published in several magazines including *Spadchyna*, *Arche* and *pARTisan*.

Dźmitryj HAŁAVAČ

A songwriter, singer and member of the popular Belarusian rock group *Tor Band*, Dźmitryj Hałavač was serving a nine-year prison sentence in a medium-security penal colony in Navapolack, northern Belarus at the end of the year. Hałavač was targeted on account of his songs, which became [anthems](#) of the mass protests that swept through Belarus in 2020.

Dźmitryj Hałavač was [detained](#) on 28 October 2022 alongside band members Jaŭhien Burło and Andrej Jaremčyk. They were sentenced to 15 days of administrative detention several times in a row, before being transferred to pre-trial detention in Homel, southeastern Belarus, in January 2023 after the Belarusian authorities [labelled](#) *Tor Band* 'extremist' and subsequently banned it. Already in August 2022, the authorities had [deemed](#) the band's creative content to be 'extremist', although the musicians were only informed of the decision following their arrest. All three members of the group stood accused of 'incitement to racial, national or religious hatred or discord' under Article 130.3 of the Belarusian Criminal Code, 'creation of an extremist group or participation in it' (Article 361.1), 'discrediting the Republic of Belarus (Article 369.1), and 'insulting the President' (Article 368) in relation to their songs. On 31 October 2023, a court in Homel found them guilty, and [sentenced](#) Hałavač to nine years in prison, Burło to eight years, and Jaremčyk to seven and half years. Their sentences were [upheld](#) in January 2024.

Born on 1 June 1982, Dźmitryj Hałavač formed *Tor Band* with Jaŭhien Burło and Andrej Jaremčyk in 2017. The group rose to prominence in 2020, when their songs became musical symbols of the mass protests

that spread across Belarus following the fraudulent presidential election, generating millions of views on YouTube. Their song *We Are Not a Little People* notably [states](#): 'We are not cattle, nor a herd of cowards, / we are a living people, we are Belarusians! With faith in our hearts, we stand as one, / the banner of freedom above our heads!'

Valeryja KAŚCIUHOVA

A political scientist, editor and author, Valeryja Kaściuhova is serving a 10-year sentence in a general-security penal colony in Homel, southeastern Belarus. She was reportedly in need of [medical care](#) at the end of the year.

On 30 June 2021, State Security Committee (KGB) officers [raided](#) Valeryja Kaściuhova's apartment and subsequently transferred her to a pre-trial detention centre in Minsk. Kaściuhova was charged alongside researcher **Taččiana Kuzina** with 'incitement of measures of a restrictive nature (sanctions) and other actions aimed at causing harm to the national security of Belarus' (Article 361.3 of the Belarusian Criminal Code), 'conspiracy to seize power by unconstitutional means' (Article 357.1), and 'incitement to racial, national or religious hatred or discord' (Article 130.4). Their trial opened in Minsk on 6 February 2023. Kaściuhova and Kuzina were both found guilty on 17 March 2023 and [sentenced](#) to 10 years in prison. The Belarusian Supreme Court [upheld](#) Kaściuhova's sentence on 25 July 2023. Her name was [added](#) to the government's 'list of citizens of Belarus, foreign citizens, and stateless persons involved in extremist activities' and 'list of organisations and individuals involved in terrorist activities' in August 2023.

Born on 30 December 1967, Valeryja Kaściuhova is the founder and editor of independent analysis and opinion website *Nashe Mneniye* (*Our Opinion*), the author and editor of *Beloruskiy ezhegodnik* (*Belarusian Yearbook*) and the head of *Bielarus v fokusie* (*Belarus in focus*), a group of Belarusian experts providing analytical commentaries on events pertaining to Belarus. She wrote several [analytical pieces](#) for *Nashe Mneniye* following the fraudulent presidential election of August 2020.

Update: Valeryja Kaściuhova was [released from prison](#) on 20 March 2026 following ongoing negotiations between Belarus and the USA aimed at lifting economic sanctions. She remains in Belarus at the time of writing.

Andrzej POCZOBUT

A board member of the Union of Poles in Belarus, Andrzej Poczobut continued to serve 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 has been denied access to his family and lawyers since his detention, preventing them from receiving information about his life-threatening heart condition for which he was previously reportedly denied medication

Initially [detained](#) on 25 March 2021 in Hrodna, western Belarus, after the Union's offices throughout the country were searched, Poczobut was taken to a detention centre in Minsk and charged with 'incitement to racial, national or religious hatred or discord' under Article 130.3 of the Belarusian Criminal Code. He was subsequently also charged with 'incitement of measures of a restrictive nature (sanctions) and other actions aimed at causing harm to the national security of Belarus' (Article 361.3 of the Belarusian 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 Lists [2022-2025](#)).

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. He was [awarded](#) the European

Parliament's 2025 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought alongside imprisoned Georgian journalist and PEN case Mzia Amaglobeli.

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 Belarusian Criminal Code of 'incitement of measures of a restrictive nature (sanctions) and other actions aimed at causing harm to the national security of Belarus' against members of the Coordination Council, including Alexievich. 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 2025.

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.

BANISHED

Ales BIALIATSKI

Writer, human rights activist and Nobel Peace Prize winner Ales Bialiatski was freed from a 10-year prison sentence on 13 December 2025 and [forced into exile](#) in

Norway, via Lithuania, alongside several other Belarusian writers and journalists, following negotiations between Belarus and the USA over lifting economic sanctions.

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’ and ‘organising and financing group actions that grossly violate public order’ (Articles 228.4 and 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 **2021–2025**). Held in a medium-security penal colony in Horki – a facility known for inmates being beaten and subjected to hard labour – he was reportedly **prevented from receiving packages and medicine** and in urgent need of medical care at the time of his release.

On 21 May 2023, 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.

Bialiatski has been targeted by Belarusian authorities for years. In 2011, he was sentenced to four and a half years’ imprisonment; he was amnestied in June 2014 (see Case Lists **2011–2014**).

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 Tutejshyja (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, and literary critic Aliaksandr Fiaduta was freed and **forced into exile** on 13 December 2025 alongside several other Belarusian writers and journalists, following negotiations between Belarus and the United States aimed at lifting economic sanctions. Fiaduta was first sent to Ukraine, before being **transferred** to Poland. Prior to his release, he was serving a **10-year prison term**, imposed in September 2022 and **upheld** in November 2022.

Aliaksandr Fiaduta was convicted of ‘conspiracy to seize power by unconstitutional means’ under Article 357.1 of the Belarusian Criminal Code, in relation to an alleged USA-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 **2022–2025**). He 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

Renowned philosopher Uladzimir Mackievič was freed and **forced into exile** on 11 September 2025 alongside several other Belarusian writers and journalists, following negotiations between Belarus and the USA aimed at lifting economic sanctions. Prior to being sent to

Lithuania, Mackievič was serving a five-year prison [sentence](#) imposed on spurious 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 ‘organisation of or participation in actions that grossly violate public order’, ‘creation of an extremist group or participation in it’ and ‘insulting the President’ under Articles 342.1, 361.1 and 368.1 of the Belarusian Criminal Code respectively. He was held in prison No.4 in Mahilioŭ – known for its harsh conditions (see Case Lists [2021-2025](#)).

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.

Maksim ZNAK

Lawyer, academic, and writer Maksim Znak was freed and [forced into exile](#) on 13 December 2025 alongside several other Belarusian writers and journalists, following negotiations between Belarus and the USA aimed at lifting economic sanctions. Znak was first sent to Ukraine, before being [transferred](#) to Poland. Prior to his release, he was 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 fraudulent presidential election held in August 2020.

Maksim Znak was [arrested](#) on 9 September 2020. Tried behind closed doors alongside **Maryia Kalesnikava**, who headed Viktor Babaryka’s campaign team, on charges of ‘incitement of measures of a restrictive nature (sanctions) and other actions aimed at causing harm to the national security of Belarus’ using mass media and the internet (Article 361.3 of the Criminal Code), ‘conspiracy to seize power by unconstitutional means’ (Article 357.1) and ‘creation of an extremist group or participation in it’ (Article 361.1), 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. Prior to his forced exile, Znak was last seen by his lawyer in February 2023 (see Case Lists [2023/2024-2025](#)).

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. He is the [recipient](#) of the 2025 Vaclav Havel Center’s Disturbing the Peace Award to a Courageous Writer at Risk.

GEORGIA

IMPRISONED

Zviad RATIANI

On 9 October 2025, the Tbilisi City Court [sentenced](#) renowned poet and translator Zviad Ratiani to a grossly disproportionate two years in prison for ‘resistance, threat, or violence against a public official’ under Article 353.1 of the [Georgian Criminal Code](#). Ratiani was [detained](#) on 23 June 2025 after he slapped a police officer while taking part in a protest outside parliament, and initially faced up to seven years in prison for ‘assaulting a police officer’. PEN International and PEN Georgia reviewed video footage of the incident, which showed the slap was light and that the police officer involved sustained no injuries. Members of the literary community in Georgia [rallied](#) in support of Ratiani, whose requests for release on bail were all denied.

At his trial, Ratiani [reported](#) being denied access to writing materials in prison, unlike other detainees. His case highlights broader concerns about politically-motivated prosecutions in Georgia, where the authorities’ [onslaught on independent voices](#) showed no sign of abating by the end of the year.

Ratiani has been repeatedly targeted by state and non-state actors in recent years. PEN Georgia documented the 29 November 2024 [brutal beating](#) of Ratiani by police in Tbilisi. Ratiani suffered [serious injuries](#), including fractures to his nose and back. He was sentenced to eight days of administrative detention by the Tbilisi City Court on 2 December 2024 on alleged charges of petty hooliganism and disobeying lawful police orders (Articles 166 and 172 of the Administrative Offences Code of Georgia). After his release, Ratiani was [attacked](#) and beaten again outside his home by unknown individuals. He had previously lived in exile in Austria following a violent incident with the police in 2017, which led to his [arrest](#).

Born on 5 January 1971, Zviad Ratiani is an [award-winning](#) and widely-translated Georgian poet and translator. He has

published five poetry collections and worked on translations of English and German poetry, including works by T. S. Eliot, E. Pound, R. Frost, M. Rilke and P. Celan. He was awarded the Literary Award SABA in 2010 for best poetry collection (*The Negative*), and the Literary prize LITERA in 2016, also for best poetry collection (*Only You Are Allowed*).

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 [2022-2025](#)).

On 14 July 2025, a court in Rome [upheld](#) convictions handed down in 2021 against Francesco Bidognetti, a former leader of the Neapolitan Camorra mafia, and his former lawyer Michele Santonastaso. They were sentenced to 18 months and 14 months in prison, respectively, for intimidating Roberto Saviano. The mafia-related threats – read out in court in March 2008 by Santonastaso on behalf of Bidognetti as the latter stood trial – forced Saviano to live under 24-hour protection.

Roberto Saviano, born on 22 September 1979, is the author of *Gomorra*, 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

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 Moroşan, were [detained](#) at the border of Bender/Tighina by Ministry of State Security (MGB) agents – the security service of the Russia-backed separatist government in Transnistria who confiscated identity documents and copies of TIMPUL, a cultural magazine. The writers and journalist were heading to a literary meeting with high school students in Bender/Tighina where they had intended to distribute the magazine, which included articles condemning the Russian Federation's war against Ukraine (Bender/Tighina is a city under de facto control of the separatist region of [Transnistria](#), which broke away from Moldova in 1990).

Interrogated for over an hour, Moldova's Ministry for Reintegration eventually brokered their return to Chişinău, Moldova's capital. They were told they were banned from entering Transnistria. In November 2024, Crudu and

Ivanov filed a complaint against the agents who prevented them from entering Transnistria (see Case List [2025](#)). The case was ongoing as of 31 December 2025. Crudu told PEN International all three were still banned from entering Transnistria at the end of the year.

Free expression organisations have documented how journalists are [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.

THE NETHERLANDS

KILLED – TRIAL IN PROGRESS

Peter R. DE VRIES

Dutch crime reporter Peter R. de Vries [died](#) in Amsterdam on 15 July 2021 nine days after being shot five times, including in the head, after leaving a TV appearance. 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; 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 [issued verdicts](#) against the suspects, ranging from four weeks to 28 years of imprisonment. Two men were acquitted. The Public Prosecution

Service subsequently [filed](#) an appeal, calling for harsher sentences (see Case Lists [2021-2025](#)).

On 11 December 2025, the Amsterdam Court of Appeals [sentenced](#) Delano G., the man who shot de Vries, and getaway driver Kamil E. to 27.5 years in prison. Krystian M., who organised the killing, was sentenced to 26 years and one month in prison. Five men received sentences ranging from four weeks to 10 years of imprisonment. One man was acquitted. At least four of those convicted have [appealed](#) to the Supreme Court.

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, *misdadverslaggever* (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: TRIAL IN PROGRESS

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. The process was ongoing as of 31 December 2025.

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, Kripos, [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, Kripos [charged](#) two individuals with Nygaard's attempted murder. The investigation continued until September 2023, when Kripos submitted the case to the Oslo District Attorney's Office, suggesting dismissal due to insufficient evidence. PEN Norway [called](#) for an independent public inquiry into the handling of the Nygaard case by the police.

RUSSIAN FEDERATION

IMPRISONED

Yevgenia BERKOVICH and Svetlana PETRIYCHUK

Throughout 2025, theatre director Yevgenia Berkovich and playwright Svetlana Petriyчук were both 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 Berkovich and Petriyчук **guilty** of ‘justifying terrorism’ under Article 205.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation and sentenced them to six years in prison. At their trial, members of the public and journalists without cameras were 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 (see Case List [2025](#)).

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 continued to **serve** a 15-year prison sentence in a high-security penal colony after conviction of alleged sexual offences his supporters say are punishment for his research unearthing human rights abuses of the Stalin era, which he has published in several books. He remained **critically ill** and denied access to cancer treatment at the end of the year.

Dmitriev was arrested on 13 December 2016 and tried in April 2018. Cleared of a charge of making pornographic images of his adopted daughter, he 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.

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, in a closed door session without Dmitriev or his lawyer present, 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. 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 (see Case Lists [2017-2025](#)).

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 has continued to [write](#) in prison.

JUDICIAL HARASSMENT

Larisa TUPTSOKOVA

Larisa Tuptsokova – a Georgia-based, award-winning writer from the Republic of Adygea in the Russian Federation – was [under investigation](#) by the Russian authorities in relation to allegations of ‘organising the activity of an extremist community’ under Article 282.2(2) of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, which carries up to six years in prison. In a letter dated 9 October 2025 but not received at her parents’ home address in Adygea until 21 October, the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation stated its intention to open a criminal case against Tuptsokova on 10 October, without sharing further information. Law enforcement officials subsequently [searched](#) her parents’ home and questioned her relatives. Rosfinmonitoring, the Russian Federation’s Federal Financial Monitoring Service, included Tuptsokova in its [list](#) of ‘terrorists and extremists’ on 11 November 2025, in effect preventing her from returning to the Russian Federation, an example of transnational repression.

Tuptsokova, who has been living in Georgia for the past 14 years and also holds Georgian citizenship, believes the case against her stems from her [activities and publications in support of Circassian language and culture](#), including through the online platform [Circassian Media](#). Tuptsokova, who worked for the Circassian

Cultural Centre in Tbilisi before the Russian Federation labelled it ‘extremist’ by in 2024, reported that a [fake website](#) had been set up under the Centre’s name in August 2025, with articles falsely attributed to her. Scores of activists and cultural figures from the North Caucasus Republics, Georgia, Türkiye and beyond have called for the case against Tuptsokova to be dropped, stressing it would set a dangerous precedent for those who worked with the Circassian Cultural Centre and highlighting Russian authorities’ increasing persecution of Circassian language and culture, including [harassment](#) of her supporters by the Kabardino-Balkarian Ministry of Internal Affairs. The case was ongoing at the end of the year.

Larisa Tuptsokova is a Georgia-based writer, poet, translator, journalist, philologist, and teacher of the Circassian language. She participated in the [2023 Indigenous and Minoritised Languages Video Poems Marathon](#) of PEN International’s Translation and Linguistic Rights Committee.

SERBIA

KILLED: IMPUNITY

Slavko ĆURUVIJA

In a [ruling](#) issued in October 2025 but only made public in January 2026, Serbia’s Supreme Court ruled that the decision in February 2024 by the Belgrade Court of Appeal to [overturn](#) guilty verdicts against four men twice convicted of the murder of Slavko Ćuruvija, violated provisions of criminal procedure. The Supreme Court ruled that major pieces of evidence provided by key witnesses in the trial had not been properly assessed by the Court of Appeal ahead of the judgement, which it said benefited the defendants. The Supreme Court’s ruling, which [cannot](#) lead to the defendants being found guilty of Ćuruvija’s murder, [prompted](#) Ćuruvija’s daughter to seek a review by Serbia’s Constitutional Court of certain provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure, including one that excludes the possibility of appealing against an acquittal rendered at second instance.

Journalist, editor, and publisher Slavko Ćuruvija, an outspoken critic of former Serbian President Slobodan Milošević, was shot and killed outside his house in Belgrade on 11 April 1999. Four former [State Security Directorate](#) (RDB) officers were twice convicted and sentenced to lengthy prison terms, but both times their convictions were overturned on appeal (see Case List [2025](#)). 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 [coordinated](#) 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 (see Case List [2025](#)).

For example, on 16 February 2025, Gruhonjić [received](#) seven Facebook messages from different accounts. They included threats of sexual violence, as well as death threats, warning the journalist that his throat will soon be 'cut' and his 'bones will be broken'. Two of the messages also threatened to 'destroy' the lives of Gruhonjić's family members. On 30 September 2025, a further coordinated [smear campaign](#) was launched against several journalists in Belgrade and other cities (see [Marko Vidojković](#) below). Photographs of at least four journalists, including Dinko Gruhonjić, appeared on anonymous leaflets that were distributed in private mailboxes and in public spaces. The journalists were described as having

'bloody hands' and stood accused of organising the 'colour revolution', in reference to the [protests](#) that have taken place since the [fatal collapse](#) of the canopy at Novi Sad train station in November 2024. As of 31 December 2025, no one had been prosecuted for any of the threats, which he reported to the Special Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crimes (VTK). 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 2025.

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 Lists [2022-2025](#)). Notably, on 17 October 2025, Vidojković received a series of [brutal insults](#) on Facebook, as well as direct threats sent to him and his family. Earlier, on 1 October, he had received death threats on Instagram. The user 'zorancvetkovic.cvetkovic' then wrote 'Your carcass should be killed and thrown to the dogs' as a comment on a post by the outlet *Danas*, which quoted Vidojković's words taken from his daily column about student-led protests. The threats were reported to both the Special Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime and the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Novi Sad.

On 30 September 2025, a coordinated [smear campaign](#) was launched against several

journalists in Belgrade and other cities (see **Dinko Gruhonjić** above). Photographs of at least four journalists, including Marko Vidojković, appeared on anonymous leaflets that were distributed in private mailboxes and in public spaces. The journalists were described as having ‘bloody hands’ and stood accused of organising the ‘colour revolution’, in reference to the [protests](#) that have taken place since the [fatal collapse](#) of the canopy at Novi Sad train station in November 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 2025. Notably in July 2025, Bakić reported that local officials of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) circulated his [phone number and address](#) on social media, resulting in Bakić receiving several anonymous phone calls and threatening messages.

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. He subsequently faced harassment and smears by the President, official and pro-government media outlets and members of the ruling political party. Similar attacks continued throughout 2023, 2024 and 2025, including after as Bakić spoke out against the Serbian authorities’

crackdown on dissent in the wake of student-led protests (see Case Lists [2023/2024-2025](#)).

Jovo Bakić, born on 23 March 1970, is a writer, sociologist and academic, who specialises 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.

TÜRKİYE

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, Ogün Samast, a 17-year-old at the time of the murder, was [freed](#) on parole in November 2023 after serving 16 years and 10 months of a 22 year and 10 month prison sentence, triggering widespread criticism across Türkiye.

Following a 2013 Supreme Court of Appeal ruling, 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 2025.

On 10 January 2025, seven people accused in one of the trials for Hrant Dink’s murder – including Ogün Samast – [benefited](#) from a statute of limitations and were spared trial.

Dink's family appealed the decision. 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. PEN International continues to call for full justice (see Case Lists [2017-2025](#)).

Update: In January 2026, the Istanbul Regional Court of Justice [found](#) that Hrant Dink's family lacked the right to appeal the January 2025 ruling that applied the statute of limitations to one of the trials for Dink's murder. The family said they would appeal to the Court of Cassation.

IMPRISONED

Selahattin DEMIRTAŞ

Writer and former co-chair of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), Selahattin Demirtaş continued to serve a 42-year prison sentence imposed on 16 May 2024 on spurious grounds. Held since November 2016, he faced [multiple criminal prosecutions](#) by the end of the year.

[Sentenced](#) in September 2018 to four years and eight months in prison for allegedly carrying out 'terrorist propaganda' during a speech he had given in 2013, he was further [sentenced](#) to three years and six months in prison in March 2021 for 'insulting' President Erdoğan. In May 2024, Demirtaş was [found](#) guilty of 'aiding in undermining the unity and integrity of the state', 'incitement to commit a crime' and 'making propaganda for a terrorist organisation', alongside scores of other HDP members, and sentenced to a combined total of 42 years in prison in relation to deadly [2014 protests](#) across Türkiye, which began over accusations that the Turkish army stood by as Islamic State militants besieged the Syrian Kurdish town of Kobane. The trial is widely seen as [politically motivated](#) (see [Case Lists 2018-2025](#)).

At the end of the year, the Türkiye authorities had yet to implement two rulings by the European Court of Human Rights – issued in [December 2020](#) and in [July 2025](#) – which found that Demirtaş's continued

detention violated his rights and had political motives and ordered his release.

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.

Update: On 6 January 2026, a court in Mersin [sentenced](#) Selahattin Demirtaş to 17 and a half months in prison for 'insulting' President Erdoğan in 2015 speeches.

Mehmet Osman KAVALA

Publisher, civil and cultural rights activist, and philanthropist Osman Kavala continued to serve a life sentence at the end of the year. His co-defendants Çiğdem Mater, Can Atalay, Mine Özerden and Tayfun Kahraman continued to serve 18-year prison sentences.

Kavala – 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. The Court of Cassation upheld his sentence and that of four co-defendants – Çiğdem Mater, Can Atalay, Mine Özerden, Tayfun Kahraman, sentenced to 18 years' imprisonment on 28 September 2023. **Mücella Yapıcı, Hakan Altınay and Yiğit Ali Ekmekçi were [acquitted](#) in February 2025.**

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. A [second case](#)

lodged at the Court by Kavala in January 2024, concerning human rights violations perpetrated against him since December 2019 is due to be heard in March 2026 (see Case lists [2018-2025](#)).

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.

DETAINED

Furkan KARABAY

Journalist and author Furkan Karabay faced ongoing judicial harassment throughout the year.

Already sentenced in April 2025 to a suspended prison term of almost two years on defamation charges after he accused President Erdoğan's family of corruption, Karabay was detained on 15 May 2025 and sentenced on 2 December 2025 to four years and three months in prison for 'insulting the president', 'insulting a public official' and 'making targets of those who were tasked to combat terrorism' on account of his journalistic work. He was released on 2 December 2025 after 201 days in pre-trial detention.

Karabay was charged on [5 September 2025](#) in relation to his [reference](#) to the names and photos of judicial officials in his reporting on the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality investigations (İBB), which prosecutors claimed amounted to making them potential targets for terrorist organisations. The 'insult' charge was based on Karabay's public recall of past remarks by President Erdoğan, in the context of a local official's deteriorating health. Karabay [denied](#) any wrongdoing, emphasising that all the information he shared was already in the public domain. PEN International, its [Young Writers Committee](#), and PEN Centres across the world actively campaigned for Karabay, notably [translating](#) and [publishing](#) some of his short stories. PEN International has called for

his sentencing to be [overturned on appeal](#).

Furkan Karabay, born 15 May 1996, has worked with several media outlets in Türkiye, including *Medyascope*, *Cumhuriyet*, *10Haber*, *Oda TV*, and *Gerçek Gündem*. He notably specialises in judicial developments. In 2024, Karabay published *Gurban*, a book detailing his investigation into businessman Mubariz Mansimov's activities with the government in Türkiye as well as his rise and fall.

Update: On 23 January 2026, Karabay was placed under [house arrest](#) on [suspicion](#) of 'publicly spreading misleading information' and 'making targets of those who were tasked to combat terrorism', in relation to his [reporting](#) on the case targeting the İBB. PEN International [called](#) for his release and an end of his judicial harassment.

Merdan YANARDAĞ

Writer, PEN Türkiye member and editor-in-chief of TELE1 broadcaster, Merdan Yanardağ was [detained](#) by police at his home in Istanbul on 24 October 2025 and formally arrested on 27 October on charges of 'espionage' under Article 328.1 of Türkiye's Criminal Code, which carries between 15 and 20 years in prison. He denies any wrongdoing. The investigation, which sees him [accused](#) of 'manipulating the 2019 local elections in cooperation with foreign intelligence services' relates to Istanbul's Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu, who has been held in pre-trial detention on politically-motivated grounds since March 2025, triggering [mass protests](#) across Türkiye. The authorities subsequently appointed a trustee to TELE 1 – one of the few remaining critical news outlets in the country – prompting the [collective resignation](#) of TELE 1 staff amid a national outcry.

Yanardağ and TELE1 have been repeatedly targeted by the authorities of Türkiye over many years, including through arbitrary fines and criminal prosecution. On 4 October 2023, a court in Istanbul found Yanardağ [guilty](#) of 'making propaganda for a terrorist organisation,' and sentenced him to 30 months in prison, for comments about the peace process between

the government and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in a June 2023 TELE 1. He was detained for over 100 days (see Case List [2025](#)). On 3 November 2025, Türkiye's Constitutional Court [ruled](#) that Yanardağ's pre-trial detention violated his right to liberty and security and ordered the government to pay 166,500 Turkish lira (approximately USD3,950) in compensation.

In a separate case, Yanardağ was retried, after a previous conviction was overturned, 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 Mafyalaşması' (The Mafia-ization of the System), published in May 2021. The retrial resulted in his [acquittal](#) on 25 September 2025.

Merdan Yanardağ, born on 24 February 1961, is a prominent journalist, writer, and member of PEN Türkiye.

ON TRIAL

Yavuz EKINCI

Writer Yavuz Ekinci continued to appeal a 2022 [conviction and suspended sentence](#) for 'making propaganda for a terrorist organisation' for eight Twitter posts mostly relating to (New Year) celebrations in Diyarbakır, south-eastern Türkiye, and to the 2014 battle of Kobane in Syria, which remained pending before Türkiye's Court of Cassation as of 31 December 2025.

On 10 November 2025, the 23rd High Criminal Court in Istanbul [dismissed](#) separate charges of 'making propaganda for a terrorist organisation' against Ekinci in relation to his book, *Rüyası Bölünenler (Dream Divided)* on the grounds that the statute of limitations had expired. Ekinci had faced up to seven and a half years in prison. PEN International [welcomed](#) the verdict. In 2024, the 23rd High Criminal Court in Istanbul had [dismissed](#) all charges against Ekinci following PEN's [campaign](#), but a retrial had been ordered in May 2025 by the Istanbul Regional Court of Justice.

Ekinci's appeal against the ban on the publication, distribution and sale of

Dream Divided remained [pending](#) before Türkiye's Constitutional Court at the end of the year. Previously, in 2018, a [smear campaign](#) was launched online against Ekinci following the publication of his book *Peygamberin Endişesi (The Prophet's Concern)* (see Case Lists [2021-2025](#)).

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. His latest book, *Aziz*, was released in December 2024.

Professor Şebnem Korur FİNCANCI

Prominent academic, forensic scientist, and leading human rights defender, Professor Şebnem Korur Fincancı remained on trial throughout 2025 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 'making 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 2025 (see Case Lists [2022-2025](#)). In October 2024, another court in Ankara [ordered](#) Fincancı to pay TL50,000 (approximately USD1,400) for damage to Türkiye's Ministry of National Defence's reputation.

Fincancı was [acquitted](#) on 20 February 2025 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 comments she made in March 2022 on instances of torture and other ill-treatment. Another case alleging that Fincancı had insulted then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan during the 2013 Gezi Park protests was **dismissed** on 17 June 2025 on the grounds that the statute of limitations had expired.

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 **acquit** all three on 17 July 2019. Fincancı was also tried and acquitted for her signature to a 2016 petition by the '**Academics for Peace**' calling for a restart to peace negotiations in the south-east of Türkiye.

JUDICIAL HARASSMENT

Gulgeç AKDENİZ (pen name Gulgeç DERYASPI)

Writer and Kurdish PEN member Gulgeç Akdeniz – pen name Gulgeç Deryaspî – remained on trial *in absentia* 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 (see Case Lists **2020-2025**).

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 conviction to be overturned.

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 is a member of Kurdish PEN.

Mehmet DICLE

In April 2025, Mehmet Dicle's lawyer informed him that an **investigation** had been launched against him and ZİZ Publishing House in relation to Dicle's book *Berfa Sor*. They stood accused of 'making terrorist propaganda' for the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a charge that carries a lengthy prison term. The investigation was reportedly dropped by the end of the year, following PEN's **campaign**.

According to the investigation file, in January 2025, prison authorities in Yozgat, central Türkiye, seized a range of books from detainees, including *Berfa Sor*. Published in 2023, *Berfa Sor* is set in the fictional town of Asûs, and recalls the anguish and longing of the parents of a guerilla fighter. Excerpts from the book were translated from Kurdish to Turkish by unofficial translators, with the Prosecutor's Office concluding they amounted to 'terror propaganda'. The investigation file was sent to the Diyarbakır Prosecutor's Office, where Dicle is based. Dicle's lawyer subsequently informed him that the investigation had been closed, though no official documentation had been shared by the end of the year.

Mehmet Dicle, born in 1977, is a Kurdish writer, editor and translator, co-founder and director of LiteraKurd Literary House in Diyarbakır, southeastern Türkiye. He is a member of Kurdish PEN. Dicle has published three short story collections written in Kurdish: *Asûs* (2005), *Nara* (2010) and *Ta* (2014). He also works as a translator and notably edited *Kürt Dili ve Edebiyatı (Kurdish Language and Literature)*,

2010), a textbook in Turkish. Since 2020, Dicle has been acting as editor of the short story magazine *Kurdeçîrok*. ZİZ Publishing House was founded in 2023 in Diyarbakır and specialises in Kurdish literary works, including poetry, novels, short stories, and translated books.

Can DÜNDAR

Can Dündar, previously editor of the daily newspaper *Cumhuriyet*, continued to appeal against a lengthy prison term and is on trial *in absentia* on other charges (see Case Lists [2014 – 2025](#)). Dündar and his Ankara bureau chief Erdem Gül were [released](#) in February 2016 after three months' [detention](#) 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. Dündar's appeal against his sentence to a combined total of 27 years and six months in prison imposed in 2020 *in absentia* process was ongoing at the end of the year.

Dündar is also accused of 'attempting to overthrow the government' in the Gezi Park trial case (see **Mehmet Osman Kavala** above). Proceedings were ongoing as of 31 December 2025.

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 2025; 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. Since October 2024, the social media platform X has [blocked](#) access to [Dündar's account](#) in relation to the death of USA-based cleric Fethullah Gülen (whom Türkiye blamed for orchestrating a failed coup attempt on 15 July 2016).

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*. His latest book *Ich traf meinen Mörder* (*I Met My Killer*) was published in Germany in 2025.

Joakim MEDIN

Journalist, writer, and PEN Sweden member Joakim Medin, a Swedish national, was [detained](#) on 27 March 2025 at Istanbul airport after travelling to cover [nationwide protests](#) and arrested the following day. Medin denied [charges](#) of 'insulting the president' based on social media posts related to a 2023 protest in Stockholm, in which an effigy of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was [hung](#) by its feet, stating that his reports were in a professional capacity. Convicted on 30 April 2025, the 79th Criminal Court of First Instance in Ankara handed him a suspended prison sentence of 11 months and 20 days. His [appeal](#) was ongoing at the end of the year.

Medin remained in pre-trial detention in the high-security Marmara prison in Silivri, near Istanbul, on separate terrorism grounds, before being [released](#) and deported to Sweden on 16 May 2025. He was banned from returning to the country for five years. His trial in the 'terror' case began *in absentia* on 25 September 2025 at the 13th High Criminal Court in Istanbul and was ongoing at the end of the year. If convicted, Medin would face years in prison and could be subject to an international arrest warrant, which would seriously affect his ability to work. PEN International [joined](#) PEN Sweden and PEN Norway in calling on the authorities of Türkiye to immediately drop all terror-related charges against Medin, to lift his entry ban, and to overturn his previous conviction on 'insult' grounds.

Joakim Medin, born on 28 August 1984, is a journalist, writer, and member of PEN Sweden, who has reported from countries including Iraq, Syria, Hungary, Thailand, Türkiye and Ukraine. Medin specialises in Kurdish issues and is the author of [several books](#), including

Kobane – the Kurdish revolution and the fight against IS (2016) and *The Kurdish track – Sweden, Turkey and the price of a Nato membership* (2023). Medin reflected on his experience in Türkiye in a [piece](#) published in PEN/Opp on 19 September 2025, and in an [interview](#) with PEN Norway, published on 21 September 2025.

Pınar SELEK

Sociologist, feminist, writer, and PEN Türkiye member Pınar Selek continued to face a [decades-long trial](#), largely conducted *in absentia*, 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 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.

On 21 June 2022, Türkiye's 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 2022-2025](#)).

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, low-income individuals, 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 lived in France since 2012.

Meral ŞİMŞEK

Throughout 2025, writer, poet, and Kurdish PEN member Meral Şimşek remained on trial *in absentia*, appealing against a [15-month prison sentence](#) for 'making propaganda for a terrorist organisation', imposed by the Malatya 2nd High Criminal Court in, eastern Türkiye on 7 October 2021.

Briefly [detained](#) in December 2020 and placed under a travel ban, in January 2021, Şimşek was charged with 'membership of a terrorist organisation' and 'making propaganda for a terrorist organisation'. 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 propaganda for terrorist organisation' 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.

Following an unsuccessful attempt to flee to Greece in June 2021, she was forced to return and was detained for seven days. 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 2025 (see Case Lists [2021-2025](#)).

Meral Şimşek, born in 1980, is the prize-winning author of three poetry books – *Mülteci Düşler (Refugee Dreams)*, *Ateşe Bulut Yağdırın (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.

Nedim TÜRFENT

On 25 June 2025, Kurdish writer, journalist and poet Nedim Türfent became aware he was the subject of a 7 May 2025 arrest warrant on the charge of ‘making propaganda for a terrorist organisation’. Proceedings were ongoing at the end of the year.

As reported by [Dicle Firat Journalists’ Association \(DFG\)](#), the basis of the warrant issued by the Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office of Yüksekova district in Hakkari appeared to be four news-related posts and retweets Türfent had shared on his X account. The charge of ‘making propaganda for a terrorist organisation’, outlined in Article 7 of Türkiye’s Anti-Terror Law (Law no. 3713), has long been used to stifle critical speech or public interest reporting. PEN International joined partners in expressing [deep concern](#) at the report.

The move was the latest in a litany of threats and judicial harassment aimed at [Türfent](#) in recent years on account of his journalistic work and Kurdish identity. He spent six years and seven months in prison from May 2016 to November 2022, with almost two years in solitary confinement, in retaliation for his reporting on special police forces’ ill-treatment of Kurdish workers. Out of the 20 witnesses called during the court hearings, 19 retracted their statements, saying they had been extracted under torture. PEN International and PEN Centres around the world had actively campaigned for his release (see [Case Lists 2018-2022](#)).

Nedim Türfent, born 8 February 1990, is an award-winning Kurdish news editor, journalist and poet from Türkiye. He was awarded the prestigious Musa Anter Journalism Award in 2015 as well as the 2022 Halkevleri Press and Art Solidarity Award. While in prison, Türfent wrote *Kuş Aynası*, a collection of poems published in September 2021 in Türkiye (Aram Publishing). *Über Mauern*,

a collection of his poetry and articles, was published in 2022 in Germany (Bernadette Ronnes and Cornelia Rohr). He is an Honorary Member of English PEN and PEN Melbourne and currently resides in Germany.

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, has faced ongoing harassment 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 USD7,560) 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 (see Case Lists [2011-2025](#)).

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 and partners](#), at least 255 cultural figures have been killed by Russian forces as of December 2025, 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 Lists [2023/2024](#) and [2025](#)).

KILLED – TRIAL IN PROGRESS

Volodymyr VAKULENKO

Four suspects with links to the so called ‘Luhansk People’s Republic’ and the Russian armed forces were charged with the killing of Ukrainian writer Volodymyr Vakulenko, and [tried in absentia](#) in Kharkiv, Ukraine. Proceedings were ongoing at the end of the year.

News that Volodymyr Vakulenko had been abducted first [emerged](#) in April 2022, but information about his fate was only made possible after the Ukrainian army recaptured Iziium 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 Iziium. 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 Iziium, eastern Ukraine, was that of Vakulenko. 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) (see Case Lists [2022 -2025](#)).

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’. He was [awarded](#) the title of Hero of Ukraine in October 2025.

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 2025. They and six other men are also [on trial](#) on charges arising from the riot. A tenth defendant died in 2025 (see Case Lists [2019-2025](#)).

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.

Update: An application to halt the trial of three men for the murder of Lyra McKee was [rejected](#) by the court on 27 February 2026.

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:

Belarus

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

Action:

April 2025: Submission [Joint submission to the Universal Periodic Review of the Republic of Belarus by PEN Belarus, PEN International and PEN America](#)

August 2025: Statement [Belarus: Five years of relentless crackdown on cultural rights](#)

October 2025: Statement [Belarus: UN submission highlights brutal crackdown on cultural rights](#)

Georgia

Mzia AMAGLOBELI (f): *journalist detained*

Action:

January 2025: Joint statement [Georgia: Release Mzia Amaglobeli and end crackdown on free press](#)

January 2025: Statement [Georgia: Prominent journalist Mzia Amaglobeli on hunger strike as she faces prison term](#)

August 2025: Statement [Georgia: Prison sentence for Mzia Amaglobeli condemned](#)

VARIOUS: *repressive legislation and crackdown on peaceful assembly*

Action:

February 2025: Third-party intervention [Georgia: Journalistic Protections in the Context of Protest to be Considered at the Highest Level by the European Court of Human Rights](#)

June 2025: Joint statement [Georgia: Independent media face new wave of repression as new laws come into effect](#)

July 2025: Statement [Georgia: Alarming Human Rights Crisis Highlighted by Writers' Groups](#)

July 2025: Submission [Joint submission to the Universal Periodic Review of Georgia by PEN Georgia, PEN International and PEN America](#)

November 2025: Statement [Georgia: Latest wave of arrests condemned](#)

December 2025: Statement [Georgia: Ruling by the European Court of Human Rights on journalistic protections in the context of protest sets important precedent](#)

Ireland

VARIOUS: *defamation legislation, SLAPPs*

Action:

July 2025: Joint statement [Ireland: Defamation \(Amendment\) Bill fails to protect public interest speech](#)

Kosovo

Flutura KUSARI (f): *author and press freedom advocate harassed*

Action:

June 2025: Joint statement [Kosovo: Steadfast support for Flutura Kusari as she seeks justice against Mentor Llugaliu's harassment](#)

Malta

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

Action:

October 2025: Joint statement [Malta: In Memory of Daphne. Media reform public consultations must lead to National Action Plan](#)

Montenegro

VARIOUS: *academic freedom*

Action:

June 2025: Statement [Montenegro: Academic freedom and expression under threat](#)

Poland

VARIOUS: *freedom of expression, artistic freedom*

Action:

October 2025: Statement [Critical Junctures: PEN International's report exposes threats to artistic expression in Poland](#)

October 2025: Report [Critical Junctures: Safeguarding the Freedom to Create in Poland](#)

Serbia

VARIOUS: *crackdown on peaceful assembly, safety of writers and journalists*

Action:

February 2025: Statement [Serbia: Protect journalists amidst nationwide protests](#)

April 2025: Statement [Serbia: End chilling crackdown on peaceful dissent](#)

July 2025: Joint statement [Serbia: Media freedom declining at alarming speed](#)

September 2025: Statement [Serbia: EU must urgently address alarming crisis](#)

Türkiye

Hamza KAAAN (m) and Mehmet ÜÇAR (m): *journalists detained*

Action:

May 2025: RAN [Türkiye: Release and drop charges against journalists Hamza Kaan and Mehmet Üçar](#)

VARIOUS: *media freedom, crackdown on peaceful assembly, safety of writers and journalists*

Action:

February 2025: Joint statement [Türkiye: Surge in press freedom violations condemned](#)

March 2025: Statement [Türkiye: Alarming crackdown on peaceful expression condemned](#)

March 2025: Joint statement [Türkiye: Ensure peaceful assembly and freedom of expression during protests](#)

May 2025: Joint statement [EU: Open letter on the assault of human rights in Türkiye](#)

September 2025: Joint statement [Türkiye: Stop throttling social media platforms and messaging services](#)

October 2025: Joint statement [Türkiye: Journalists reporting LGBTQ+ issues risk criminalisation](#)

United Kingdom

VARIOUS: *terrorism legislation*

Action:

June 2025: Joint statement [United Kingdom: Proscribing Palestine Action as terrorist organisation threatens fundamental rights](#)

Ukraine

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

Action:

February 2025: Statement [Ukraine: Andrey Kurkov on Three Years of War](#)

Viktoria ROSHCHYNA (f): *torture and death in Russian custody of Ukrainian journalist*

Action:

May 2025: Statement [Ukraine/ Russian Federation: Investigate torture and death in custody of Ukrainian journalist Viktoria Roshchyna](#)

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA REGIONAL OVERVIEW

MINA THABET

Head of the Middle East and North Africa Region

The freedom of expression crisis in the Middle East and North Africa worsened throughout the year, with horrifying attacks on minority communities in **Syria**, a brief conflict between **Israel** and **Iran**, continued genocide of Palestinians in Gaza by **Israel**, which also escalated attacks in **the occupied West Bank**. Governments across the region continued their harsh repression of freedom of expression, including expression online; crushing peaceful protests; while continuing the use of smear campaigns, arbitrary detention, judicial harassment (including travel bans), and unfair trials against writers, journalists, and government critics. Press freedom remained under attack in various countries, with Israel responsible for the deaths of two-thirds of all journalists killed worldwide in 2025. PEN International welcomed the releases of arbitrarily detained writers in **Algeria** and **Egypt**.

CLAMPDOWN ON PEACEFUL PROTESTS

In September, in **Morocco**, authorities violently responded to the '[GenZ212](#)' country-wide [protest movement, against government policies and corruption](#), and demanding better health care and education. The crackdown resulted in the [deaths](#) of at least three people and the [detention](#) of thousands, including minors. In October, Moroccan courts [sentenced](#) hundreds of protestors to varying prison terms between six months and five years, with some defendants [sentenced](#) to 15 years in prison.

In **December 2025 and January 2026**, authorities in Iran used [excessive force, mass arbitrary arrests](#) and [internet shutdowns](#) to suppress country-wide [protests](#) against the government's mishandling of the economy, including the [collapse](#) of the country's local currency and persistently high inflation. UN experts previously [warned](#) that the sanctions and different forms of over-compliance have had a serious negative impact on the country's economy, leading to serious violations of human rights and humanitarian challenges, which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic in recent years.

CRACKDOWN ON ONLINE EXPRESSION

In **Algeria**, authorities escalated online repression, severely punishing any dissent or criticism of the government through arbitrary arrests, detention, and unfair trials. According to Amnesty International, at least 23 activists and journalists were [arrested](#), detained and convicted in unfair trials in relation to their participation in an online protest movement [#Manich_Radhi](#) [#أنا لست راضٍ](#) [I am not satisfied], with at least seven sentenced to prison terms ranging from 18 months to five years. In January, Algerian authorities [arrested](#) poet **Mohamed Tadjadit** (see below) for his online

writings and participation in the [#Manich_Radi](#) movement, and sentenced him to five years in prison and a DZD200,000 (approximately USD1510) fine just four days later, following an expedited trial, reduced to one year in prison in May. In November, Tadjadit was sentenced to a further five-year sentence under the Anti-Terrorism Law, also in relation to his online expression. In March, the Bejaia Court of Justice [upheld](#) an 18-month sentence and a fine of DZD100,000 (approximately USD755) against activists **Soheib Debbaghi** and **Mohamed Bazzizi** for their role in the launch of the [#Manich_Radi](#) movement. Despite the repression, Gen Z activists were undeterred, launching the GenZ213 movement in October to demand greater social justice, which pro-government media framed as a [Moroccan plot](#) to destabilise the country.

In **Egypt**, authorities continued their crackdown on government critics and repression of online expression. Egyptian poet **Ahmed Douma** was [arrested](#) and faced similar charges in at least two cases over the past year for his online expression (see below). Since his release in August 2023 after over a decade in prison, PEN International has recorded at least five open investigations into Douma's writings and online commentary, in which he faced identical charges and was forced to pay punitive bail fees exceeding EGP230,000 (approximately USD4,850). Investigative journalist and writer **Ismail Alexandrany** was [arrested](#) in September at a security checkpoint in Matruh governorate in relation to a series of Facebook posts containing criticism of the government's human rights record and the use of '[rotation](#)' against government critics. The Supreme State Security Persecution (SSSP) ordered his pre-trial detention on bogus charges and continued to extend his detention until the end of the year (see below). In **Morocco**, authorities arrested activist **Mohamed Boustati** over his online criticism of Israel's war on Gaza. He was convicted in March and [sentenced](#) to one year in prison for 'defamation' of Saudi Arabia in relation to his criticism of Arab countries' position on the war in Gaza and normalisation of relations with Israel.

ARBITRARY DETENTION

Governments across the region sustained their use of arbitrary detention and imprisonment, often in harsh conditions, to silence critics, stifle freedom of expression, and maintain an overall climate of fear to deter any public opposition.

In **Egypt**, authorities continued to arbitrarily detain cartoonist and translator **Ashraf Omar** without trial at the end of the year (see below). In August, Egyptian authorities **brought** bogus charges against award-winning poet **Galal El-Behairy** (see below) in two separate cases in an effort to extend his ongoing arbitrary detention after he had already spent nearly four years in pre-trial detention and served a three-year unjust sentence. A week after the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) **criticised** the practice of ‘rotation’ of charges against prisoners in Egypt, highlighting El-Behairy’s situation, authorities brought fresh charges under another case, in apparent retaliation. In December, authorities in Iran violently arrested writer, human rights defender and Nobel Peace laureate **Narges Mohammadi** (see below) in Mashhad while attending a memorial service for Iranian human rights lawyer **Khosrow Alikordji**, who was found dead in **suspicious** circumstances.

The **UAE** maintained its zero-tolerance policy against any form of criticism, weaponising its legal system to silence critics. In March, authorities **upheld** an additional 15-year sentence against Emirati poet, blogger and human rights activist **Ahmed Mansoor** following an unfair trial (see below). Similarly, authorities continued to unjustly imprison prominent Emirati writer, academic and human rights lawyer Dr **Mohamed Abdullah Al-Roken** at the end of the year (see below). In June, human rights **organisations reported** that two of Al Roken’s sons were detained in April for unknown reasons and held in an undisclosed location without access to a lawyer or family members. In addition, Turkish-Egyptian **poet Abdel Rahman Yusuf Al-Qaradawi continued** to be arbitrarily held without a trial, at an **undisclosed** location, without the ability to communicate with the outside world freely.

WAR, CONFLICT, AND VIOLENCE DECIMATE FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The ‘Twelve-Day War’ between **Iran** and **Israel** in June significantly contributed to a decline in freedom of expression in both countries, with Iran ramping up its censorship and crackdown on online expression and Israel further restricting press freedom. A **journalist** and a media worker, **Nima Rajabpour**, editor-in-chief of Iran’s State TV news channel Khabar, and **Masoumeh Azimi**, a secretary, were **killed** in a **premeditated attack** on the Iranian state broadcaster (IRIB) building during a live broadcast. Israel’s deliberate bombing on 23 June of Iran’s notorious Evin Prison Complex in Tehran, where political prisoners, human rights defenders, writers, and government critics are often held, **killed** at least 80 civilians and put imprisoned writers at risk.

In response to the hostilities, Iranian authorities shut down **internet** services and interrupted communications across the country for several days, severely disrupting access to information for millions of Iranians. Additionally, both pro-Israel and pro-Iran accounts **unleashed** a massive wave of online misinformation and disinformation on social media platforms. Fuelled by AI-generated **content**, they were **utilised** to manipulate facts and influence narratives about the conflict.

Over a year since the downfall of the al-Assad regime in **Syria**, grave concerns arose at **reports** of the transitional Syrian government’s **security forces** and affiliated militia groups’ systematic persecution, possibly including **war crimes**, of religious and ethnic minorities across the country. The attacks coincided with a horrendous rise in **hate speech** and identity-based incitement to violence directed against minorities, creating a suffocating environment for freedom of expression, particularly among the Alawi, Druze, and Kurdish communities.

The impact on writers has been profound: many have lost their homes and personal belongings, including books and libraries, while others were forced into self-censorship, fearing for their lives. Writers who survived the attacks on the Druze and Alawi communities described to PEN International the horrific levels of violence committed against their families and communities. Widespread kidnapping or hostage taking of civilians, including women; systematic looting and pillaging; destruction of property; and the extrajudicial killings of civilians, have resulted in a climate of fear and polarisation that has paralysed their ability to work and creatively express themselves.

For example, writers from the city of Suwayda reported widespread abductions and killings of civilians; lootings; and destruction of property during attacks on the governorate in July. One writer reported that their family members survived a knife attack only to be shot later in their home by transitional government forces and affiliated militias, who ransacked their house. Another reported that their home was completely burned down, including their library, while their family members were forced to flee their homes. A writer who survived the attacks on coastal areas in March 2025 told PEN International that they witnessed most of their neighbours being slaughtered inside their homes and in the streets due to their religious background. Their home and shop were ransacked, and their car was torched by the interim government forces and affiliated militias.

ONGOING GENOCIDE AND APARTHEID AGAINST PALESTINIANS

Deplorably, **Israeli** authorities continued their attacks against Palestinians throughout the year despite agreeing to two ceasefire deals in Gaza in [January](#) and in [October](#) 2025, with over 600 Palestinians killed between October and February 2026. In September, the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) [found](#) that Israeli authorities had extensively and systematically demolished civilian infrastructure and continuously enlarged areas under their control, reaching 75% of the Gaza Strip by July 2025, and also that Israeli policies and actions in the West Bank demonstrated intent to forcibly transfer Palestinians, expand settlements and annex the whole West Bank, with significant implications on Palestinians' ability to practise their right to self-determination across the OPT.

Testimonies of Palestinian writers across the OPT given to PEN International corroborated the growing body of evidence demonstrating concerted and systematic efforts by the Israeli authorities to erase the Palestinian people and their cultural heritage across the OPT, and especially in **Gaza**. PEN International concurs with the [UN](#) and [legal experts](#), sister [human rights organisations](#) and [genocide scholars](#) that Israel is perpetrating genocide against Palestinians in Gaza.

Since October 2023, Israeli authorities continued to conduct continuous, coordinated attacks on Palestinians and their culture, including the killing of writers, academics, artists, and cultural workers and weaponising vital humanitarian aid, including food and medicine. Israeli bombardment has resulted in widespread and systematic destruction of most of Gaza's infrastructure, while forcibly displacing writers, artists, and cultural workers several times over and destroying their homes and private properties. Israeli authorities have employed a

policy of widespread and systematic arbitrary detention of Palestinian writers, artists and journalists, while subjecting them to torture and other ill-treatment, including starvation, to silence any criticism of their actions and spread a climate of fear. Israel briefly detained and deported hundreds of activists from around the world who were aboard flotillas bringing aid to Gaza in July and October. They included Bangladeshi photographer **Shahidul Alam** (see Asia/Pacific case list).

Israel's widespread, systematic and ongoing [destruction](#) of cultural heritage sites, [schools](#) and educational facilities, coupled with the enormous loss of lives, including of [writers](#), artists, [journalists](#), academics, cultural workers and activists, and enforcement of conditions causing irreparable damage to Palestinians and their culture, corroborates PEN International's concerns about concerted efforts to erase the Palestinian people and their culture in the Gaza Strip.

Testimonies of writers in Gaza describe the irreversible loss of most of its tangible and intangible cultural heritage, including independent cultural spaces. Many writers reported the loss of their personal libraries, built over decades amid suffocating restrictions, especially on the importation of books. They also talked extensively about the irreversible loss of indigenous writings by Gazan writers that were printed and distributed in Gaza.

Writers in Gaza reported significant impacts on their and their families' health, including weight loss, constant fatigue and weakness, an inability to recover from simple infections like flu or stomach bugs, severe back and joint aches. Several reported respiratory and digestive problems. They also described a lack of medicines and medical equipment for chronic and life-threatening conditions and diseases, including diabetes and heart conditions, as well as disability. The Israeli targeting of water infrastructure across Gaza has left the entire population with limited or no access to clean drinking water, pushing many writers to resort to drinking underground water, which is usually contaminated with sewage.

In June, PEN International [called](#) for an immediate arms embargo on all parties to the conflict, and particularly a ban on the export of all weapons used by Israel in its persistent and intentional targeting of Palestinian civilians across the OPT. The organisation also reiterated its call for an immediate and permanent ceasefire; unfettered access to humanitarian aid in Gaza; the release of all hostages and arbitrarily detained Palestinians; and an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestine, including the systems of racial segregation and apartheid imposed there.

GOOD NEWS

PEN International [welcomed](#) the release in September of British-Egyptian writer and activist **Alaa Abd El-Fattah** after almost six years in arbitrary imprisonment, as well as the [release](#) of French-Algerian novelist **Boualem Sansal** in November.

2026 CASE LIST MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

EMBLEMATIC CASES



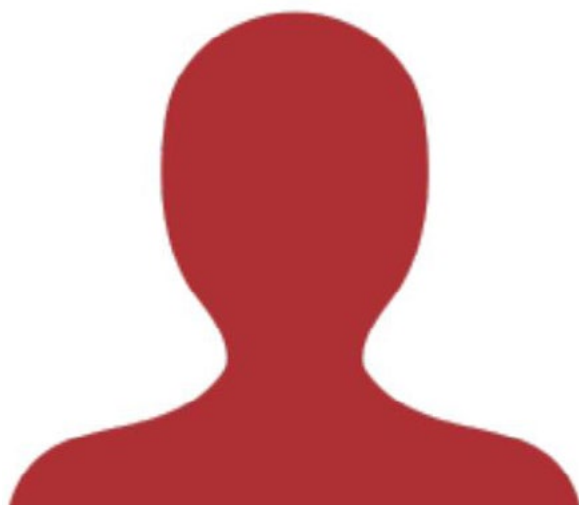
ALGERIA

Mohamed TADJADIT

Poet imprisoned in relation to his views and activism

Mohamed Tadjadit is an Algerian poet and activist known for his impactful poems performed by the Hirak movement in Algeria that overthrew former president Abdelaziz Bouteflika. Known as ‘the poet of the Hirak’, Tadjadit has faced years of harassment, arbitrary arrests, and imprisonment for his poetry and activism.

Mohamed Tadjadit. Photo Credit: Lydia Saidi



UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Mohamed Abdullah AL-ROKEN

Writer, academic, and human rights lawyer imprisoned for to his dissenting views

Mohamed Al-Roken is an Emirati writer, academic and human rights lawyer known for his expertise in human rights law and counter-terrorism. He has been arbitrarily imprisoned in the UAE since 2012 for his calls for democratic reforms and elections in the country.

ALGERIA

IMPRISONED

Mohamed TADJADIT

Poet and activist Mohamed Tadjadit remained in prison by the end of the year.

Mere weeks after his October 2024 release under a Presidential pardon, Tadjadit was arrested on 16 January 2025, after participating in a campaign around the hashtag #Manich Radi/#JeSuisPasSatisfait. Just four days later, he was sentenced to five years in prison and a DZD200,000 (approximately USD1500) fine after conviction of trumped-up charges, including ‘compromising national unity,’ ‘insulting a constituted body, and ‘public display of publications likely to harm the national interest’ under Articles 96, 79 and 146 of the Penal Code, in connection with his online writings and criticism of the government. On 22 May 2025, an Algiers Court upheld his conviction but commuted his prison term to one year.

On 11 November 2025, Tadjadit was sentenced to another five years in prison, on baseless terrorism-related charges related to his January 2024 arrest, including ‘encouraging acts of terrorism and sabotage,’ ‘using media and communications technology to support terrorist acts,’ and ‘incitement to unarmed gathering.’ At the end of the year, Tadjadit and 12 other activists were facing further bogus charges, including ‘conspiracy against the state,’ for their social media posts and private digital communications, which can carry the [death penalty](#) under Articles 77 para 1, 78 and 79 of the Penal Code. Tadjadit has been repeatedly [arbitrarily detained](#) by Algerian authorities for his poetry and activism, facing at least eight arrests and five convictions since 2019 (see [Case List 2020](#) and [2025](#)).

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 Boutafliqa 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. In November 2025, Tadjadit [won](#) the 2025 Index on Censorship Freedom of Expression Award in the Arts category.

Update

On 16 January 2026, the Algiers Appeal Court commuted Tadjadit’s November 2025 five-year sentence to three years in prison and a DZD100,000 (approximately USD750) fine.

RELEASED

Boualem SANSAL

Award-winning French–Algerian writer Boualem Sansal, 81, was [released](#) in November 2025 after receiving a presidential pardon from President Tebboune, following a year in prison on national security charges. Sansal [arrived](#) in Germany on 12 November 2025 to receive medical treatment following his release.

In March 2025, a court in Dar El Beida, near Algiers, [sentenced](#) Sansal to five years in prison and a fine of DZD500,000 (approximately USD3,730) after he was convicted of national security-related charges. He had declared a hunger strike in February in protest over his unjust imprisonment, as his health had been [deteriorating](#) in custody. In July, after a hearing where he appeared in court without legal counsel, an appeal court [upheld](#) his prison sentence and fine, rejecting the Algerian prosecutor’s attempt to [double](#) Sansal’s jail term.

Sansal had been arrested upon arrival at Algiers airport in November 2024, and his whereabouts remained unknown for over a week, during which he was denied access to his family and legal counsel (see Case List [2025](#)).

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.

EGYPT

DETAINED

Ashraf OMAR

Cartoonist and translator Ashraf Omar, arrested in July 2024, remained held in pre-trial detention on bogus national security charges including 'participating in a terrorist group to achieve its objectives,' and 'financing terrorism through funds, data, and information' at the end of the year. Though in November 2025, the SSSP [referred](#) Omar, and others, to trial. No date had been set by the end of the year.

Security forces detained Omar from his home on 22 July 2004, [physically assaulting him](#) and confiscating his personal belongings. Two days later he appeared before the SSSP who ordered his pre-trial detention, which has been extended numerous times (see case list [2024](#)). Egyptian authorities have not adequately investigated his allegations of ill-treatment.

Born on 8 May 1968, Ashraf Omar is a [cartoonist](#) and [translator](#) who has 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.

Galal EL-BEHAIRY

Poet and lyricist Galal El-Beairy continued to be held without trial at the end of the year. He has reportedly been tortured in detention. In August, the SSP [brought](#) new charges against El-Beairy in two separate cases, which PEN International believe to be fabricated and intended to further extend his unjust incarceration. The new charges, based solely on a 2023 report by National Security officers, include 'disseminating fake news' and 'joining and aiding a terrorist organisation'.

El-Beairy was arrested on 5 March 2018 at Cairo International Airport while attempting to travel abroad, in connection with his lyrics for exiled Egyptian singer Ramy Essam's song [Balaha](#) that was deemed insulting to the president. Charges related to the song were 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, *ضرباً لنا نأوسن ريخ* *The Finest Women on Earth*. He has been held arbitrarily since expiry of his sentence in July 2021, facing new charges of 'disseminating false news' and 'joining a terrorist group' (see [Case Lists 2018 – 2025](#)).

In protest at his continued detention and detention conditions, El-Beairy has undertaken several hunger strikes, including between 16 June and 14 August 2025. El-Beairy'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, heart problems and a tumour in his jaw. His mental health has severely deteriorated in recent years and he has attempted to [commit suicide](#). PEN International has constantly [campaign](#)ed for his release, including by highlighting his detention on the [2019 Day of the Imprisoned Writer](#).

Galal El-Beairy, [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).

Ismail ALEXANDRANI

Writer, journalist and researcher [Ismail Alexandrani](#) remained in pre-trial detention at the end of the year. He was [arrested](#) on 24 September 2025 at a security checkpoint in Matruh governorate and is facing charges brought by the SSSP in Cairo to face charges of 'joining a terrorist group,' 'disseminating false news,' and 'using an online platform to spread terrorist ideas' in relation to 17 of his [Facebook posts](#).

Alexandrani served a seven-year prison term between 2015 and 2022 for 'leaking military secrets' and 'membership of a terrorist group' following a grossly unfair trial, according to information received by PEN International and was subjected to harassment in connection with his work (See [Case Lists 2015 - 2025](#)). PEN International has consistently campaigned for his [release](#) and an end to the harassment.

[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.

JUDICIAL HARASSMENT

Ahmed DOUMA

Poet, writer and activist Ahmed Douma continued to be judicially harassed by Egyptian authorities throughout 2025. In April 2025, Douma was [charged](#) with 'disseminating false news inside and outside the country' and released on EGP10,000 (approximately USD210) bail, in relation to his online posts. Similarly, in July, the SSSP [charged](#) him with 'disseminating false news undermining state prestige' under Article 80(d) and 102 bis of Egyptian Penal Code in relation to his commentaries on different issues, including deadly road traffic accidents, fees on humanitarian aid to Gaza, criticism of pro-government media figures, and for sharing a cover of the Arabic [translation](#) of Juan José Millás' novel [Tonto, muerto, bastardo e invisible](#). In September 2025, the SSSP [charged](#) Douma with 'disseminating false news' in a new case concerning a series of online posts about his experience in Egyptian prisons. Both times, he was later released on bail of EGP50,000 (approximately USD1055).

In December 2025, security officials at Cairo International Airport [prevented](#) Douma from boarding a flight to Lebanon, citing a previously undisclosed travel ban of which Douma was unaware. He had been unable to travel since his release from over a decade in [arbitrary detention](#), due to the refusal of authorities to issue him with a new passport. Douma's writings have also been banned (see Case Lists [2022-2025](#)).

Ahmed Douma, born on 11 September 1985, is a poet, writer and activist known for highlighting the situation of detainees in Egypt. He [wrote](#) about his experiences, dreams, and aspirations during his prolonged imprisonment in his 2012 poetry collection [علاط كتوصي](#) (*Your voice is Heard*). His second collection of poetry written in prison, [يلدريك](#) (*Curly*) was published in 2021.

Update

On Monday, 19 January 2026, Douma was detained overnight. The SSSP released him on bail of EGP100,000 (approximately USD2,120),

on suspicion of ‘disseminating false news inside and outside the country’ in relation to his online posts about the alleged [assault](#) of imprisoned activist Mohamed Adel.

RELEASED

Alaa ABD EL-FATTAH

Alaa Abd El-Fattah, an award-winning writer and Honorary Member of English PEN, was [released](#) from prison after receiving a presidential pardon in September 2025, following almost six years of [arbitrary detention](#), and joined his family in the UK, where his mother, [academic](#) and activist Leila Soueif had gone on an [extended hunger strike](#). The Egyptian government continued to deny him access to a lawyer and UK consular visits. In April 2025, PEN International [raised](#) grave concerns over his deteriorating health in custody and repeatedly [called](#) for his release, including [urging](#) the UK government to do more. Coinciding with his arrival in the UK, an online campaign called for Abd El-Fattah’s [deportation](#) in relation to historical tweets, which he unequivocally [apologised](#) for.

[Arrested](#) in September 2019, Abd El-Fattah was [sentenced](#) to five years in prison in 2021 on trumped-up charges including ‘joining an illegal organisation’, ‘spreading false news,’ and ‘misusing social media’ after a grossly unfair trial before the Emergency State Security Court, but his release date was not scheduled until January 2027, as his pre-trial detention period was not taken into account. While held, Abd El-Fattah was [subjected](#) to torture and other ill-treatment and held in deplorable prison conditions without access to a lawyer and British consular visits as well as [prohibited from accessing books and newspapers](#), all of which [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. He had previously served another [unjust](#) five-year sentence for participating in a peaceful protest in 2013 (see [Case Lists 2014-2025](#)).

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.

IRAN

IMPRISONED

Narges MOHAMMADI

Writer, journalist, human rights defender, and Nobel Peace laureate Narges Mohammadi was [assaulted and detained](#) in December 2025, almost a year after her 2024 release on medical grounds. Throughout the year, Mohammadi continued to face lengthy prison time for 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, imposed as reprisals for her human rights activism across over 14 years (see Case Lists [2012](#), [2017](#) and [2019-2025](#)).

On 12 December 2025, Mohammadi was violently [detained](#) in Mashhad city while attending a memorial service for Iranian human rights lawyer [Khosrow Alikordi](#), found dead in [suspicious](#) circumstances earlier that month. Mohammadi called her family on 14 December, sounding unwell and informing them that she had been hospitalised twice due to injuries sustained from plain-clothed agents who hit her with batons on the head and neck and threatened to kill her. Mohammadi suffers from severe ill-health, including a neurological disorder that can result in seizures, temporary partial paralysis, and a pulmonary embolism for which she has been denied essential medication.

Mohammadi, born on 21 April 1972, is an Honorary Member of the Danish, Belgian, Norwegian and Swedish PEN centres. Her book, *White Torture* (Oneworld, 2022), documents the use of solitary confinement against women prisoners in Iran. 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](#).

Update

In February 2026, after an unfair trial, Mohammadi was transferred to a prison in Zanjan province after receiving additional [sentences](#) for national security charges, totalling seven-and-a-half years' imprisonment, two years of internal exile and a two-year travel ban.

HARASSED

Sarvenaz AHMADI

Iranian translator, journalist, and human rights defender Sarvenaz Ahmadi continued to be subjected to a travel ban and was unable to hold book launches in 2025. She was conditionally released on 29 December 2024 after serving about 19 months of a six-year prison sentence on [national security charges](#) believed to be linked to her writings and reporting on the 'Women, Life, Freedom' mass protest movement triggered by the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini in custody on 16 September 2022 (see Case List [2025](#)).

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).

JUDICIAL HARASSMENT

Mahvash SABET

Teacher and poet Mahvash Sabet remained free on medical grounds throughout 2025, facing potential return to prison to serve an unjust 10-year prison sentence imposed in 2022 over unfounded 'espionage' charges related to her activities on behalf of the Baha'i minority in Iran. She remained subject to a travel ban, preventing her from visiting family abroad. 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](#) and [2022-2025](#)). Due to inadequate medical care in prison, her health continued to deteriorate in 2025.

Sabet, who suffers from pulmonary fibrosis and heart disease among other illnesses, was temporarily released from prison in December 2024, after undergoing open-heart [surgery](#), in order to recover at home. 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 [اثر \(A Tale of Love – More Prison Poems\)](#) and [یقشاع تی اکج \(Love Story\)](#) were published in 2019 and 2021. She is an honorary member of the 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 long [campaigning](#) for her release, including through an [appeal](#) on the 2025 International World Poetry Day.

MOROCCO

HARASSED

Soulaiman RAISSOUNI

Journalist, editor and writer Soulaiman Raissouni continued to face harassment in 2025 through [smear](#) and [defamation](#) campaigns by pro-government [media](#) and individuals following his release from prison on 29 July 2024. He also remained unable to work in Morocco. The increasingly hostile environment in Morocco led to him leaving the country to live in self-exile.

Before his release, 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](#). Prior to his arrest in 2020, Raissouni had been [targeted](#) for surveillance by Pegasus spyware over a two-year period, starting in 2017 (See Case Lists [2021- 2025](#)).

On one occasion in March, Raissouni and his wife, Moroccan screenwriter Kholuod Mokhtari, were [featured](#) in a cartoon riding a paper boat that was raising the Pride flag and heading to England from Tunisia. The cartoon was accompanied by a long commentary using derogatory language against him, including referring to him as 'abnormal in his choices and orientations,' as well as being a 'drunk.' On another occasion in September, he was [depicted](#) in another cartoon, along with others, inside a 'Trojan donkey' and labelled a 'traitor.'

[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 remained a target of harassment by Moroccan authorities for his critical writings and views on the government. In 2025, he remained unable to access his assets or leave the country after a ban imposed on him in October 2020, which he has protested, despite the fact that he was included in a royal pardon in September 2024 which brought his prosecution that had begun in 2015 to an end. He has previously been subjected to smear [campaigns](#) by pro-government media and remains unable to resume his job as history professor, from which he was sacked in September 2022 (see [Case Lists 2020 - 2025](#)).

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

BRIEF DETENTION

Mahmoud MUNA

Writer and bookseller **Mahmoud Muna** was [arrested](#), along with his nephew Ahmad Muna, during a raid by Israeli police on their bookstore in East Jerusalem on 9 February 2025. Plain-clothed police officers [stormed](#) the bookstores and confiscated about 250 books on 'suspicion of inciting terrorism against Israel.' During the raid, officers used Google Translate to search through the books' titles, and [seized books](#) based on their cover designs, colours, or titles that contained 'Palestine,' 'Palestinian,' or 'Gaza.'

The two men faced accusations of 'incitement' and 'disturbing public order'; however, police failed to provide evidence to support the accusations. Following two

days in detention, they were both released on bail without charge, placed under house arrest for five days, and ordered not to appear at their bookstore for 20 days.

About a month later, on 11 March, Israeli officers [raided the bookstore](#) again without a search warrant and [confiscated](#) about 50 books, including titles on the work of British artist Banksy, and others by the Israeli historian Ilan Pappé and the US academic Noam Chomsky. Muna's brother Imad, the co-owner of the shop, was arrested and taken for interrogation by the police. He was later released without charge on the same day and most books were returned.

Mahmoud Muna, born in 1982, is a writer and a bookseller who runs Jerusalem's renowned Educational Bookshop and The Bookshop at the American Colony Hotel which holds a prominent position in the city's literary scene. He is the co-editor of *Daybreak in Gaza: Stories of Palestinian Lives and Culture*, published by Saqi Books a [week before](#) the first raid on the bookstore. Muna has been active in many cultural initiatives across Palestine and writes regularly on culture and politics for various media outlets, including [Haaretz](#) and [The Independent](#), with bylines in the [London Review of Books](#) and [Jerusalem Quarterly](#), among others.

HARASSED

Ahed TAMIMI

Writer and prominent activist Ahed Tamimi remained under a travel ban throughout the year and is unable to reach her university for study.

Held for 24 days between 6–30 November 2023 until her release as a 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 Israeli soldiers enforce on Palestinians at checkpoints across the West Bank. According to her family,

Tamimi remains subject to a travel ban and is unable to travel to pursue her university studies abroad, which resulted in her losing a scholarship opportunity in 2025. 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 the co-author (with Dena Takruri) of [They Called Me a Lioness: A Palestinian Girl's Fight for Freedom](#) (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

In 2025, Professor Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian continued to face physical assaults, harassment, and [smear](#) due to her expression, [academic work](#) and [criticism](#) of Israeli authorities. These included threats and attacks by Israeli settlers on several occasions, including a physical assault by a settler in East Jerusalem. No trial date was set in relation to charges brought against her after her 2024 arrest in connection with her criticism of Israeli oppression of Palestinians, including the genocide conducted against Gazans (see [Case List 2025](#)).

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 the Global Chair in Law at Queen Mary University of 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).

RELEASED

Mustafa SHETA

Researcher, journalist and theatre manager Mustafa Sheta was released on 30 March 2025, following more than 15 months in arbitrary detention without charge or trial. Sheta was arrested from his home on 13 December 2023 after Israeli forces broke into the Freedom Theatre during a raid on the refugee camp and destroyed its offices. An Israeli military court [ordered](#) his administrative detention for six months without any charges on 31 December 2023; the order was renewed several times until his release (see Case List [2023/2024-2025](#)).

Sheta told PEN International that he was held in poor conditions in Gilbo'a prison. He was denied contact with the outside world and detained in inhumane conditions, with limited access to food, medicines and clothing. He was assaulted by prison guards on several occasions, including in January 2025, when prison guards stormed his cell, assaulted him and his cellmates, and forced them out to the prison yard to sleep on their stomachs with their hands behind their backs while it was raining. He also faced constant threats, intimidation and humiliating measures throughout his detention, including prison officers forcing an inmate to shave his hair..

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

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

IMPRISONED

Mohamed Abdullah AL-ROKEN

Dr Mohammad Abdullah Al-Roken continued to be [held arbitrarily](#) serving a life sentence after he was convicted in July 2024, 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 and has been subjected to [torture or other ill-treatment](#). On 4 March 2025, the State Security Branch of the UAE's Federal Supreme Court [upheld](#) his and the other defendants' convictions.

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 – 2025](#)). Most, if not all, including Al-Roken, were previously convicted of similar vague charges in the notorious '[UAE 94](#)' trial. Many of this group, 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 Lists [2014-2025](#)). PEN International has long campaigned for his release, including by highlighting his imprisonment in the [2021 Day of the Imprisoned Writer](#) campaign.

Human rights organisations [said](#) in June that two of Al Roken's sons were detained in April for unknown reasons and held in an undisclosed location without access to a lawyer or family members.

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 prison terms totalling 25 years in 2025 on vaguely worded national security charges (see Case Lists [2014-2025](#)). 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.

[Arrested](#) on 20 March 2017, Mansoor was later sentenced later to 10 years' imprisonment, three years of surveillance and a fine after conviction in an unfair trial 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.' The sentence was upheld on appeal.

In July 2024, 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.

In September 2025, the UN Secretary-General's annual report on reprisals against those who cooperate with 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, 2021, 2022 and 2024.

Poet, blogger and human rights activist Ahmed Mansoor was born on 22 October 1969. Before his arrest, Mansoor's literary analysis and poetry were [published](#) in many Emirati newspapers and a collection of his poem [مددع ندم دعاباً](#) *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, [@penmena.bsky.social](#) and [penintmena](#) (Facebook).

Egypt

VARIOUS: *escalating attacks on freedom of expression*

Action:

January 2025: Statement: [Egypt: Joint submission to the UPR on the crackdown on dissent and violations of freedom of expression](#)

February 2025: Joint Letter: [Egypt: Call on UK to lead international action on Egypt at UN Human Rights Council](#)

June 2025: Statement: [Egypt: PEN International urges Egyptian authorities to release arbitrarily imprisoned writers](#)

Palestine

VARIOUS: *protection of writers, journalists, and others in the war in Gaza*

Action:

January 2025: Statement: [OPT/Israel: Ceasefire in Gaza, but escalating violence in the West Bank threatens fragile truce](#)

June 2025: Statement: [OPT/Israel: There is no safe place in Gaza. Impose an arms embargo and end the genocide now](#)

August 2025: Statement: [OPT/Israel: The assassination of Aljazeera journalists is another desperate attempt to hide the truth about Israel's crimes in Gaza](#)

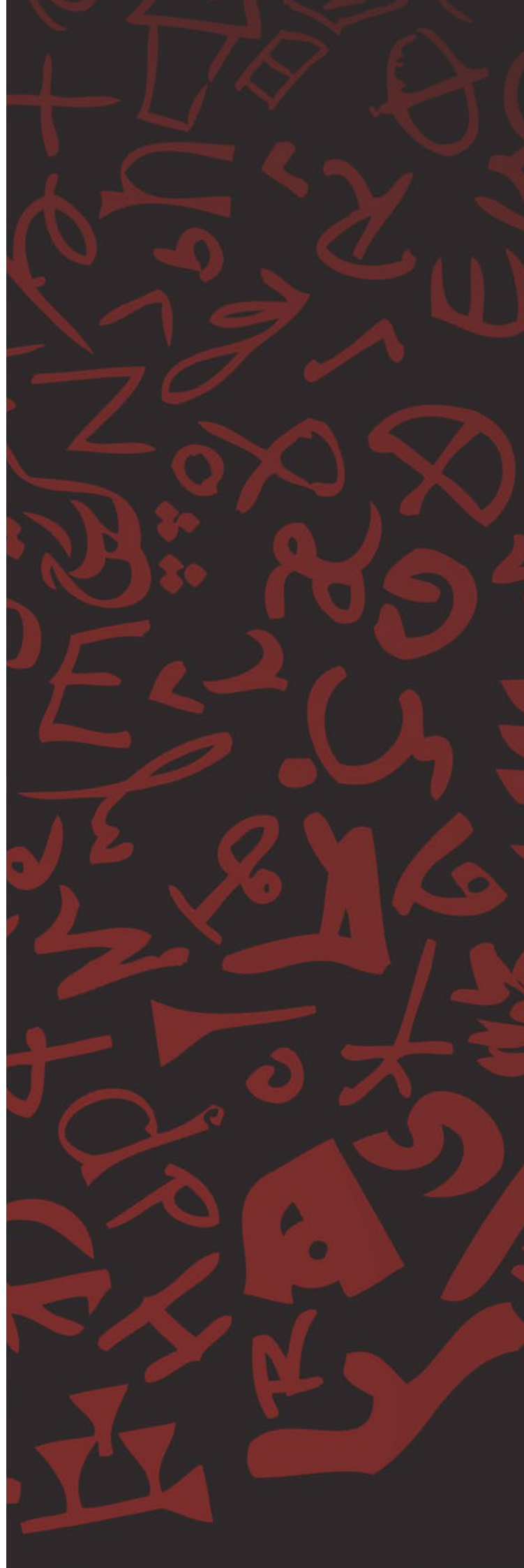
October 2025: Statement: [OPT/Israel: Gaza ceasefire must be followed by steps to ensure accountability and the right to self-determination for Palestinians](#)

United Arab Emirates

Various: *continued arbitrary detention of writers*

Action:

April 2025: Joint letter: [United Arab Emirates: Urgent Appeal for the Immediate Release of Abdulrahman Yusuf Al-Qaradawi](#)



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As this Case List was being prepared, civilians in the MENA region, particularly Iran, were paying the highest price in yet another conflict which is also throwing shock waves into economies around the world, the outlook for freedom of expression is between a rock and a hard place. Authoritarian governments, often stoking conflict for their own ends, are seeking to quell dissent on the one hand and on the other, Big Tech and other extractive industries run by brologarchs are hell bent on maintaining their bottom line, often through the deliberate spread of disinformation and lobbying for repression of protests. The role of PEN International in calling out authoritarian practices that quell peaceful dialogue and conflict resolution, and impede the free flow of information, as well as persecuting individual writers, is at its most critical since the end of the Second World War.

At the same time, the rise and rise of generative artificial intelligence poses a new and growing threat to freedom of expression and the creative industries. AI-generated disinformation and 'deep fake' content severely harm the right to access information and fuels racism, xenophobia, gender-based violence and transphobia, while the very act of creation is undermined by the unregulated use of the technology that is robbing writers and artists of their intellectual property and ultimately their livelihoods. PEN international's continued efforts to use literature and the influence of writers for good to counter this disturbing trend are all the more needed in this new world order. The organisation could usefully consider what additional efforts it could take to support the right to create, as well as to counter the worrying rise in transnational repression.

To these ends, PEN International makes the following recommendations, in addition to those in previous Case Lists:

TO FOSTER PEACE

To states and multilateral institutions

- Make every possible effort to strengthen dialogue between States and peoples in order to reach consensual agreements, reinforcing both multilateralism within the United Nations and the traditional principles that have for decades inspired diplomatic practices between nations, so that the rule of law, human rights and, in particular, freedom of expression are universally respected.
- 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 and on educational and cultural infrastructure, to ensure the delivery of adequate humanitarian aid to those in need, and to prioritise rebuilding the cultural and education sectors once conflict has ended.
- Ensure accountability and the right to remedy for international crimes, including genocide and apartheid, as well as for human rights violations.
- 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.

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.
- Implement effective measures to protect writers from threats, harassment, physical attacks and death and to counter impunity for such actions.
- End attempts to silence writers overseas through transnational repression tactics.
- End the practice of enforced exile, including through 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 effective measures to address the growing use of SLAPPs, in line with PEN International's 2023 resolution on countering SLAPPs as these pose a significant threat to freedom of expression and public participation.
- Ensure a comprehensive, fair and systematic response to all writers and creatives fleeing persecution in line with PEN International's 2024 resolution on [protection mechanisms for writers](#).

TO ENHANCE THE CULTURAL ROLE OF MINORITISED COMMUNITIES

Recognise and celebrate the role of minoritised 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, anti-LGBTQ+ and anti-women's rights sentiments;
- Facilitating mother tongue education, which enables members to celebrate their life, language, culture and heritage;
- Promoting translation of literatures to and from minoritised languages;
- Protecting the cultural heritage of minoritised communities;
- Ending the persecution of any writer solely on the grounds of their background and protecting the right of writers from minoritised 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 right of all, individually or with others, to safely speak out, organise, associate, peacefully protest, 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.

TO WRITERS AND ARTISTS

- Use storytelling to foster understanding, dialogue and empathy, encouraging readers to imagine more humane and compassionate futures.
- Champion the ideal of one humanity living in peace and equality, challenge cruelty and injustice, and remind political, economic, social, and cultural leaders of their responsibility for social justice in their communities. This can be done not only through confrontation but through the quiet power of a well-told story.
- Support all forms of justice including environmental, climate, racial, gender and intergenerational justice which are indivisibly intertwined with freedom of expression. Censorship, persecution, and exclusion of minoritised voices are forms of structural violence that violate human rights law and standards.
- Reject hateful and racist rhetoric. Cruelty, dehumanisation, repression, or intolerance must be exposed as unworthy.
- Hold governments accountable, not only to their supporters but to all people under their jurisdiction. Advocate for fairness, generosity, empathy, and justice, both within and beyond national borders.
- Defend truth and help persecuted writers by translating, publishing, and spreading their words that have been silenced by autocratic regimes.

OUR FUNDING: YOUR SUPPORT IS CRUCIAL

PEN International's Case List 2026, and all the extensive, ongoing work that underpins it, including our wider programmes supporting writers at risk and addressing urgent threats to freedom of expression, **only happen because of donations** from a truly diverse **community of supporters** around the world.

We are so grateful to every one of our supporters!

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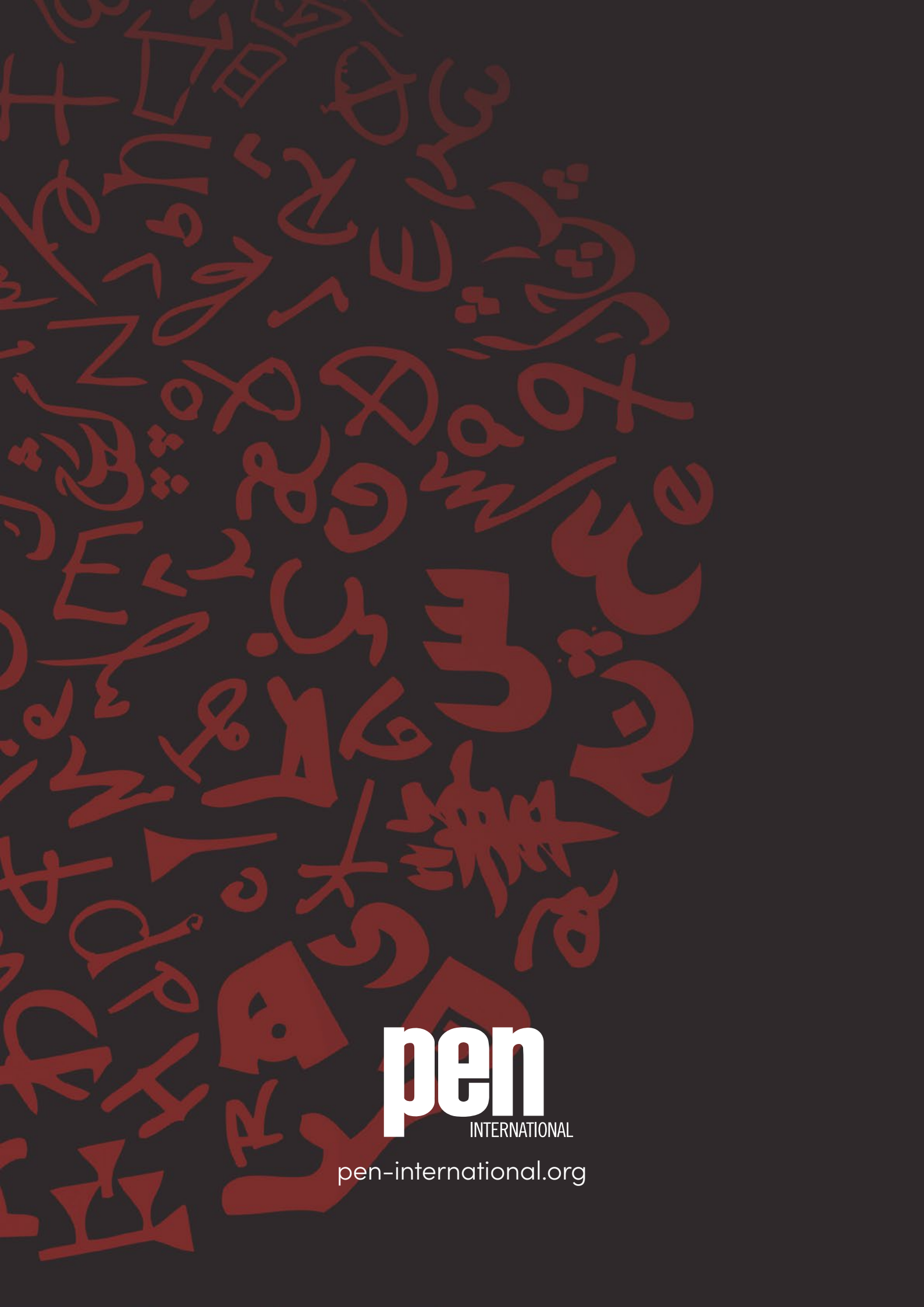
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