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## **PERSECUTED, BANNED, CENSORED AND JAILED WRITERS RECEIVE GRANTS**

### **30 writers from 17 countries recognized by Lillian Hellman/Dashiell Hammett Funds**

Five years ago at the request of the trustees of the estates of Lillian Hellman and Dashiell Hammett, the Fund for Free Expression, now known as the Human Rights Watch Free Expression Project, began a program to implement Hellman and Hammett's wishes that their legacies assist writers around the world who have been victims of political persecution. This year the grants totaled approximately \$175,000, awarded to 30 writers from 17 countries.

In the four previous years of the program, more than 100 writers have received grants, including writers like Liu Qing, a Chinese journalist who was imprisoned and tortured for his repudiation of the Cultural Revolution; Mariella Sala Eguran, a Peruvian novelist who was targeted for assassination by Sendero Luminoso; and Nasir Khaksar, an Iranian author who after eight years in prison under the Shah was sentenced to death by the current regime and fled to the Netherlands.

The 1994 recipients include Nguyễn Chi Thiên, a dissident Vietnamese poet who has spent the majority of his life in prison for writing poems critical of the Communist regime; the Iranian novelist Shahrnush Parsipur, whose books about the challenges women face in Iran have been banned since 1989; and the courageous editors of two Kenyan news magazines which have been closed and harassed for criticizing the president and writing stories about government corruption.

Short biographies of this year's recipients follow:

**Dodojon Atovullo** (Tajikistan), journalist, was fired from his position as head of the arts and literature department on the weekly communist youth paper for writing articles that did not follow the party line. Unable to find work at other papers, Atovullo founded *Charogi Ruz*, an independent weekly, which quickly gained a popular following. When paramilitary groups started stalking him, Atovullo fled to Moscow, organized *Charogi Ruz* in exile and has been sending papers back to Tajikistan through informal channels.

**Tiến Thanh Đình** aka To Thuy Yen (Vietnam), poet, is known for the intellectual integrity and courage with which he

supported freedom of expression and opposed censorship by the military regime. Imprisoned by the communists three times, totaling more than thirteen years, Mr. Dinh recently emigrated to the United States and is living in St. Paul, Minnesota. His poems have a sense of drama of life and the vulnerability of man facing war and death.

**Njohu Gatabaki** (Kenya) is publisher of *Finance*, a monthly news and financial journal which he founded in 1984. After six years of success covering business and financial issues, *Finance* broadened its content to include articles by activists who were critical of President Moi and advocates of multi-party democracy. During 1991 and 1992, *Finance* was the subject of confiscations and Gatabaki was charged with sedition. In 1993 the attacks became unrelenting. By mid-year, *Finance* was closed down and its printer, Fotoform Limited, was forced out of business.

**Doan Viet Hoat** (Vietnam), professor of education at Van Hanh Buddhist University, has been imprisoned twice. The first detention for unspecified political charges lasted 12 years. When released in 1988, Dr. Hoat joined a few prominent intellectuals to put out a newsletter for which he was arrested and charged with attempting to overthrow the government. Now serving a 15-year prison term, he has been moved three times within the last year in an effort to restrict contact with him. The newsletter, Freedom Forum, was actually a collection of typewritten sheets passed around by hand. Some of the writing criticized government policies and proposed political reform, but none advocated violence. From prison, Dr. Hoat has called on the government to release all political detainees, implement civil freedoms, and hold fair elections which permit all citizens to run for office regardless of their political stand.

**Huang Xiang** (China), poet and essayist, has been a rebel since his youth. Throughout the Cultural Revolution, he was either imprisoned or subjected to "supervision of the masses." In 1979, he was arrested with Democracy Wall activists. In 1983, he was charged with rape for living with an 18-year old woman less than half his age, whom he later married. In 1986, after holding unofficial poetry readings in Beijing, Huang was sentenced to three years in prison for "disturbing social order." His history of political imprisonment makes it difficult for him to find regular work.

**Hwang Suk-Young** (South Korea), author of novels and stories, was arrested in April 1993 when he returned home after more than four years in exile. He was charged under the National Security Act for making unauthorized trips to North Korea in 1989 and with receiving \$250,000 for alleged espionage activity. Hwang says the money was the fee for rights to make a movie based on one of his novels. He is serving an eight-year prison sentence.

**William M. Mandel** (United States), author of books on the Soviet Union, is still hampered by the effects of his 1953 refusal to name names to the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee. His career was on the rise when McCarthy accusations caused him to be blacklisted and frequently cited as a "communist" along with Dashiell Hammett. He remained active in the peace movement and is currently writing his autobiography.

**Mohammed Nasheed** (Maldives), free lance journalist, has been arrested and harassed repeatedly over the past five years. In the late 1980s, Nasheed and a group of young journalists started a general interest weekly which quickly gained a popular following, but its criticism of government corruption and irreverent comments about local officials caused the government to close it down. Accused of false reporting in articles he wrote for papers in India and Sri Lanka, Nasheed was sentenced to six months house arrest. While under house arrest, he was charged with maintaining illegal contacts with foreign journalists. He was also charged with participating in a bomb plot and transferred from house arrest to prison where he was tortured and held in atrocious conditions. Released in 1993, he is receiving physiotherapy for spinal damage and failing eyesight.

**Taslima Nasrin** (Bangladesh), poet and novelist, has been threatened with death threat by fundamentalist groups for her feminist views and has difficulty getting protection from the government which has banned one of her books and confiscated her passport. In response to international pressure, the government placed police guards around her house, but still denies that she is in danger. Nasrin is suing to get her passport back.

**Plus Nyamora** (Kenya), journalist, launched his own magazine, *Society*, in 1988. Within two years, it was covering sensitive political stories and had a circulation of 30,000. Official harassment began when the police seized 10,000

copies of the February 1991 issue which carried interviews with advocates of multi-party democracy. Police impounded all copies of a January 1992 issue which effectively forced *Society* out of print for several months. The plant managers at its printer were temporarily deported, another printer was hit by arson (also Gatabaki's printer), and fear of reprisals has made it hard to find any place to print the magazine. Police harassment of vendors caused circulation to drop to 6,000 and advertisers refused to buy space. Mr. Nyamora, his wife and three staff members were arrested and charged with sedition. *Society* is the subject of many libel suits, most of them brought by public officials.

**Shahrunush Parsipur** (Iran), novelist, was vehemently attacked and twice imprisoned following publication of her collected stories, *Women Without Men*, in 1990. After two years she was tried and acquitted; following the trial, her publisher's offices were bombed. Her books have not been officially banned but publishers are now unwilling to take the risks that publishing entails. The ministry even "advises" publishers against such ventures. None of her books appear in bookstores but pirated photocopies are available on the black market.

**Irene Petropoulou** (Greece), journalist, is editor of *AMPHI*, Greece's oldest gay and lesbian magazine. She was convicted of publishing "indecent and offensive" material for running a brief item in the personal ad section asking heterosexual men to leave lesbians alone "because they have nothing in common in bed." Petropoulou is appealing the sentence — five months in prison and a \$300 fine — which she characterizes as a back door effort by the government to harass the gay community.

**Jorge Pomar Montalvo** (Cuba), writer and translator, a Communist party member who fought in Angola, was expelled from the party after he co-signed the "Declaration of Intellectuals" which called for the release of political prisoners, lifting travel restrictions and direct elections to Parliament. In November 1991, he was attacked and beaten at a meeting in the house of poet Maria Elena Cruz Varela and arrested shortly afterwards. He was held incommunicado, charged with "defamation" and "illegal association" and sentenced to two years in prison after a summary trial. Released in December 1993, he has a one-year appointment at the European Translation Committee in Germany.

**Bozor Sobir** (Tajikistan), poet, has written hundreds of poems and many political and historical essays which have been widely published in Tajik newspapers. He was an outspoken critic of the Soviet government and then of the Tajik government which emerged after independence. Sobir was arrested in March 1993 and charged with inciting ethnic hatred; charges based in part on "Mixing Blood and Flour," an allegedly anti-Russian poem. "Mixing Blood and Floor" conveys Sobir's anti-imperial view and perhaps unfairly attributes social ills in Tajikistan to Russia but not in a way that casts ethnic slurs. He was convicted, sentenced and immediately paroled. With international protection, he was able to emigrate to Moscow.

**Nguyễn Chí Thiện** (Vietnam), poet, was jailed four times for a total of 27 years, spending many of them in solitary confinement. During incarceration, he contracted tuberculosis, malaria and stomach ulcers leaving him in precarious health. Thiện's poems have criticized the Communist regime, denounced its atrocities and immortalized the people's suffering. They advocate peace, freedom and democracy. Thiện now lives with an elderly sister in the suburbs of Hanoi. He is under strict police surveillance and orders not to have contact with foreigners or to accept any money for his writings.

**Wu Xuocan** (China), editor, journalist and essayist, was a participant in the 1989 Democracy Movement who fled to Hainan Island after the June 4 massacre. He was captured in December, held in solitary confinement until the trial two years later, convicted of "counterrevolutionary propaganda and incitement" and sentenced to four years in prison. He was released three months ahead of schedule, a few days before the International Olympic Committee was due to vote on whether the 2000 games should be located in Beijing. Wu remains unrepentant, insisting he was wrongly tried and convicted.

In addition to the above-mentioned recipients, thirteen award winners must remain anonymous because of the dangerous circumstances in which they and their families are living. They include writers from China, Myanmar, Sudan, Turkey, Uzbekistan and Vietnam.

The annual grants are announced each spring. The Hellman-Hammett funds also give small emergency grants from time to time throughout the year, usually to writers with an urgent need to leave their country.

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***Human Rights Watch Free Expression Project (formerly the Fund for Free Expression)***

Human Rights Watch is a nongovernmental organization established in 1978 to monitor and promote the observance of internationally recognized human rights in Africa, the Americas, Asia, the Middle East and among the signatories of the Helsinki accords. Kenneth Roth is the executive director; Cynthia Brown is the program director; Holly J. Burkhalter is the advocacy director; Gara LaMarche is the associate director; Juan E. Méndez is general counsel; and Susan Osnos is the communications director. Robert L. Bernstein is the chair of the Board and Adrian W. DeWind is vice chair. Its Free Expression Project was established in 1975 to explore the relationship between censorship and global social problems, investigate and analyze restrictions on freedom of expression in the U.S., and document curbs on freedom of expression in other countries. Gara LaMarche is the director; Marcia Allina is the program associate; Lee Tucker is the W. Bradford Wiley Fellow; Lydda Ragasa is the associate. Roland Algrant is the chair of the advisory committee and Peter Osnos is the vice chair.