

BANNED, CENSORED, HARASSED AND JAILED WRITERS RECEIVE GRANTS

48 writers from 23 countries recognized
by Lillian Hellman/Dashiell Hammett Funds

The 1995 recipients of grants from the estates of Lillian Hellman and Dashiell Hammett include Fatos Lubonja, an Albanian writer imprisoned for seventeen years after the government found his writings were "decadent;" Father Ricardo Rezende, a Brazilian parish priest and author whose work with landless rural workers has put his name on a "death list;" and Aysenur Zarakolu of Turkey, in prison for "advocating separatism" because she published a book that discussed the problem of the country's Kurds.

The Hellman/Hammett grants are given annually by Human Rights Watch to writers all around the world who have been targets of political persecution. The grants, now in their sixth year, began after trustees of the Hellman and Hammett estates asked the Human Rights Watch Free Expression Project to devise a program to implement the writers' wishes that their legacies be used to assist writers in financial need as a result of political persecution. This year, the grants were awarded to 49 writers from 24 countries, totaling approximately \$175,000.

Short biographies of this year's recipients follow:

Fikret Baskaya (Turkey), an economist, professor and leading intellectual on the Kurdish question, was a regular columnist for *Ozgur Gundem*, the now-banned partisan pro-Kurdish newspaper. Following publication of an academic text in which one chapter is critical of the government's policy on the Kurds, Baskaya was convicted of "disseminating separatist propaganda," fined, and sentenced to twenty months in prison under Article 8 of Turkey's 1991 Anti-Terror Law.

Kenneth Best (Liberia), journalist, founded and directed *The Daily Observer*, Liberia's first independent newspaper, from 1981-90. The paper was closed five times, and Best was imprisoned three times. Best left

Liberia in April 1990 for a visit to the United States to buy equipment for the newspaper, and was unable to return home because of the war. He and his family went first to Ghana and then to the Gambia where he started the first independent paper in that country. After the military coup in the Gambia in July 1994, Best was deported back to Liberia. He sought refuge in the United States, where he is building support for a return to Liberia and for publishing *The Daily Observer* again.

Lindsey Collen (Mauritius), novelist, whose book *The Rape of Sita* was attacked by the prime minister as "an outrage against public and religious morality." The police were ordered to confiscate all copies of the book, but the publisher withdrew them and resisted, saying that as the books were not exhibited for sale, there was no right to confiscate them. The books were then distributed privately. The controversy led to anonymous death and rape threats against Collen.

Colson Dormé (Haiti), print and radio journalist, was arrested and tortured by Tonton Macoutes following the junta's closure of Tropic FM in February 1993. After his release, Dormé tried to work in hiding but death threats forced him to flee to Venezuela. Dormé returned to Haiti in December 1994.

Murad Esenov (Turkmenistan), scholar, editor and journalist, has been forced into exile in Sweden as a result of his work in publishing *Turkmen Ili*, an independent journal covering cultural, political and human rights issues in Turkmenistan. Published in Russia and distributed clandestinely in Turkmenistan, *Turkmen Ili* has made Esenov a constant target of vilification in Turkmenistan's state-controlled press. In October 1994, following an unsolved attack on a Moscow street, during which Esenov was badly beaten, the contents of his briefcase were taken. They later turned up in the possession of the Turkmenistan KGB and were used to accuse him of plotting the assassination of the country's president.

Farhang Farrahi (Iran), journalist, was jailed three times under the Shah. During the turmoil following the Shah's overthrow, Farrahi fled to the United States, where he took up opposition to the Islamic Republic of Iran. He frequently writes and appears on radio and television criticizing the treatment of writers, artists and intellectuals in Iran – for example, protesting the recent death in prison of the renowned dissident writer Ali Akbar Saidi Sirjani. Farrahi co-signed the declaration by Iranian exiles in Defense of Salman Rushdie.

Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin (Ethiopia), poet and playwright, has translated and adapted the works of Shakespeare, Moliere and Brecht for Ethiopian theater. He is especially known for Ethiopian historical dramas. His writings have subjected him to intense political persecution by the current government which opposes his historical and linguistic perspectives. In 1993, Gabre-Medhin was dismissed from his position at the Ministry of Culture, and his wife was forcibly retired by the National Bank. The performance of a new play was interrupted by people reportedly sent by the government, who beat up the actors and stage crew and closed down the production. The official media have denounced him; eleven of his plays have been banned. Political repression is not new to Gabre-Medhin. Some of his plays were banned by Emperor Haile Selassie, and the succeeding military junta which imprisoned him for directing an adaptation of Brecht's *Mother Courage* also banned and censored much of his work.

Guo Lusheng (China), the originator of the "Misty" school of poetry, is considered one of China's most influential underground poets. When Guo was in the army during the Cultural Revolution, poems he had written five years earlier were discovered and found to be "reactionary." The Public Security Bureau criticized him and he was attacked by Mao's wife Jiang Qing. Under this pressure, Guo had a nervous breakdown and was discharged from the army. He recovered, but had a relapse following the crackdown on the Democracy Wall movement. He has been in a mental hospital almost continually since that time.

Ismet G. Imset (Turkey), journalist, is an expert on the Kurdish situation and the activities of extremist groups operating in Turkey. His articles for the *Turkish Daily News* and *Turkish Probe* were reproduced in the Foreign Broadcast Information Daily Reports, and his books on the PKK are a primary research source for scholars. Imset participated in a series of briefings in Europe and the United States on an "off the record" basis but his remarks were leaked to Turkish authorities, producing a number of articles in rightist Turkish papers defaming him as a traitor. The likely arrest and trial for his writings and the ever present risk of assassination for journalists writing on the Kurdish question in Turkey, forced Imset to seek asylum in Great Britain.

Vasila Inoiatova (Uzbekistan), poet, is a member of the banned Birlik Popular Movement and of the non-governmental Uzbekistan Human Rights Society. Her political views have caused the government to prevent publication of her work. A poem titled "Last Letter to the President" was deemed an "infringement on the honor and dignity of the president." In 1993, she was sentenced to two years in prison but released under amnesty, apparently a concession to international protests. Although she has been forced to curtail most of her political activities, she and her family are still harassed by the intelligence service.

Mumia Abu-Jamal (United States), journalist, was convicted of shooting and killing a police officer, which he continues to deny, claiming that he was charged in retribution for his prior support and coverage of defendants who had been accused in the shooting death of another policeman. There are serious questions about the fairness of Jamal's trial, particularly the heavy reliance during the sentencing phase on information about his political associations and beliefs. Publication of a book he has written about life on death row is being challenged by the police union, and prison officials have restricted his access to the press. Jamal is currently on death row in Pennsylvania while his conviction is being appealed.

Anastasia Karakasidou (Greece), scholar, has been subjected to threats of death and rape as a result of her work on the Macedonian community in Greece. Her doctoral dissertation discussed the Greek government position that claims national homogeneity and denies the existence of a distinct Macedonian minority. Greek media and a Greek-American newspaper promoted the attacks. Police protection has not been provided.

Hadi Khorsandi (Iran), satirist, poet and journalist, has been under death threat from Islamic militants since 1979. Khorsandi, who had moved to London in 1976, returned to Iran after the Islamic Revolution of 1979 but soon had to flee back to London when a mob of Khomeini supporters demanded that he be hanged for writing satirical articles critical of the revolution. In exile, he founded and edits a satirical newspaper covering political and social issues.

Giorgi Khoshtaria (Georgia), scholar and former Minister of Foreign Affairs, has been repeatedly harassed by local police in an apparent attempt to silence his criticism of the government. He has been arrested twice and beaten. He reports that armed militia entered his home without presenting a search warrant and has received anonymous phone calls threatening his children.

Iusup Kuliev (Turkmenistan), journalist, has been subject to unrelenting government persecution, starting in 1992 when he was fired from *Esh Kommunist*, reportedly because the paper failed to follow government censorship guidelines. He found work with the Turkmen Service of Radio Liberty but was prevented from leaving Turkmenistan to intern in Munich, and his phone service was cut off whenever he would call Radio Liberty. The secret service began threatening his relatives because of their association with him. In October 1994, Kuliev was taken from his home by KGB agents, severely beaten, and detained for seventeen days. During that time he was sent to a psychiatric clinic where it is alleged he was given drugs which damaged his

speech and memory. Kuliev is now held under house arrest on suspicion of participating in an attempt to assassinate President Niyazov and is subjected to almost daily interrogations by local authorities.

Aicha Lemsine (Algeria), novelist and journalist, has been branded a fundamentalist sympathizer by the military dictatorship because she stood up for civil liberties and advocated dialogue with Islamists. This caused her husband, a career diplomat, to lose his job. Meanwhile as a result of her advocacy of women's rights, the Islamists have called her "the most dangerous woman in Algeria." She refuses on principle to wear a veil, so cannot leave her house in Algiers for fear of assassination. Her books have been banned in Algeria since 1976, and since 1989, she has been banned from broadcasting or publishing her news commentaries.

Li Shizheng - pen name, Duoduo - (China), poet, also writes short stories and essays. In 1989, after Li attended an international festival at the invitation of Poetry International, it became clear that it would be dangerous for him to return to China in the post-Tiananmen climate. From abroad, he has been publishing articles about the situation in his homeland, and would be severely punished if he returned to China now.

Liao Yiwu (China), poet, was arrested in March 1990 with four colleagues after compiling and distributing a videotape commemorating the victims of the 1989 Beijing massacre. Liao is also the author of an audio tape which criticizes the Chinese leadership for ordering the army to fire on protesters in June 1989. Both tapes were distributed in an effort to break the government's news blockade and convey the truth about the massacre. Liao's colleagues were only briefly detained, but he was held until February 1994. Reliable sources report that Liao was brutally treated in prison and suffers cranial damage as a result of repeated beatings.

Fatos Lubonja (Albania), poet, novelist and essayist, was arrested in 1974 when the state secret police found his dissident writings which they labeled "decadent." He was charged with "agitation and propaganda" and sentenced to seven years in prison. During his fifth year, while at forced labor in a copper mine, he was accused of "counter revolutionary activity." In a secret trial, his sentence was extended by sixteen years and his wife and two daughters were sent to internal exile. Most of his literary work was destroyed. He was released in 1991 after seventeen years in prison. He immediately began work as a human rights activist and published political essays criticizing the new politicians of having the same mentality as the communists.

Ma Shaohua (China) wrote a book describing the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe which was banned soon after it was published in 1993. On the eve of a conference which he helped organize on Eastern Europe and China, he was arrested and questioned for over thirty hours. Ma and his conference partners then organized the "Human Rights Association." After he staged a public protest demanding the release of Gao Ping'an, a worker arrested for resisting eviction from his home, Ma was arrested again and detained for eight months. Released without charge, he remains under strict surveillance.

Morteza Miraftebi (Iran), poet and essayist, published a collection of short stories in 1975 which portrayed government and religious leaders as greedy, irresponsible, brutal and corrupt. The Shah banned the book and arrested Miraftebi, but yielded to pressure from the Iranian Writers' Association and released him. After the revolution in 1985, Miraftebi wrote an article saying that the Islamic regime and the state-run media were responsible for Iran's political and social failings. As a result, he was forced to leave Iran. In exile, he founded and edits a literary magazine which promotes political and press freedom in Iran. In response to an article he published in 1992, the *Keyhan Hawaii*, an Iranian state-run newspaper printed a rebuttal in which Miraftebi was sentenced to execution and dismemberment. Recognizing the harassment and fear for his life, the United States granted Miraftebi political asylum.

Albert Musin (Uzbekistan) is one of only a few journalists who writes critically about Uzbekistan's repressive

regime. KGB threats forced him to flee to Moscow but even there he is not safe. In November 1993, unknown assailants, thought to be paid by the Uzbek Security Service, broke into the apartment he shared with two other Uzbek journalists (see Iadgor Obid, page 6), beat them and stole material from their files. Mr. Musin still suffers from head injuries sustained in the attack.

Bonar Tigor Naipospos (Indonesia), journalist and student activist, was arrested in 1989 and sentenced to eight-and-a-half years in prison on charges which included expressing Marxist views in his writing. He was also charged with distributing a book written by banned Indonesian author Pramoedya Ananta Toer, who received a Hellman/Hammett grant in 1990. After nearly five years in prison, Naipospos was released conditionally, which means he could be reincarcerated at any time without trial.

Nasim Narzullaev (Tajikistan), poet, taught school and worked as a journalist. During the spring of 1992, as a leader of the Tajik opposition, Narzullaev frequently read his poems to political supporters to inspire solidarity. Facing criminal charges which were never made specific, he hid in another part of the city when armed men came looking for him. In 1993, he fled to Moscow, where he received refugee status.

Nguyễn Văn Ho - pen name, Nguyễn Ho - (Vietnam), essayist, was born in South Vietnam under French rule. As a young man, he joined the Viet Minh opposition and then the Communist Party. Arrested in Saigon for labor organizing activity, Ho spent four years in jail and was released as an exchange prisoner to North Vietnam. He rose in the Party hierarchy, serving in many high level positions while remaining a persistent and vocal internal critic of the Party's economic policy, human rights record and corruption. In 1986, Ho joined other disaffected Communist loyalists to found an independent veterans organization which produced a newspaper featuring his writings. After four years of increasingly open criticism, the government seized control of the organization and closed the paper. Ho was arrested and held under house arrest until May 1993. He was rearrested in early 1994 for circulating a biographical essay which described his involvement and eventual disillusionment with the Communist party. He now lives in Ho Chi Minh City under house arrest.

Nguyễn Văn Thuan (Vietnam) poet and journalist, has written books on Vietnamese literature, political theory and biographies and edited an anthology of Vietnamese poetry. He was imprisoned by the Communists in 1975 when they forced tens of thousands of South Vietnamese writers, artists and intellectuals into re-education camps. Released in 1983, he resumed writing under pen names. He was arrested again in 1990, held for nearly a year without charges, then convicted of "working to overthrow the people's government" and sentenced to ten years in prison and five years under house arrest. In May 1993, he received a second sentence of eighteen years (later reduced to twelve) for his part in publishing *Freedom Forum*, an underground newsletter that advocated peaceful political reform. Thuan suffered a serious stroke in February 1994. After much delay, he was moved to a hospital and has partially recovered. He remains in the hospital under the threat that he will be sent back to the labor camp if he resumes political activity.

Iadgor Obid (Uzbekistan), poet, turned to journalism as his primary means of literary expression when his works were banned in Uzbekistan. Forced from his homeland as a member of the Birlik (Unity) Popular Movement, Obid is a frequent contributor to the Uzbek Service of Radio Liberty. In November 1993, unknown assailants broke into the Moscow apartment he was sharing with two other Uzbek journalists (see Albert Musin, page 5), beat them and stole material from their files. Obid continued to report for Radio Liberty and in March 1994 was stopped in the street by two men who asked if he worked for Radio Liberty. When he said yes, they attacked him and fled. Both attacks are thought to have been instigated by the Uzbek State Security Service; no suspects have been apprehended.

Qin Yongmin (China) wrote unofficial journals for the Democracy Wall movement and is the principal author

of the Peace Charter, a document modelled on the Czech Charter 77, which advocates peaceful political reform in China. Qin has been repeatedly detained since his first arrests in 1978 and 1981 during the crackdown on the Democracy Wall movement. In April 1993, police searched Qin's home and confiscated papers, including poetry and his draft autobiography. Throughout the spring and summer of 1993, he was harassed — detained and questioned by police, his phone tapped and mail stopped, and warned not to talk about his opposition to Beijing's bid for the 2000 Olympics. In November he was arrested and sentenced without trial to a two-year reeducation term for "disturbing social order."

Father Ricardo Rezende (Brazil) has written poetry, articles and non-fiction books about life and violence in the Amazon region, where he is a parish priest. He is also a human rights activist who works with landless rural workers helping to fight the use of forced labor by big landowners. Father Rezende, who has been receiving death threats since the late 1980s, was on a "death list" with five of his friends, all of whom were murdered in 1994.

Ken Saro-Wiwa (Nigeria), poet, novelist and television playwright, is a founding member of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). Saro-Wiwa has been in prison since May 1994, his fifth arrest in two years, part of the government campaign to halt the Ogoni efforts to protect their homelands from exploitation by multinational oil companies. After seven months in incommunicado detention without access to a lawyer or medical treatment for a heart condition, Sara-Wiwa was charged with murder and is being tried by a special tribunal which bypasses the regular court system's guarantees of due process.

Alexandra Sviridova (Russia) is a journalist and filmmaker whose investigative reporting expressed pro-democracy, anti-totalitarian views and exposed rights abuses and corruption under the Communist regime. After filing a report which identified former KGB agents who continued to hold government positions, Sviridova began receiving telephone and in-person threats to her life, culminating in a tear gas attack in March 1993. This caused her to flee with her son to New York City. She was granted asylum in January 1995.

Koigi wa Wamwere (Kenya), journalist, has also published a novel and a collection of poems, letters and critiques of the Kenyan government. Wamwere has been in detention almost continually since 1990 when he returned from exile in Norway and was charged with treason for articles deemed "seditious" by the state. The current charges of attempted robbery appear to be part of a pattern of harassment of human rights activists. If convicted, he would face a mandatory death sentence.

Wang Ruoshui (China), a journalist and former deputy editor-in-chief of the Communist party's official newspaper, is now writing a book about Mao Zedong's effect on Chinese culture and society. During the Cultural Revolution, Wang was forced to spend long periods in re-education camps for writing articles which displeased Mao. He returned to his job as deputy editor of the *People's Daily* in 1977, but was soon in trouble again for contacts he developed during the Democracy Wall movement. In 1983 after publishing a series of articles on humanism, he became a principal target of the Campaign Against Spiritual Pollution, lost his job and could not publish anything under his own name. The political harassment continued and intensified after the 1989 democracy movement.

Xiao Xuehui (China), philosopher, was student editor of an unofficial campus journal associated with the Democracy Wall movement in the late 1970s. Writing about ethics and humanism in the 1980s, she expressed views rejecting Marxist materialism which caused most journals to refuse to publish her work. Xiao was arrested in 1989 and charged with "counter revolutionary propaganda and incitement" for her alleged role in student protests. She lost her job and academic accreditation. Upon release in 1991, Xiao filed a lawsuit to

regain her teaching credentials but the courts refused to hear her case. Xiao has been kept under tight surveillance, her friends are frequently harassed, and she is still prevented from publishing.

Xu Shuiliang (China), political journalist, became one of the principal theorists of the Democracy Wall movement. His contributions to dissident journals led to his arrest in 1981. Though the charges against him were never made public, it is thought he was accused of "joining a counterrevolutionary group" and of "counterrevolutionary propaganda and incitement." Xu was released in May 1991 after serving a ten-year prison term. He continues to be harassed and has been unable to find a job.

Aysenur Zarakolu (Turkey), editor and publisher of Belge Press, was imprisoned in 1993 under Turkey's 1991 Anti-Terror Law for "advocating separatism" by publishing *The Republican Popular Party's Program (1931)* and *The Kurd Problem* by Ismail Besikci (1991 Hellman/Hammett recipient). She was also fined 42 million Turkish lira. Four more cases are pending against her, including one for the translation of the French book *The Armenian Taboo*. She was arrested in 1982 for ignoring orders of the military dictatorship by publishing *Documents on the Old Left*. In 1984, she was held for six weeks for employing "leftist personnel."

Zhou Guoqiang (China), a published poet, lawyer and veteran Democracy Wall activist, was sentenced to three years "re-education through labor," an administrative penalty which requires no trial, reportedly for printing "inciting" t-shirts, writing "anti-government" articles which he "sent to Hong Kong using an unauthorized fax machine," and holding an "illegal press conference." From labor camp, Zhou has filed a legal challenge to his sentence. His wife, Wang Hui, who has been detained several times in connection with Zhou's activities, is helping him with the lawsuit. She is under constant surveillance.

In addition to the above-mentioned writers, eleven grant recipients must remain anonymous because of the dangerous circumstances in which they and their families are living. They include writers from China, Burma, Indonesia, Iran, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan and Vietnam.

The annual grants are announced each spring. In the five previous years of the program, more than 160 writers have received grants totaling more than \$1 million. 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

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. It is supported by contributions from private individuals and foundations worldwide. It accepts no government funds, directly or indirectly. Kenneth Roth is the executive director; Cynthia Brown is the program director; Holly J. Burkhalter is the advocacy director; Ann S. Johnson is the development director; Gara LaMarche is the associate director; Juan E. Méndez is general counsel; Susan Osnos is the communications director; and Derrick Wong is the finance and administration 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 and to document and oppose curbs on freedom of expression. Gara LaMarche is the director; Marcia Allina is the program associate; Lydda Ragasa is the associate; Ann Beeson is the W. Bradford Wiley Fellow. Roland Algrant is the chair of the advisory committee and Peter Osnos is the vice chair.