



ICORN international cities of refuge network

2011 Report

1. Progress and achievements

During the year of 2011 ICORN has

- Received and handled 43 writer applications, and placed 17 new writers in ICORN member cities.
- Convened its first ICORN membership meeting in Brussels, co-organised with PEN International Writers in Prison Committee and the Halma organisation
- Continued to develop a democratic and efficient governance structures, including convening three ICORN board meetings
- Further developed the EU multi annual cooperation project Shahrazad – Stories for Life, with the ICORN member cities of Barcelona, Brussels, Frankfurt, Norwich, Stockholm and Stavanger in charge.
- Continued an extensive dialogue with the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European External Action Service on the process of mapping current shelter initiatives for human rights defenders, and exploring possibilities for common future developments within the field
- Further developed the cooperation with PEN International and other major and relevant international literary, human rights and freedom of speech organisations.
- Promoted itself at major book fairs and festivals in Europe and beyond

Furthermore, the ICORN Administration Centre in Stavanger has in 2010

- Continued to identify, qualify and work with persecuted writers from all over the world, potentially to be hosted in upcoming ICORN member cities.
- Continued the work to recruit new ICORN member cities in Europe and beyond, as well as working with current member cities, extending and improving the communications and collaborations between the cities and between the cities and ICORN.

2. Problems, challenges, possibilities

2011 continued to be a year of steady growth for ICORN. The following problems and challenges and possibilities were facing the organisation during the year:

Network extension: By December 2011 we were about to pass the amount of counted 40 ICORN member cities. A landmark was reached already in January, when the Mayor of Paris signed the ICORN agreement, bringing maybe the World's Capital of Exile back into the city refuge fold. When cities like Krakow and Reykjavik also joined the network during 2011, commitment to freedom of expression, hospitality and international solidarity was expressed from the very top municipal levels. The Nordic front also continued to develop, with significant engagements especially from Swedish governmental, NGO and municipal actors, concluded through a well visited and visionary city of refuge symposium at the Swedish Academy in Stockholm.

The identity and organisational frames of ICORN was challenged in 2011 not only through the EU driven process of mapping shelter initiatives for human rights defenders. The Freemuse organisation, working globally to monitor abuses of musician's rights to express themselves freely, pointed to a growing need for safe havens also for persecuted artists and musicians.

Immigration: It was still posing big challenges to get persecuted writers out from their present danger zones and into their future ICORN safe havens also through 2011. The ICORN administration centre continued to mobilise an increasing energy and working force towards managing the problems arising in each individual case. It often takes frustratingly long time from a writer is invited to become a city's guest writer, until she finally successfully arrives. The Arab revolutions brought new challenges with regard to "Fortress Europe" in 2011, and the Shahrazad – stories for life prospect for a European Hospitality Tribunal in Stockholm in 2012 never has seemed more timely and to the point.

Finance/funding: When 2010 for several reasons ended with a minor deficit for the ICORN organisation, the result for 2011 was ending solidly over on the positive side. Our major funders from the very start (the Sigrid Rausing Trust, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign affairs) stayed on board, and the Nordic Council committed themselves to long term project support to strengthening and consolidating the ICORN organisation. Still not severely hit by the financial crisis at its Norwegian head quarter, several of ICORN's member cities are striving, especially those in the southern parts of Europe. Some new cities expected to join ICORN in 2011 and 2012 are delaying the process due to financial constraints. The ambitions to recruit member cities also in Africa, Asia and the Americas are still not put on hold, but ICORN has had to continue to adjust plans for extension, awaiting regional, national and international economies to recover.

Effective governance/democratic participation: The development from being a loosely organised network to becoming a proper international organisation was successfully accomplished in 2010, and the process has been brought further and consolidated in 2011. We are still facing challenges with regard to keeping the information channels to all the writers and all the member cities alive and going. Web and email communication are important tools,

but we realise that encounters like the annual general meetings/general assemblies are more necessary than ever for maintaining our goals for the overall development of the organisation. The Malmö guest writer Parvin Ardalan from Iran has taken upon the task to represent the guest writers to the ICORN Board, providing for a more active participation from the writers in the work and activities of ICORN.

The post placement syndrome is still *the* major challenge to our organisation. We are approaching stronger and multiple strategies to answering the crucial “what after” question also through 2011. Only very rarely, a writer can return to her home country after a two year standard ICORN placement. In 2011 we have invested more resources in continuous communication between the writer, her host and the ICORN office from day 1 of her stay, with regard to look actively for alternatives for her post placement life and career.

3. The ICORN Network meeting in Brussels

The first ICORN Network meeting was successfully accomplished in Brussels Thursday 24 - Sunday 27 March 2011. Convening together with PEN International WiPC and Halma under the very professional auspices of the Passa Porta Festival, the participant responses have been unanimously positive.

It started out with the Lord Mayor of Brussels' generous reception at the Town Hall on Thursday 24th, followed by a very impressive and to the point "Forbidden books" performance at La Tentation. A joint opening event sparked it all off on Friday 25th with speakers from all three organisations, the key speaker Tienchi Martin-Liao from the Independent Chinese PEN Centre presented her speak *Is Jasmine a Chinese Flower?* The opening event was followed by separate sessions; ICORN and Europe before, and Promotion and Participation after lunch. A big highlight followed that same evening: The launch of the *Shahrazad - Stories for Life* Letters to Europe project, through a fantastic performance for all senses, explored by a fully packed KVS Theatre.

Saturday 26th started with shared workshops on important and relevant issues, visa & migration, translation & publication, working with the EU, mobility & creativity and freedom of expression, followed by ICORN's last major session, Protection; challenges and expectations. During Sunday 27 March Brussels exploded in a big literary feast with more than 90 Passa Porta festival events at venues all over town. Many ICORN writers were performing, and the ICORN Network Meeting participants had a last chance to gain food for thought and afterthought before returning back home.

governmental and inter-governmental levels for the ICORN organisation. As we have entered 2011, the development is on a track where it seems the EU tends to aim for building mainly on already existing structures when implementing the shelter cities initiative, leaving a seemingly broad opening for ICORN to play an important role in the further developments.