



ICORN international cities of refuge network

Stavanger, 21 December 2012

Safe, but not Silent Season's Greetings from ICORN

We are coming towards the end of 2012, another exciting, challenging and extraordinary year for the young, but thriving ICORN organisation. Nearly 100 persecuted writers have found a safe haven in an ICORN member city since it all began back in 2006. Starting out with less than twenty cities, the network has been steadily growing, passing 40 this year, and foundations have been laid for more cities to join in months and years to come. Worrysome, though, censorship and repression still prevails throughout the world. ICORN has received 41 applications from persecuted writers in 2012, and 16 writers are brought out of hardships and persecution from Iran, Syria, Zimbabwe, Palestine, Cuba, Egypt, Russia, Eritrea, Iraq, Ethiopia, and into safe havens in our member cities

No doubt, rest and respite are essential components in an ICORN shelter experience. Nevertheless, most ICORN guest writers are looking for new and numerous ways of letting their voices be heard as soon as they are well established in their host city. 2012 is the year when the multiannual EU Culture 2007 cooperation project Shahrazad – stories for life expired, and we use this opportunity to thank the project owners in the cities of Barcelona, Brussels, Frankfurt, Norwich, Stockholm and Stavanger for creating so many platforms and possibilities for guest writers in all ICORN cities to be heard, seen and promoted.

Consequently, 2013 will be a year for ICORN writers, member cities and a wide range of cooperation partners to look for new, inventive and ambitious projects where the unique talents and resources of the visiting writers can be identified and stimulated. One of the main purposes of joining together for the ICORN Network Meeting in Krakow 14-16 May next year, is exactly to facilitate new laboratories of freedom of expression and creativity to emerge. Out of experience, we know that when so many gifted and motivated people from so many corners of the world meet, a lot of creative energies will be released and valuable new initiatives will surface.

Just before 2012 broke loose, a successful city of refuge conference was organised in the Swedish Academy in Stockholm. It resulted in a letter written and signed by all Nordic Ministers of Culture, with a strong urge for their municipalities to strengthen their work for freedom of expression and open more cities of refuge to persecuted writers. In May, Stockholm was venue for an impressively accomplished ICORN General Assembly with more than hundred delegates, guest writers, observers and other guests taking part. Sweden remained an ICORN stronghold throughout the year, with a major ICORN stand at the Gothenburg Book Fair as another highlight. "Your city – A city of refuge?" was the heading, under which guest writers from cities in Denmark, Iceland, Norway and Sweden took part in

28 public events throughout the fair. Which city, which country, which region will take on Sweden's example and become an ICORN stronghold in 2013?

As new cities are joining ICORN in Sweden and elsewhere, sister networks and initiatives are increasingly inspired to look for options to create safe havens for persecuted artists and actors for change so far not being embraced by the ICORN system. In February, the European Commission launched a comprehensive global mapping study of temporary shelter initiatives for human rights defenders (<http://www.icorn.org/articles.php?var=355>), and throughout Scandinavia and beyond, music and arts organisations are working to develop inventive and sustainable shelter solutions for a wider range of artists in distress.

With only a few exceptions, ICORN placements until now have happened in European cities. Many signs indicate this will change when we are looking a few years into the future. In October 2012 ICORN held a workshop in New York City with current and future cooperation partners on how to establish new ICORN shelters in Canada, USA and the Americas. Initiatives for establishing ICORN cities in South Africa are maturing, and distinguished writers Anna Funder, John Coetzee and Thomas Keneally are among those pushing for the Australian cities Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide to join the network.

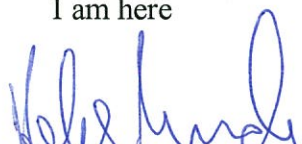
Many have had the possibility of getting a glimpse of ICORN's work by watching Marion Stalens' superb short information film (<http://www.icorn.org/articles.php?var=365>) that was launched this year. The film interestingly also reveals our day to day work within the ICORN Administration Centre. The good news on the eve of 2012 is that thanks to generous funders we are able to extend our work force from the beginning of 2013, hopefully enabling us to receive more applications, place more writers and strengthen our efforts for freedom of expression in the year to come.

ICORN will achieve nothing, though, without the fabulous work performed in and by all our member cities. We will use this opportunity to thank each and everyone for your contribution to protecting and promoting persecuted writers, being it as city coordinators, board members cooperating partners of funders. And finally, our mostly deep felt thanks to all of you whom everything with ICORN is all about: The ICORN guest writers. We thank you for all you have shared with us in 2012, for your bravery and relentless fight for freedom of expression,, and look immensely forward to working with you in 2013. Norwan, ICORN guest writer in Stavanger, gets the last words:

Share love

Love is like air
Everywhere
Breathe it, dear
Don't cry here
Share your tears
Please bear
I am here
I am here


Elisabeth Dyvik


Helge Lunde


Marianne Hovdan