



PROTECT  
PROMOTE  
PARTICIPATE

Photo from the Gezi Park protests in Turkey  
2013. By Iranian photographer Hossein  
Salmanzadeh, ICORN artist-in-residence  
in Dalarna, Sweden 2014-2016.

ICORN is a network of cities and regions  
working to promote freedom of expression  
by offering shelter to writers and artists who  
are at risk as a direct consequence of their  
professional activities.



ICORN

INTERNATIONAL CITIES OF REFUGEE NETWORK

[icorn.org](http://icorn.org)

## WHO IS IT FOR?

Any writer or artist who is threatened or persecuted for expressing their opinions or ideas, through professional and/or artistic work, is invited to apply for an ICORN residency.



### Creative writers

Novelists, poets, screen and playwrights, dramaturgs, filmmakers.



### Non-fiction writers

Journalists, academic writers, essayists, bloggers, prose-writers, technical writers.



### Musicians

Composers and musicians of all genres.



### Editors, publishers and translators



### Artists

Photographers, cartoonists, visual- and performance artists, new media artists.

“More than 170 writers and artists have been offered a residency in an ICORN city. They play a vital role, both in highlighting human rights and free speech violations in their home countries, and in supporting their in-country colleagues. They bring new energy to the host cities; build bridges between countries, cultures, politics and people, and contribute insight and new perspectives to the local debate.”

HELGE LUNDE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ICORN

## WHY DOES THE WORLD NEED ICORN?

“It is our common task to make sure that their voice is heard, and becomes the object of interest for mass media, authorities and ordinary people of the free world.”

DANUTA GLONDYS, KRAKOW CITY OF REFUGE/  
ICORN BOARD MEMBER

Writers, journalists and artists often become the first targets when authoritarian regimes and repressive groups clamp down on freedom of expression. They are on the front line, giving voice to ideas and critique, which frequently challenge existing societal norms and concepts. This makes them subject to censorship, persecution, imprisonment and even death.

As a response, ICORN offers temporary, long-term safe residencies to writers, journalists and artists at risk, so they can continue their work without fear of persecution.

By 2017, more than 60 cities had joined the network, to host writers and artists who face threats and persecution. The Cities of Refuge

are located across Europe, the United States, Canada and Latin America, and will expand towards South Africa, Australia and Asia in the coming years.

The ICORN residency programme, run by the individual member cities, enable writers and artists to continue their work and keep up the fight for freedom of expression, so vital to the health of a free society.

ICORN cooperates closely with PEN International and local PEN centres, as well as a large number of civil society organisations within the fields of human rights, arts and migration, and with public, governmental and intergovernmental bodies, locally and internationally.



Facing severe threats from the Lukashenko government, she lived in exile since 2001, but returned to Belarus in 2011.

Journalist and writer from Belarus.

Awarded The Nobel Prize in Literature 2015 for "her polyphonic writings, a monument to suffering and courage in our time".

ICORN writer-in-residence in Gothenburg City of Refuge 2006-2008.

“The fact that ICORN’s values ultimately boil down to the protection of one writer or artist’s voice, relying on that voice and story to stand for all artists and writers, is what most symbolises ICORN’s importance to me.”

CHRIS GRIBBLE, NORWICH CITY OF REFUGE/ICORN CHAIR OF BOARD

### The Nobel Laureate

I am grateful because, in adversity, I found shelter in Europe and was able to work and to finish my epic: The Encyclopedia of Red Civilization.

My conflict with the authorities in Belarus arises because my books break the myths of Great Russia, of the Great Utopia. They give voice to the ordinary people to whom nobody had ever listened. We see now that the Great Utopia, when people are not mature, results in a blood bath and millions of corpses.

I had to leave the barricades because they are dangerous for an artist. They prevent the artist from seeing and hearing. From the barricade, you only see the target.

Here in refuge, we find not only asylum and the means to work, but also salvation of the soul. We save our capacity to see the world, to see all human nuance.

I came back to my country, but in fact there is even less freedom than when I left. We discovered a new Putin, a strengthened Lukashenko after 20 years in power. I am in full rupture with this power. I cannot express myself on television, and only rarely am able to meet my readers. Even after my Nobel Prize award, the authorities completely ignored me. But now, when I meet people, in shops or cafes, they hold me in my arms and say, “thank you, you saved our dignity”. This makes me happy.

*Excerpt from Svetlana Alexievich’s address to the 2016 ICORN General Assembly in Paris.*

**THE ICORN NETWORK**

**THE ICORN NETWORK**

**HARSTAD:  
CITY OF REFUGE SINCE 2014**

Harstad is the world's first City of Refuge for musicians at risk. It is run by the municipality, with support from Troms County. In Harstad, as in all Norwegian ICORN Cities, the writers and artists arrive as quota refugees.

**PITTSBURGH:  
CITY OF REFUGE  
SINCE 2003**

The ICORN programme has support from the city of Pittsburgh, but is run by City of Asylum/Pittsburgh. They provide sanctuary to multiple writers and artists simultaneously, and run cultural programmes in the community. It is funded by the founders of CoA/ Pittsburgh, city funds and private sponsors.

**PARIS:  
CITY OF REFUGE SINCE 2011**

Anchored in the Mayor's Office, the programme is financed and managed by the city administration, in cooperation with partners within the media, human rights and the cultural sphere.

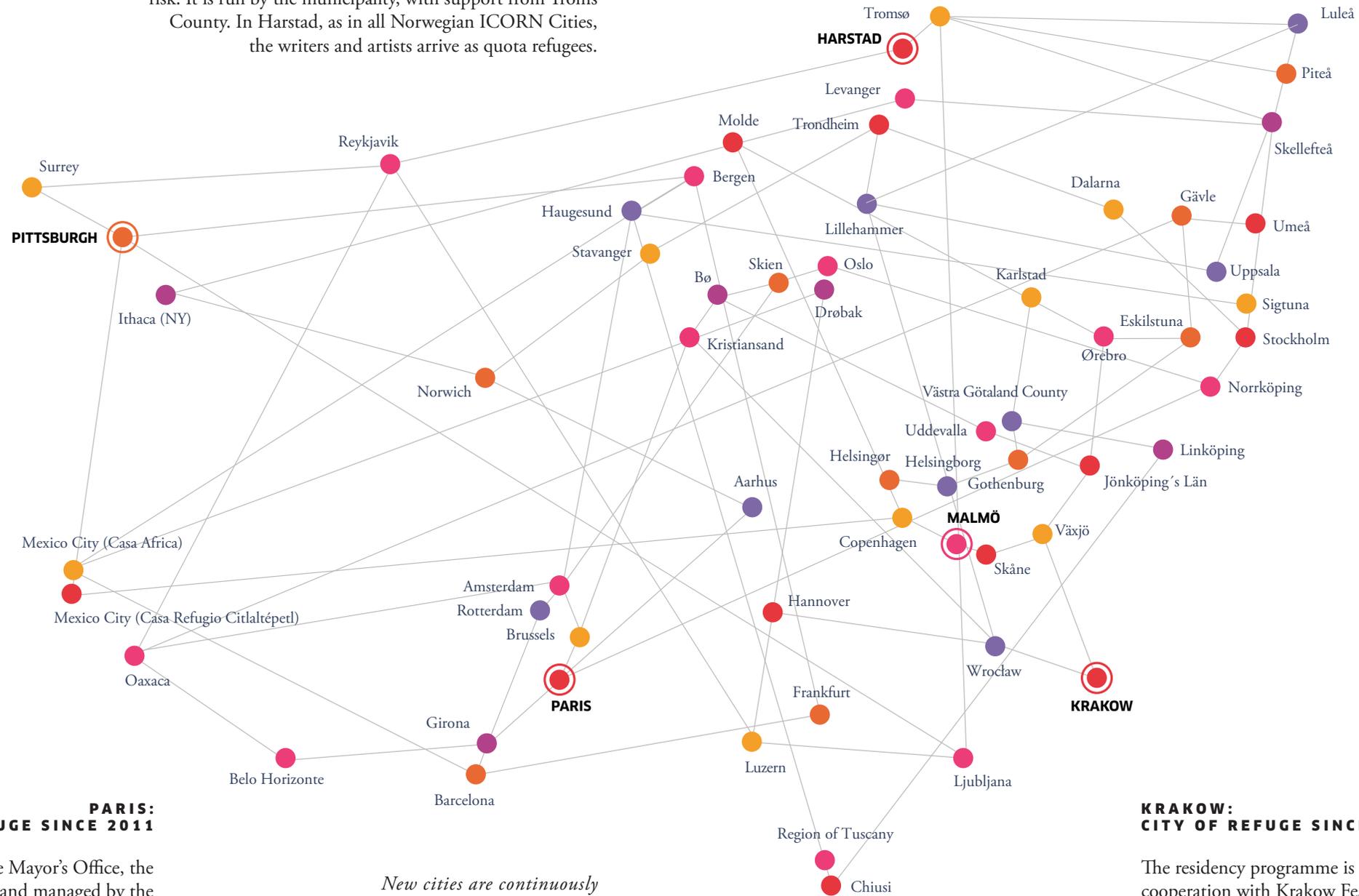
*New cities are continuously joining the network.*

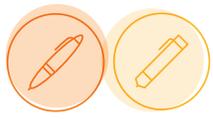
**MALMÖ:  
CITY OF REFUGE  
SINCE 2010**

The ICORN programme is financed and anchored in the cultural department of the municipality, and cooperate with local, national and international cultural actors. In 2014, the city decided to run two residencies simultaneously, one for writers and one for artists/musicians.

**KRAKOW:  
CITY OF REFUGE SINCE 2011**

The residency programme is run by the Villa Decius in close cooperation with Krakow Festival Office, which is part of the city administration that deals with the organisation and promotion of major cultural events in the city.





“What is being protected is my freedom to be irreverent, and freedom of expression, so I should exercise this even more because I enjoy this protection.”

ZINEB EL RHAZOU

### The Charlie Hebdo survivor

She is constantly on the move and under 24-hour guard as one of the most closely protected individuals in France. Zineb El Rhazoui is a Charlie Hebdo journalist who happened to be away on January 7 2015, the day terrorists “avenging the Prophet” massacred her colleagues at the satirical magazine in Paris. She believes she has a duty to defy the Islamists desperate to silence her.

The journalist, born in 1982, co-founded the pro-democracy, pro-secularism movement MALI before joining Charlie Hebdo in 2012. After a series of threats, police intimidation, and arrests by the Moroccan Government, she went into exile in Slovenia.

El Rhazoui was ICORN writer-in-residence in the city of Ljubljana from 2011-2013,

where she co-authored the comic book “The Life of Mohamed” with Charb, the editor of Charlie Hebdo, Stéphane Charbonnier, who was killed in the attack against the magazine.

El Rhazoui, who collaborated on the first issue of the magazine following the attack, has said that she feels she does not have the right to renounce her struggle, or give up her freedom. Due to direct and specific threats to her life, she has been forced to live under strict protection from the police.

She has said that the protection afforded her speaks to the French authorities’ emphasis on the right to free expression.

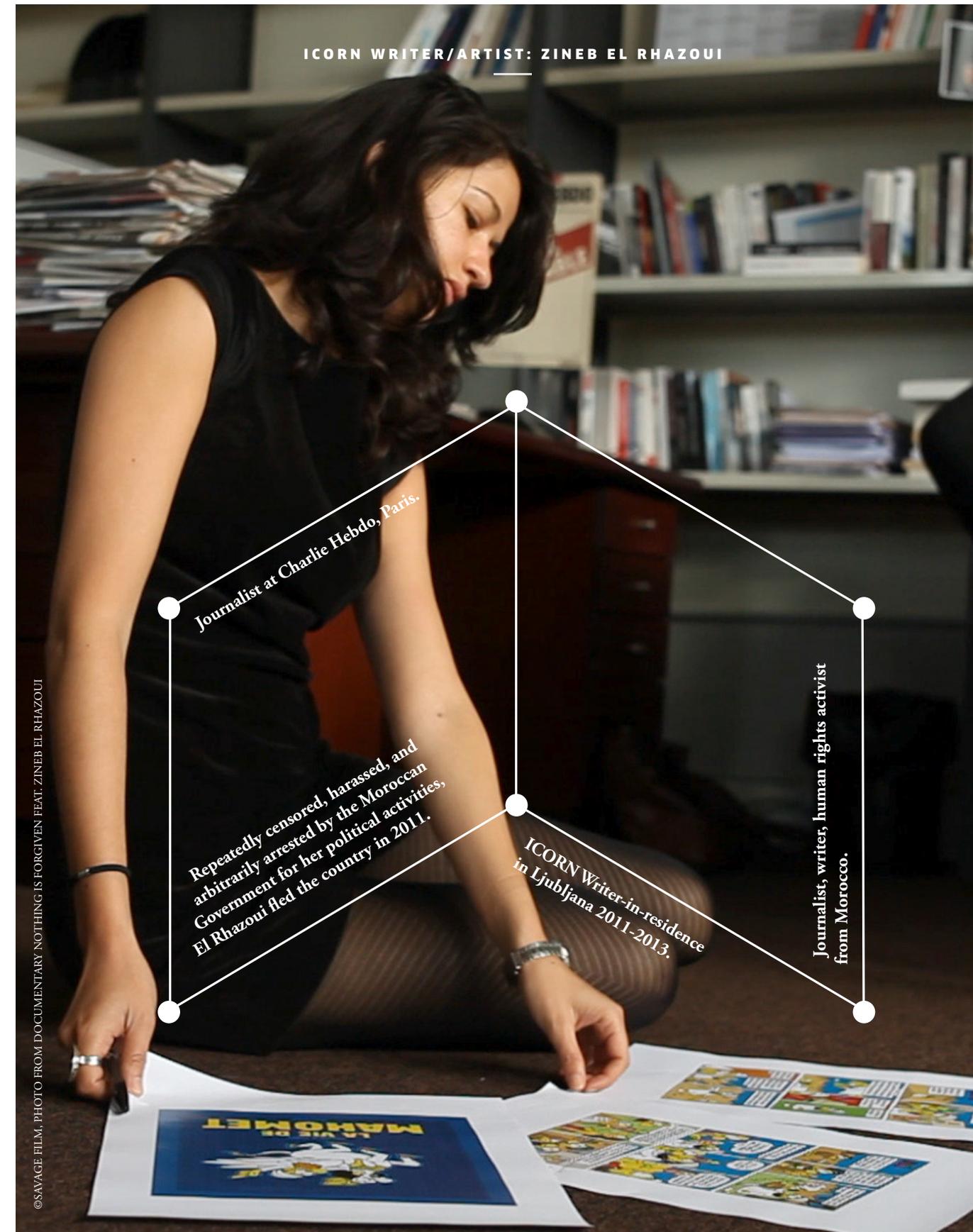
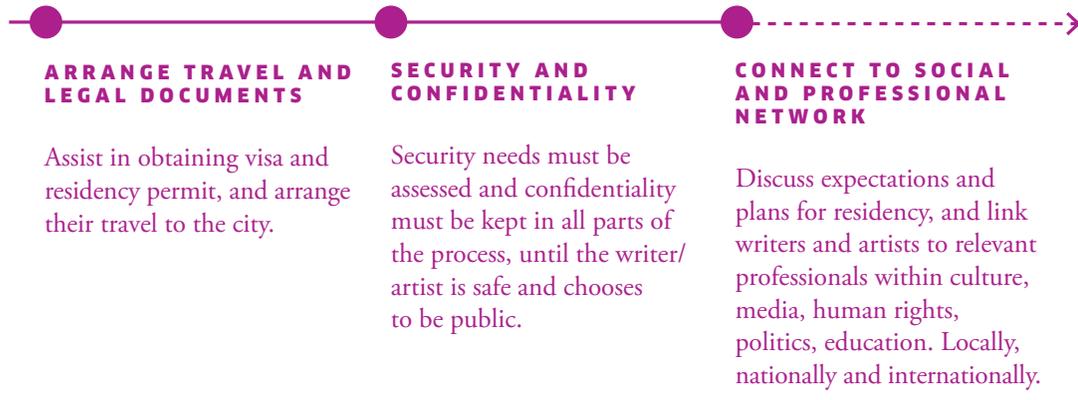
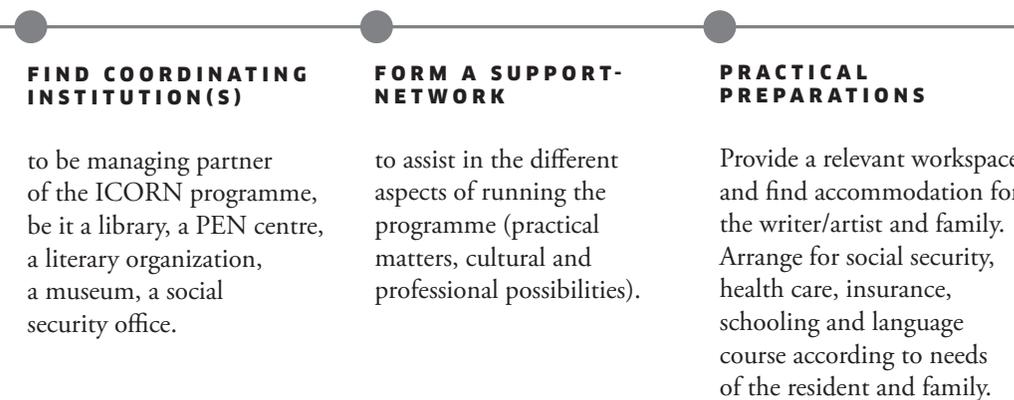




PHOTO: GRZEGORZ ZIEMIANSKI



“Especially in times like ours when nations are put under pressure by unprecedented political challenges, it is important that cities can step forward underlining the values of hospitality and solidarity.”

RAFAL DUTKIEWICZ, MAYOR OF WROCLAW



Investigative journalist, writer and documentary filmmaker from Syria.

Ali Al-Ibrahim was documenting schools under Al Nusra and ISIS when it became too dangerous for him to stay in Syria.

Ali Al-Ibrahim left Syria for Turkey late 2015. He arrived in Sweden in 2016 and is ICORN writer-in-residence from 2016-2018.

PHOTO: PRIVATE PHOTO



“I was reluctant to leave Syria, as it is imperative to have reporters on the ground to document what is really happening.”

ALI AL-IBRAHIM

### The Syrian witness

Syrian journalist, writer and documentary filmmaker, Ali Al-Ibrahim, has survived both Assad’s prisons and ISIS’ captivity. Capturing the way education is being exploited by extremist groups in Al Nusra and ISIS-controlled areas, Ali finally left Syria late 2015 when the security situation in the war-torn country became too dangerous for him.

What began with anti-government protests against the Assad regime in March 2011, escalated into a full-scale civil war. Al-Ibrahim was covering the early protests in Syria in 2011 when he was caught in the mass imprisonment of protesters by the Assad regime and was kept under inhumane conditions in prison for more than two months.

In 2013, whilst working on an assignment for Sky News Arabia on the El Ghouta battles,

he was captured and abducted by ISIS militants. He was kept for two months and spent three days in confinement with James Foley, an American journalist who was later killed by ISIS. The video showing the murder of Foley was distributed online and has become a symbol of the barbarism and ruthlessness of the terror organization.

Al-Ibrahim managed to leave Syria for Turkey in late 2015, documenting the escape with hidden cameras and a cell phone. His footage will be edited into a full documentary. Ali arrived safely as ICORN writer-in-residence in Sweden late 2016. He continues his large-scale film project, documenting everyday life strategies of survival in the besieged city of Aleppo, and investigating what has happened to the more than 10.000 refugee children who have disappeared since arriving in Europe.

1948

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

ARTICLE 19, THE UNITED NATIONS UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

1993-2005

In the wake of the Iranian fatwa on Salman Rushdie and a growing pressure on writers' freedom of expression, including attacks and assassinations, Rushdie and fellow writers set up the International Parliament of Writers (IPW) and engaged cities to give writers safe spaces to continue working. 25 cities joined in a network that dissolved in 2005.

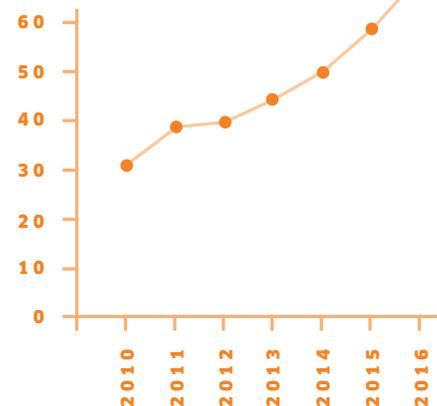
2005

Key representatives from some of the engaged cities, as well as from Norwegian PEN and PEN International, meet to set up a sustainable network to continue the work to protect and promote persecuted writers.

2006

ICORN is formally founded at an official meeting in Stavanger, with representatives from 15 cities, to ensure a new and secure network structure. The ICORN Secretariat is established as a project with support from the City of Stavanger. PEN International and ICORN sign an official cooperation agreement.

THE NUMBER OF ICORN CITIES



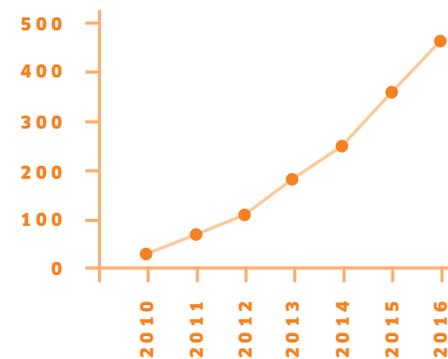
2010

As the network grows, ICORN consolidates and becomes an independent membership organisation. New agreements with PEN International and Stavanger Cultural Centre are signed at the official launch of the new organisation in London.

2014

ICORN widens its scope and opens up residencies for visual artists and musicians. The decision is made by the General Assembly meeting in Ljubljana.

ICORN APPLICATIONS IN TOTAL



2016

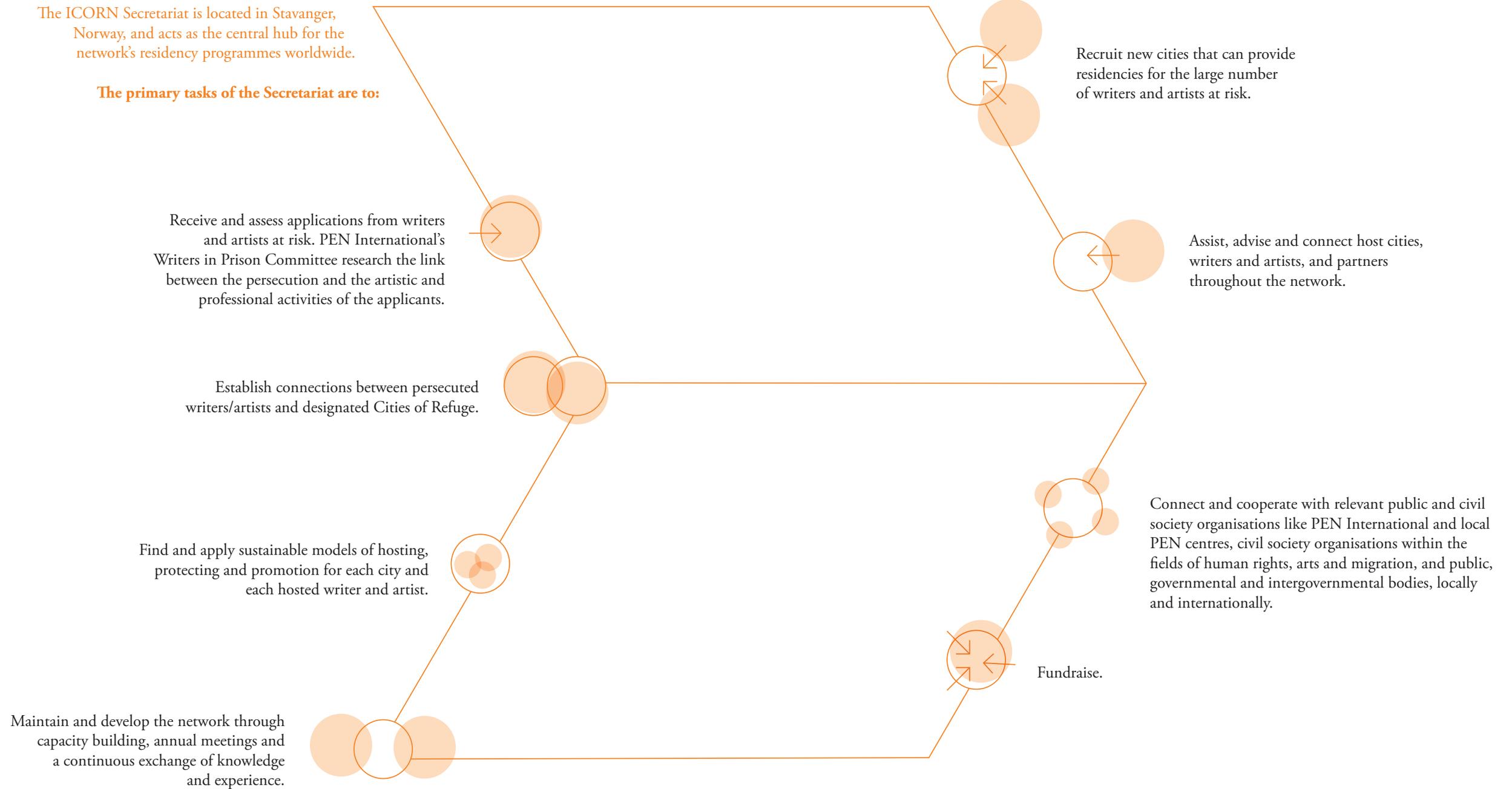
ICORN celebrates its 10 years anniversary in Hôtel de Ville in Paris with more than 200 participants, among them 50 writers and artists at risk.

*“Throughout the twentieth century, the City of Paris has been host to exiles from around the world, for intellectuals and artists. The values of human rights and freedom of expression is at the core of the international strategy of our city. Being a part of ICORN, hosting writers, journalists and artists at risk, is both a very concrete and an important symbolic fulfilment of our commitment.”*

ANNE HIDALGO, MAYOR OF THE CITY OF PARIS

2017

65 cities have joined the network and more than 170 writers and artists have found refuge in an ICORN city.



THE WRITERS/ARTISTS

*“In Gaza, hip-hop is the language of the youth and the rebels. We need people to resist, not only by weapons, but also by words. My friends and I were constantly subject to censorship, harassment and arrests under the pretext of blasphemy and “improper” behaviour. The chance I got from ICORN and the city of Gothenburg became a key to the rest of my life; it opened doors and it was up to me to seize the opportunity.”*

**Khaled Harara,**  
Gothenburg City of Refuge  
2013-2015



Most writers, journalists and artists find it difficult to be away from their country and cause. Author and journalist, **Aslı Erdoğan** chose to return to Turkey after her ICORN residency in Krakow 2015-2016. Erdoğan was detained on 17 August, after acting as columnist and stand-in-editor of *Özgür Gündem*, a pro-Kurdish opposition daily, which was shut down by decree following the failed coup d'etat in July 2016.



Iranian poet, journalist, human rights defender, **Asieh Amini's** rights activism has focused on women's rights and combating the death penalty, particularly stoning and juvenile execution in Iran. Amini worked for an Iranian newspaper when she was forced to go underground in 2003 after involving herself in the case of a 16 year old girl who was sentenced to death by stoning. The girl was subsequently killed, and Amini's newspaper did not dare print her stories. She was ICORN writer-in-residence in Trondheim 2010-2012.



The author of three successful novels and a number of short stories, **Jude Dibia** is working on his fourth novel from his ICORN residency in Malmö City of Refuge. The 2005 publication of his first novel, *Walking with Shadows*, garnered significant media attention and controversy for its portrayal of the difficult lives of homosexuals living in Nigeria. After receiving death threats and intimidation, and with the passing of the Anti Same-Sex marriage law in Nigeria in January 2014, Dibia became increasingly fearful of physical attacks, and left Nigeria.



*– After the killing of so many bloggers and editors in Bangladesh the past years, which publisher will dare publish books by young, freethinking writers, who challenge the spread of fundamentalism in Bangladesh?”*

**Ahmedur Rashid Chowdhury/Tutul** rhetorically asked the question in his speech when receiving the PEN Pinter International Writer of Courage prize from Margaret Atwood in October 2016. He is the publisher of the late American-Bangladeshi writer and blogger Avijit Roy and several other secular bloggers hacked to death in Bangladesh since 2013 for their open-minded writings. He scarcely survived an attack at his office in Dakha in October 2015. Tutul is ICORN writer-in-residence in Skien City of Refuge, 2016-2018.

ICORN depends on the generous support of private and public funders to carry out the international programme for persecuted writers, journalists and artists. For more information on how to support us, please see: [www.icorn.org/get-involved](http://www.icorn.org/get-involved)

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