



PENWrites is an international letter-writing campaign in solidarity with writers in prison and at risk around the world.

For decades, PEN has supported writers who are unjustly persecuted, harassed, imprisoned, and even murdered for exercising their right to freedom of expression. Central to this effort, PEN members have long sent letters of support in an act of solidarity with colleagues in prison or otherwise at risk.

The impact of such a simple act cannot be underestimated.

Countless writers have told us how letters and messages they received provided much-needed moral support in extremely difficult circumstances, serving as a crucial reminder that they had not been forgotten. Others have spoken of how they were afforded better treatment in prison as a result of cards flooding in from all over the world.

Ahead of our centenary, we are inviting all of you to join us in celebrating and supporting writers of courage across the globe by sending letters of solidarity to them and their families.

'Each letter day, I get so many letters from PEN members and I am engulfed by very beautiful feelings... I can feel myself with you, always, and perhaps that is why I never feel helpless.'

Zehra Doğan, Kurdish artist and writer

LETTER WRITING GUIDELINES

Who to write to

Throughout the campaign, we will be highlighting current cases of concern to PEN and inviting you to send messages of solidarity. You may wish to write to all our featured writers or to focus on just one individual – it is entirely up to you.

What to send

It is up to you what sort of correspondence you want to have but you may want to consider the following recommendations:

- Send general greetings or tourist cards from your own town if possible – these can be a powerful way of showing individual writers, as well as the prison guards, that they have supporters across the globe.
- Keep your messages brief and not too personal. You want to express support and solidarity but not raise expectations.
- If you plan to send more than one letter, you may wish to number them, as well as to send copies of your previous letter in case they don't reach their intended recipient.

In order to avoid any related repercussions, **we recommend that you do not:**

- Comment directly on their case;
- Include overtly political or religious messages, symbolism or references.

'It's very important – I'm pleading with you. Please write letters to political prisoners. It means a lot and it's a massive support to us.'

Oleg Sentsov, Ukrainian filmmaker and writer

SENDING MESSAGES

Virtual messages

Visit the PENWrites webpages to send a virtual message of support.

<https://www.englishpen.org/pen-writes>

Physical messages

If you have the capacity to send physical letters from wherever you are based you are very welcome to do so in cases where addresses are available. Please contact cat@englishpen.org for more details.

Please note that when writing directly to those in prison, it is possible that your messages may not reach the recipient but do not let that deter you. The prison officials will receive them and may return to sender but will still be aware of the international support for the writer in question.

Addresses

Participants are requested not to publish or circulate the addresses of our cases of concern, especially when they are private addresses.

Please print out names and addresses in non-Latin script where provided and stick on the envelopes as this will enhance the likelihood of letters reaching their destination.

Return address

We recommend that you include a return address so that the writer can respond if they are able to do so. If you would prefer to use English PEN's office address you are very welcome to do so:

PEN Writes, English PEN, Free Word Centre, 60 Farringdon Road,
London, EC1R 3GA.

Postage

Participants are expected to cover the postage costs of sending cards and letters.

KEEP IN TOUCH

Please let us know:

- If you receive a reply and, if possible, share a copy with us;
- If you send a physical letter, especially if you have used English PEN as the return address so that we can reach you should we receive a response.

SPREAD THE WORD

We hope to reach and engage new audiences through this campaign. You can help by:

- Inviting friends and colleagues to join the campaign
- Sharing your messages of support or photographs of any cards or letters you send (before adding addresses) with the English PEN team and on social media to encourage others to get involved. Please include the hashtag #PENWrites and tag @englishpen where possible.

'I would like to speak on behalf of all whose rights and freedoms have been deprived. This is what PEN did for me, by championing my cause. This is what you are doing for so many poets and writers in the world. When I suffered in prison, your compassion sustained me; all through those dark years, your sincere support encouraged me.'

Mahvash Sabet, Iranian poet and teacher