

PEN CANADA

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PEN Canada Marks International Day of the Imprisoned Writer by granting *One Humanity Award* to Mexican journalist Lydia Cacho

TORONTO: November 15, 2009—PEN Canada marks International PEN's annual **Day of the Imprisoned Writer** by presenting the 2009 *One Humanity Award* to the distinguished Mexican writer **Lydia Cacho**.



Lydia Cacho is an award-winning author, journalist and women's rights activist. Following the publication of her first book in 2005, on child pornography in Mexico, she was illegally arrested, detained and ill-treated before being subjected to a year-long criminal defamation lawsuit. She was cleared of all charges in 2007 but continues to be the target of harassment and threats.

“Lydia Cacho is a writer of extraordinary courage, and we are proud to honour her with the PEN Canada One Humanity Award,” said Ellen Seligman, President of PEN Canada. “She continues to put herself at great risk on behalf of vulnerable children and women and in the defense of freedom of expression in Mexico.”

The award will be given **Thursday, November 19, 2009 at the PEN CANADA Literary Evening with Ondaatje and Cockburn at the Glenn Gould Studio/CBC Toronto [sold out]**. In further recognition of the ongoing harassment and murder of journalists in Mexico, the **Empty Chair** that evening recognizes anthropologist and poet, **Miguel Ángel Gutiérrez Ávila**, beaten to death in southern Mexico, in July 2008.

“**Gutiérrez** is just one of 26 writers murdered in Mexico since 2004,” said Marian Botsford Fraser, Chair of International PEN's Writers in Prison Committee. “We are honouring him on this annual **Day of the Imprisoned Writer**, when PEN members around the world express solidarity on behalf of persecuted writers. In the past year, 35 print and online journalists have been killed.”

The PEN Canada *One Humanity Award* honours someone “whose work has transcended the boundaries of national divides and inspired connections across cultures. The writings of the individual reflect honesty, good judgement and a courageous belief in the peaceful expression of ideas through any medium.” The \$5000 award is made possible by the gracious generosity of PEN Canada supporter, Florence Minz.

International PEN has 145 centres in 104 countries. The freedom to express ideas— without fear of attack, arrest or other persecution—has always been at the heart of International PEN's work.

For more information about Lydia Cacho: www.pencanada.ca

BACKGROUND: In the spring of 2005, Cacho published *Los Demonios del Eden: El Poder Que Protege a la Pornografía Infantil* (The Demons of Eden: The Power That Protects Child Pornography), an exposé of child abuse and pornography rings in Cancun. In her book, she named Kamel Nacif Borge, a Puebla businessman and various well known politicians. In October 2005, Nacif Borge sued Cacho for criminal defamation. A few days later, police officers forced Cacho into a van and drove her 950 miles across Mexico, reportedly ramming gun barrels into her face and taunting her for 20 hours with threats that she would be drowned, raped or murdered. She was released on bail.

On 14 February 2006, telephone conversations between Nacif Borge and Mario Marín, governor of the state of Puebla, were published, revealing a discussion about putting Cacho in jail as a favour, and having her beaten and abused in order to silence her. In January 2007, Cacho was acquitted of all charges of defamation.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights advised Cacho to leave the country and offered her political asylum, legal assistance and access to international courts. However, Cacho has chosen to remain in Mexico. She remains under threat.