

INTERNATIONAL PEN

FOUNDED 1921

John Ralston Saul
International President

Eugene Schoulgin
International Secretary

Eric Lax
International Treasurer

Frank Geary, Sara Whyatt
Interim Executive Directors



Brownlow House • 50/51 High Holborn • London WC1V 6ER • United Kingdom

e-mail: info@internationalpen.org.uk website: www.internationalpen.org.uk

telephone: +44 (0)20 7405 0338 fax: +44 (0)20 7405 0339

President of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili

Administration of the President of Georgia

1 M. Abdushelishvili Street, Tbilisi, Georgia 0103

info@president.gov.ge

9 September, 2010

Your Excellency,

PEN International, the worldwide organisation for writers, playwrights, translators, editors and journalists with 144 centres in 101 countries, through its Writers in Prison Committee, strongly protests the recent arrest and sentencing of three members of the Georgian Centre of International PEN, following an act of peaceful demonstration.

On 14 August 2010, poets Shota Gagarin, Aleks Chigvinadze and Irakli Kakabadze were peacefully demonstrating on George W. Bush street of Tbilisi. They demanded that George W. Bush Street be renamed Walt Whitman Street, read the poetry of the esteemed American poet Walt Whitman, and defaced the street sign. According to numerous reports, including that of the Public Defender (Ombudsman) of Georgia, they were arrested, and charged under Article 173 of the General Administrative Code of Georgia for "evil resistance to police." The accused were held overnight, and reportedly abused verbally and physically. On 15 August 2010 they were found guilty in a hearing conducted behind closed doors where they were denied the presence of family members and the media. Video evidence showing that they did not resist arrest was not deemed admissible by the judge. They were each fined \$US250; the usual penalty for defacing a sign would be only \$30, with no arrest. They have to date received no response from the court to their appeal.

Presidents Emeritus: Homero Aridjis • Jiří Gruša • Ronald Harwood CBE • Francis King CBE • György Konrád • Mario Vargas Llosa • Per Wästberg

Vice Presidents: Margaret Atwood • Niels Barford • Andrei Bitov • Alexandre Blokh • Sook-Hee Chun • J.M. Coetzee • Georges Emmanuel Clancier
Moris Farhi MBE • Gloria Guardia • Nadine Gordimer • Nancy Ing • Lucina Kathmann • Kata Kulavkova • Joanne Leedom-Ackerman
Predrag Matvejevic • Toni Morrison • Boris A. Novak • Antonio Olinto • Michael Scammell • Thomas von Vegesack

Board: International President • International Secretary • International Treasurer • Michael Butscher • Markéta Hejkalová
Takeaki Hori • Yang Lian • Mohamed Magani • Kristin T. Schnider • Haroon Siddiqui

Registered Charity No. 1117088, Company Registered in England No. 05683997, Registered Office: Brownlow House 50/51 High Holborn London WC1V 6ER

The poets are well-known activists, often using the tools of civil disobedience to highlight their concerns, but they do not resort to violence. Reports that, in previous incidents, police have been heavy-handed when arresting such activists, and that trials are often not fair are of concern, not only in Georgia, but to the international community of writers. Furthermore, the hostile reaction of members of the public has directly caused the loss of work and income, and ignited fears for their safety. We are deeply concerned about reports of a climate of impunity.

PEN International calls upon the Georgian government to ensure that the three poets Shura Gagarin, Aleks Chigvinadze and Irakli Kakabadze are given a fair hearing, and that there is no future harassment of writers for the peaceful expression of their ideas. We further believe it is imperative that the Georgian authorities make it clear that all threats to citizens will not be tolerated, and will be subject to prosecution, and furthermore, that the rules of law be upheld in the courts.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Eugene Schoulgin" with a horizontal line underneath.

Eugene Schoulgin
International Secretary

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Marian Botsford Fraser" with a horizontal line underneath.

Marian Botsford Fraser
International Chair
Writers in Prison Committee

Copied to:

Mr. Zurab Adeishvili, Prosecutor General of Georgia
Mr. Giorgi Tugushi, Public Defender of Georgia

