



Impunity Reigns – Writers Resist: PEN International Case List 2022

21 March: PEN International launches *Impunity Reigns – Writers Resist*, its 2022 Case List which documents 115 cases of writers facing harassment, arrest, violence and even death, worldwide.

‘The writers featured in this report have put their lives on the frontline and made enormous sacrifices – risking their safety and liberty – to hold the powerful to account. They have inspired us to keep fighting to safeguard the right to freedom of expression. They have dared us to visualize a different world, a better one. They have empowered us and new generations of writers and readers, as we reflect on the past 101 years of our work, to protect writers globally and consider how our voices and actions have the power to shape a future where human rights are a reality for all’. Ma Thida, Chair of PEN International’s Writers in Prison Committee.

Global analysis

According to PEN International research, throughout 2022, across all regions, writers have continued to be arrested, detained and often imprisoned for vaguely worded offences relating to national security, including in **Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, China, India, Iraq, Iran, Kuwait, Morocco, Myanmar, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Türkiye, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the United Kingdom, and Vietnam.**

War and conflicts around the world have posed extreme risks for those reporting or commenting on them, especially in **Ukraine, Palestine and Ethiopia.**

Some countries saw writers forced to flee persecution and seek pathways to safety, often cruelly denied, such as in **Myanmar and Afghanistan.** Meanwhile, a new form of repression in the form of forced expulsion and exile of writers, was seen in several countries including **Cuba and Nicaragua.**

In **Italy, Egypt, Malaysia, Peru, and Türkiye,** criminal defamation and *lèse-majesté* laws, were used to harass or silence writers.

States in the **Americas** continued to see high level of violence, with **Mexico** remaining the deadliest country in the region for journalists, and the most dangerous country in the world for journalists outside active war zones.

Women writers continued to be disproportionately silenced: Turkish journalist [Sedef Kabaş](#), handed a 28-month suspended prison sentence following critical comments she had made about President Erdoğan; Palestinian journalist [Shireen Abu Akleh](#), shot by the Israeli army while reporting on behalf of Al Jazeera in the occupied West Bank; Zimbabwean writer, playwright and filmmaker [Tsitsi Dangarembga](#), sentenced to a six-month jail term, suspended for five years, following a legal and judicial persecution endured since July 2020; prominent Uyghur anthropologist [Rahile Dawut](#), disappeared by the Chinese authorities since 2017, and

Nicaraguan-Argentinian journalist [Gabriela Selser](#), harassed by the authorities and paramilitaries because of her writings, to name a few.

Africa

African countries in 2022 continued to restrict freedom of expression, with authorities punishing critical voices.

In **Rwanda**, digital dissenters continued to face repression, including arbitrary arrest and detention, prosecution on trumped up charges, and enforced disappearances. PEN International continued to campaign on behalf of poet [Innocent Bahati](#) whose fate has remained unknown since his disappearance in 2020.

For more than two decades, the authorities in **Eritrea** have continued to ignore regional and international pressure to account for the plight of [12 writers and journalists](#) arbitrarily arrested and detained incommunicado since 2001. The authoritarian regime continued to violate the human rights of Eritreans with impunity, including elimination of a free press.

Countries such as **Burundi, Uganda, Ethiopia, and Cameroon**, among others, have made self-censorship common for writers, journalists, and critical voices. 2022 also marked a rise in repression of free speech in countries considered comparatively free, particularly **Senegal, Ghana, and Botswana**.

Americas

As documented by PEN International, 2022 was the [deadliest](#) year for press in the **Americas** in the last **24 years**.

Almost half of the at **68 journalists** reported murdered worldwide in 2022 were killed in the [Americas](#), including: **13 in Mexico, 7 in Haiti, 2 in Brazil, 2 in Colombia, 2 in Honduras, 1 in Chile, 1 in Ecuador, 1 in the United States, 1 in Guatemala, and 1 in Paraguay**.

In **Cuba**, **nine artists** were **detained** and **15 forced into exile** in 2022. Two prominent independent artists, [Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara](#) and [Maykel Osorbo](#), were given unjust prison sentences of five and nine years.

In **Nicaragua**, at least [703 cases of press freedom violations](#) were documented, with abusive use of state power (498 cases), assaults and attacks (159) and stigmatising discourse (15) being the main violations against journalists and media. On 15 February 2022, the Nicaraguan Parliament closed the PEN Nicaragua Centre. **Fourteen journalists or media workers** were **imprisoned** at the time of writing.

In **Mexico**, the cycle of impunity continued with kidnappings and deadly attacks on reporters, including the murder of journalists **Ciro Gómez Leyva, Antonio de la Cruz, and Lourdes Maldonado López**, in relation to their work.

Asia/ Pacific

In 2022, freedom of expression was increasingly threatened in more countries across **Asia/Pacific**. **China (PRC)** saw numerous writers, journalists, scholars, and public intellectuals

receiving lengthy prison sentences for peaceful expression, including members of the Independent Chinese PEN Centre [Gui Minhai](#), [Yang Hengjun](#), [Qin Yongmin](#) and [Zhang Guiqi](#), among many others. In **Hong Kong**, writer and publisher [Jimmy Lai](#), who has been detained continuously since December 2020, faces several further charges which could result in a maximum sentence of life imprisonment if convicted.

In **Myanmar**, writer [Ko Jimmy](#), arrested days after the February 2021 coup which he criticised on social media, was among four activists who were executed by the military junta following a sham trial. The first executions carried out in Myanmar in over 30 years, their deaths are a damning indictment of the military junta's willingness to use every means available to terrorise the people of Myanmar.

The Taliban's repressive restrictions in **Afghanistan** have resulted in the systematic erasure of women and girls from public life and efforts to silence independent media. At-risk Afghan writers, poets, and journalists have requested assistance from PEN International while living precariously in neighbouring countries, with many facing the risk of refoulement or exploitation due to their illegal residency status. PEN International continues campaigning for [more effective pathways](#) to safety.

Europe and Central Asia

In **Europe and Central Asia**, 2022 was marked by the Russian Federation's war against **Ukraine**. Safety concerns for writers and journalists in **Ukraine** remained high, with at least **13 journalists** killed while reporting on the war. In occupied Crimea and in the **Russian Federation**, citizen journalists and human rights activists remained imprisoned on politically motivated grounds, including Ukrainian [Server Mustafayev](#).

Meanwhile in **Belarus**, repression against the Belarusian language and literature continued, with independent publishing houses raided for promoting books by Belarusian writers and in the Belarusian language, and their activities suspended under far-fetched pretences.

40 journalists were behind bars in **Türkiye** and **26** in **Belarus** as of 1 December – with the countries holding the record of the fourth and fifth worst jailers of journalists in the world, respectively.

As documented by PEN International, in **Türkiye**, 24 Kurdish journalists and one media worker were [detained](#) in separate raids following some of the biggest operations conducted against journalists in the predominantly Kurdish south-east in recent years. To date, the authorities are yet to abide by biding rulings of the European Court of Human Rights urging the immediate release of publisher [Osman Kavala](#) and writer and opposition politician [Selahattin Demirtaş](#).

Middle East and North Africa

Governments across the **Middle East and North Africa** have continued eradicating freedom of expression through draconian laws, censorship, crushing peaceful protests, executions, and arbitrary detention of critical voices.

In **Iran**, writer [Baktash Abtin](#) died in custody due to medical negligence, after authorities denied him urgent medical care following his second infection with COVID-19. Also in Iran,

authorities sustained their relentless persecution of minority communities, such as the Kurdish and Baha'i communities. Iranian security forces arrested leading members of the Baha'i community, including prominent poet [Mahvash Sabet](#), and sentenced her to 10 years in prison following an unfair trial.

In **Egypt**, PEN International documented several cases of imprisoned writers who were subjected to torture and ill-treatment and faced heavy jail sentences following unfair trials, including British-Egyptian writer [Alaa Abd El-Fattah](#), and Egyptian poets, [Galal El-Behiry](#) and [Ahmed Douma](#).

In **Israel**, authorities sustained strict online censorship of Palestinian content on social media amid an escalation of Israeli attacks on Palestinians. In August, the Israeli military [raided](#) the offices of seven leading independent Palestinian organisations, confiscated documents and equipment and ordered the closure of the offices.

Other authorities across the region, mainly in **Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Saudi Arabia**, continued to expand online censorship and use vague charges to silence critics, including writers, activists, and journalists.

JOIN THE LAUNCH

To mark the launch of ***Impunity Reigns – Writers Resist***, PEN International will host a live event with four panellists, who speak to the issues and writers featured in the 2022 Case List: **Ma Thida**, Chair of PEN International's Writers in Prison Committee and former President of PEN Myanmar, philosopher, journalist, and President of PEN Ukraine **Volodymyr Yermolenko**, author **Gioconda Belli** and Egyptian novelist and activist **Ahdaf Soueif**. The event will be live streamed today at 1pm GMT, on PEN International's Facebook page. Click [here](#) to join.

Today, more than ever before, we urgently need additional donations to safeguard our mission, to help those who are persecuted, silenced, in prison, or in exile; and to defend freedom of expression. Please support our [Crisis Appeal](#).

Notes to editors

- For further information, please contact **Sabrina Tucci**, Communications and Campaigns Manager, Sabrina.Tucci@pen-international.org