

LETTER OF INTENT – Joanne Leedom-Ackerman

PEN was founded in a difficult time on a simple concept, that by having writers from different countries engaged with each other, ideas and literature might flow more easily across borders and the world might benefit from this exchange and from these bonds among writers. This idea remains as relevant today as ever.

In 1922 a news report about PEN began: Le coeur n'a pas de pays. Today when many are claiming a clash of civilizations and fear across borders is rising, PEN can continue to demonstrate international fellowship through its literary programs, its work on behalf of imperiled writers, its support of writing in all languages and cultures, its assistance to writers in exile, and its development of new centers. It is important that PEN continue to focus on areas where cultures are under stress or in conflict and become part of the dialogue. PEN should continue working with UNESCO, the UN Human Rights Commission and other organizations whose aims and programs enhance its own.

I have been involved with PEN for over twenty years, as a member of USA West, American and English centers, the president of USA West, the Chair of International PEN's Writers in Prison Committee, and currently as a Vice President of International PEN. A novelist and journalist, I remain engaged by PEN's ideals, its actions, its possibilities and most of all by friendships across the globe made through its forums.

International PEN's challenge as an organization that has grown worldwide is to continue to translate its ideals into meaningful action and let the structures of the organization facilitate activities and not become the activity. As an international NGO with a global voice for literature, writers and linguistic rights, PEN needs to expand its professional staff to accommodate the growing needs of the organization. The size of the secretariat is almost the same as it was 20 years ago. An enhanced secretariat could better coordinate programs among centers and assist struggling and new centers. PEN could further develop its website to publicize its work, communicate with centers and with the public at large.

PEN's strength is its members. Its financial resources have been less reliable. I would hope to work with the members and with an enhanced London staff and new Trustees Committee to identify activities, foundations and individuals to expand PEN's financial base to meet its needs.

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