

Amnesty International

SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT BRIEFING



MEMBERS DEBATE: DAY OF THE IMPRISONED WRITER

21 NOVEMBER 2017

On Thursday 15 November, the Members Debate [S5M-07970](#) will take place in the Scottish Parliament:

That the Parliament acknowledges that, each year, 15 November marks the Day of the Imprisoned Writer, which commemorates writers around the world who have been imprisoned, threatened or attacked for exercising their right to freedom of expression, and takes action on their behalf; notes with grave concern what it sees as the decline worldwide in free expression, as documented by organisations such as Reporters Without Borders, Amnesty International, PEN International, Committee to Protect Journalists and Human Rights Watch; acknowledges the importance of defending and supporting free expression for every person in Scotland and of protecting persons persecuted around the world, by state and non-state actors, for exercising their right to free speech; notes the view that governmental, intergovernmental and civil society partners at home and abroad should work together to secure protections for writers and others who are persecuted for exercising their right to freedom of expression, and further notes calls for the day to be officially recognised every year by the Parliament.

Amnesty International UK raise the cases of writers imprisoned for exercising their right to freedom of expression. Amnesty use a series of events during the Edinburgh International Book Festival, and a recent event at the Scottish Parliament to give voice to those imprisoned.

We would encourage contributors through the debate to use their freedom of speech to read the work of people who have been imprisoned. Attached to this briefing are case studies identified by Amnesty, along with excerpts from their writing.

Reinaldo Arenas is acknowledged as one of the great Cuban writers. In the mid-1960s, the Castro regime openly persecuted homosexuals, and Arenas' dissatisfaction with the government deepened when his writings – unconventional, and supportive of the individual's right to self-expression – were declared “antirevolutionary” and censored. Soon afterward, Arenas was no longer permitted to publish on the island. Defiant, he secretly sent his

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manuscripts abroad, where they were immediately published, an act that infuriated the regime, which on various occasions confiscated and destroyed his work and ultimately branded him a nonperson in Cuba. Having been persecuted, mistreated and imprisoned in Cuba, he left in the Mariel exodus of 1980. A film based on his autobiography (Before Night Falls) received extensive critical praise.

Raif Badawi was sentenced to 10 years in prison and 1,000 lashes for setting up a website that championed free speech in the autocratic kingdom of Saudi Arabia. His blog, the Saudi Free Liberals Forum, was shut down after his arrest in 2012.

Nien Cheng was a Chinese author best known for her memoir *Life and Death in Shanghai*. The widow of the former manager of Shell in China, one of the only foreign companies permitted in the country at the time, Cheng was accused of being a British spy and imprisoned for six-and-a-half years. As a prisoner in Shanghai's First Detention Centre, Cheng was subjected to torture and solitary confinement as she refused to give a false confession. During interrogation sessions, Cheng would use Mao's teachings against her interrogators and was often able to turn the tide against the authorities. Upon her release, Cheng was told that her only daughter had committed suicide, but later learned that she had been murdered by the Red Guards. Cheng left China in 1980 and eventually settled in the United States. She died on 2 November 2009, at the age of 93.

Khadija Ismayilova is an investigative reporter that worked with Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty's Azerbaijani service and with the Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project covering the corruption of Azerbaijan's ruling family before she was arrested on Dec 5 2014 and sentenced to seven and a half years in prison in September 2015. She was set free after a successful appeal to Azerbaijan's Supreme Court on May 25 2016, two days before her 40th birthday.

Dareen Tatour was arrested in October 2015, charged in November and spent several months in prison before being placed under house arrest in January 2016. She was confined to an apartment in Tel Aviv, with no access to the internet. The Israeli authorities alleged that restricting her movements was necessary as she represented 'a threat to public safety.' She is now allowed limited freedom and is able to work part-time but is still prohibited from using the internet.

Albert Woodfox was released after more than four decades in solitary confinement in the USA, on his 69th birthday in a move Amnesty International called 'long overdue and undeniably just'. Amnesty campaigners had been working on his case for almost 25 years.

Further cases identified by Amnesty International can be shared for use in the debate, please get in touch to request an individual case.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL – SCOTLAND OFFICE

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