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**Manifestation for freedom of expression,
democracy and human rights.**

“BORDERS SEPARATE, BOOKS UNITE”

On one of these borders, eighty-two years ago today, German-Jewish philosopher Walter Benjamin was trying to cross from France to Spain and from there to the United States. The border guards told him he couldn't cross. Benjamin would either be caught by the trailing Nazis, or... He chose the second possibility and committed suicide.

It was just round here, and happened today. Walter Benjamin took his own life on September 26.

Nearness is absolute in space and time. If there is pain on the earth, it doesn't matter in which corner of the world it is. It is always next to us. And nearness in time. It doesn't matter when the pain was. If it was once experienced then it means it is always with us now. The suffering of people in the Second World War, in the slavery of Africa, in the exploitation of Asia are not part of long history, it is today with us in Ukraine, Afghanistan, Syria, Myanmar, Palestine and in the fight of women for freedom in Iran and Kurdistan.

Walter Benjamin had a black leather bag with him. The roads were steep and Benjamin was in poor health. At a time when he was feeling helpless, his friends told him to leave the bag. But he strongly objected. He said that he could stay, but the bag had to cross the Atlantic. After Benjamin died, his bag was lost. We don't know what's in that bag. Manuscripts? Or something else? Although we don't know this, we know that what is carried in that bag belongs to freedom.

In the same year, at the beginning of the Second World War, H. G. Wells, the second president of PEN International, stated in his book *The Rights of Man*, that our aim is to save people from fear. Saving people from the fear of war, fear of hunger, fear of pain... In order to accomplish this, it was necessary to establish a system that allows people to live happily together.

However, the first half of the twentieth century was filled with the pain of two world wars, and the second half was full of efforts to overcome it. The establishment of the United Nations (1945) and the Council of Europe (1949) and the forming of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the establishment of The European Court of Human Rights (1959) were the results of learning from history and long debates around the world. PEN International was an active part of those developments.

But today, with the new wave of populism, many countries are trying to undermine the humanitarian basis of international institutions. We are moving away from a single humanity and the dream of a peaceful world. Even the word democracy is taken for granted in many places and is clearly misused.

Oscar Wilde once said, “*A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at... Progress is the realisation of Utopias.*”

It seems utopian -to imagine a future where there is world peace, freedom, and a protected nature today.

People think that Utopia belongs in an unknown, distant time – a distance both temporal and spatial. We need to bring it in the current moment; because Utopia is not 'the place that cannot exist', it is 'the place that should be made to exist'.

Although we are born within the borders of a certain country, we are citizens of the world that produces minds that are opened beyond borders.

Freedom relates not only to the domain of law, but also to the domain of truth.

We know that “Big Brother” is watching us. There is no longer such a thing as a truly private life. Everything is in the data centres of corporations, and our every word is targeted by the censorship guards.

In a period where we have lost the meaning of truth, it is not possible to be really free. Today we live in a period where truth is corrupted, disintegrated and destroyed in a poisonous air.

Art and literature are ways of claiming truth and recreating it.

PEN International was founded with this prospect and right from the beginning it stated that “*Literature knows no frontiers...*”

Writing and publishing books is thought to be easy, but it often becomes a difficult and dangerous job.

The author is not an important person by the normal standards of everyday life. We are not doing anything big, we are writing a book, publishing a poem. But then politicians come out and say “*Books are dangerous*” and target us. While we don’t attach importance to ourselves because of the book we have written, the governments give us this importance, showing that what we do is not an ordinary job.

Writers often use the word freedom, so they appear to be interested in politics.

In fact, not to be silent in the face of oppressions is not to be political, but to be against bigotry and authoritarianism.

The horizon of literature is beauty, not politics. Unfortunately, political blindness tries to darken that horizon. Despite this, literature continues to seek the truth with aesthetics, to establish language with aesthetics, and to understand people through aesthetics.

Against the politics that separate us with borders and create rigid societies behind barbed wires, we say: "Borders separate, books unite."

Time flows in two ways, one fast and the other slow. In fast-flowing time, power can win against us, censor us, destroy us. But in the slow flowing time, our words, our writings always live and go beyond the time limits of politics.

Could they destroy Socrates? Can they destroy Salman Rushdie?

Were those who tried to destroy Salman Rushdie able to destroy his namesake, Ibn Rushd, nine centuries ago?

The meaning of Rushdie comes from the Arabic word rushd, meaning mature, wise and sensible. Salman Rushdie mentions Ibn Rushd in his books about how he was oppressed. I want to tell you about Ibn Rushd's funeral. A funeral scene that I described in my first novel, years ago.

Ibn Rushd was an Islamic philosopher of the 12th century from Cordoba, Spain. Thanks to the countless books he wrote, he was respected and served as a judge and a medicine man. But then he was targeted for his alleged apostasy, and his books were burned. He emphasized the importance of reason in relation to faith. He was the most famous Aristotelian commentator of the Middle Ages. Western intellectuals learned Aristotle first from Ibn Rushd, then from the Greeks. When you say things that differ from the mainstream, you immediately become a target, and that's what happened to him.

The funeral of Ibn Rushd, who died in Marrakech, was moved to his hometown of Cordoba. They loaded his coffin onto the back of a horse. In order to balance with the weight of the coffin, they put the books he had written on the other side of the horse. Ibn Rushd was known as the Islamic thinker who wrote the most books. His coffin and the books he wrote were of equal weight. That's how he went on his last journey.

The life of Ibn Rushd or Salman Rushdie, a philosopher or a writer, is equivalent to his work.

Death is not what we are afraid of. We are only afraid of losing what we have created, that is why Walter Benjamin's black leather bag is valuable for us. To balance Benjamin's coffin on a horseback, we would put his black leather bag on the side of his books.

Those who think that they could destroy Walter Benjamin or Salman Rushdie cannot see the greatness of the work they created and left to history.

With this confidence we say, literature knows no frontiers, including frontiers of fear and time.

Literature is forever.