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Norwegian PEN and asylum seekers

Norwegian PEN is a member-based organization and its main job is to defend freedom of expression for our members (writers, journalists, publishers, editors, booksellers and bloggers, henceforth called writers, etc.) and others within the same professional groups that turn to us, both nationally and internationally.

Norwegian PEN receives an increasingly number of inquiries from writers, etc., who are in refugee reception centers in Norway.

In point of fact, Norway has an orderly system for receiving and processing cases for asylum seekers. Norwegian PEN has neither the skills, capability or ambition to be an asylum seeker organization. Therefore, we have very limited possibilities to assist asylum seekers while their cases are being processed by the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI).

Essentially, what Norwegian PEN can do is to assist asylum seekers with relevant background (writers etc.) only after they have been rejected by the UDI.

When an applicant appeals, our task is:

a) Requests from asylum seekers who neither are nor have relevant background as writers etc.,

- refer them to legal counsel, such as all asylum seekers are assigned to after a rejection from the UDI. If an asylum seeker has problems with his assigned lawyer, the asylum seeker is guided to continue the case with NOAS, which is a professional organization with the mission to assist asylum seekers with counseling and legal aid.

b) If the applicant is a writer, etc., or have such background;

- assist them and their lawyer by writing an additional letter to appeal the UDI's decision.

The letter must contain new, updated and confirmed information from PEN International or other sources where such information can be verified by a third party.

- refer the applicant to NOAS, which assists asylum seekers with information about rights, contact and information on the UDI, follow-up and assistance in case of rejection and appeal to the Immigrations Appeal Board (UNE).



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If the asylum seeker is a writer etc. and the complaint is rejected by the Immigrations Appeal Board (UNE):

c) In addition to guiding asylum seekers to a lawyer or NOAS with the actual case, Norwegian PEN can assist asylum seekers with a background as writers etc., with relevant information from UNE.

Additional information from Norwegian PEN enclosed to the complaint from the lawyer/NOAS should contain, if possible, information on and confirmation of:

- that the applicant has worked as a writer etc.
- the working conditions for independent/critical writers in their home country
- the types of need for protection that result from such conditions, as well as the dangers writers etc. will be exposed to in case they return to their home country
- any other information that is relevant for the application and can influence the outcome.

d) In case of inquiries from NOAS on asylum cases concerning writers etc., Norwegian PEN can assist with any confirmation of their background as writers, etc., the conditions for writers etc. in their home country and other relevant information.

e) Norwegian PEN will collect information from PEN International's staff, semi-annual reports (case list) etc. Norwegian PEN can also use information from IFEX, the Norwegian Union of Journalists and other organizations with special expertise on journalism, freedom of expression etc., or directly from personal contacts in countries on which Norwegian PEN has special expertise, such as Turkey, Tunisia, Belarus and Afghanistan.

Journalists/ writers with a residence permit

Norwegian can not assist writers etc. who have been granted asylum and who want help to find a job or publish books etc. As a rule, this kind of inquiry is referred to the information on Norwegian writers' organizations and the Norwegian literary system that already exists and is offered to all guest writers through ICORN or directly to cities of refuge. Such information is available on these websites on Norwegian, English, Arabic and Farsi.