



ICORN international cities of refuge network

ICORN Strategic plan 2012-2014

As approved by the ICORN General Assembly in Stockholm on 11 May 2012

Aims and objectives

ICORN is an organisation of member cities and regions, offering safe havens for persecuted writers. Our aim is to be able to host as many persecuted writers as possible in ICORN member cities, forming a sustainable and dynamic global network for freedom of expression. For each writer arriving safely in a city of refuge, a former censored, harassed and threatened voice is granted a free space to think, write and express whatever is on the person's mind.

Through modern technology made available by the host cities, the ICORN writers can reach media and audiences in their home countries that they were prevented access to before leaving. Locally and through the ICORN network, their voices can also be heard by new audiences in the host cities and beyond.

A strengthened and consolidated ICORN will not only offer an increasing amount of de facto long term placements to persecuted writers, it will also signal to hundreds of writers surviving harassment and hardship in their home countries, that if the persecution becomes unbearable, there is an alternative, an ICORN city of refuge.

Network expansion

To be able to offer placements to the growing number of writers who apply to, the network needs more members. This is one of the tasks with the highest priority for the administration centre. Throughout 2010 and 2011 ICORN has gained many new member cities from the Nordic countries, while noteworthy also many from elsewhere in Europe. Initiatives in the next two years will to an increasing extent be taken towards cities in Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas.

The recruitment process includes finding possible candidate cities, identifying long term partners in the city, securing dedication to the ICORN charter and to the city's obligations as laid out in the membership agreement.

Expanding the scope of ICORN

ICORN's growth and expansion in 2010 and 2011 has made the organisation considerably better known on the global human rights/freedom of expression scene. Our network has served as a model for the European Commission in their efforts to establish a system of shelter cities to human rights defenders. Music- and other arts organisations are looking to ICORN when realising that not only writers, but artists of all media are targets for persecution, and in need of shelter.

ICORN is according to its statutes, agreed upon and in effect since June 2010, limiting its scope to work to provide shelter for persecuted *writers*. The definition of the term writer found in the same statutes is wide, though, including poets, journalists, bloggers, cartoonists and many more genres and professions.

ICORN will work to further explore challenges and proposals to extend our organisation's outreach.

Funding

The administration centre must secure its short, medium and longer term funding through cooperation with a diversity of funding partners. In this it is necessary to prove long term commitment, tangible results and reliability. Transparency, good governance and efficiency are essential in building trust with funders. Identifying new sources and ways of funding is also required. Project funding is normally easier to acquire than provision of core cost coverage. The more valuable, though, the partners available to secure long term core cost funding for our organisation. To be able to achieve the goals of the present plan, ICORN will work towards private funders, national governments and intergovernmental bodies (notably the EU) to secure an as strong as possible financial foundation for our work and activities.

Promotion

Protecting the writer and the word is ICORN's core focus. But a protected voice might be silenced by sheer distance to the audience, both physically or geographically, and because of linguistic, social or cultural barriers, to mention but a few. To help overcome these distances and barriers six ICORN cities launched the Shahrazad – Stories for life EU supported project in 2008. The project continues toward the end 2012, and ICORN needs to start preparing and develop ideas and possibilities for new promotional projects. This work must engage the individual cities, to look for cooperation partners locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

ICORN will continue to promote its writers and their work by participation and cooperation with established international literary arenas and institutions, such as literary magazines, book-fairs, and literature festivals.

ICORN also needs to promote itself as a worldwide organisation, both in the media, through partnerships, and within relevant larger networks and environments. The promotion should target organisations working for persecuted writers, other relevant organisations, potential funders and members, decision makers and legal authorities (on national levels, + towards EU/UN bodies), and the general public.

Capacity building, network learning, communication

The next years are crucial with respect to consolidating the organization. We need to both strengthen and develop the network. ICORN has to be both solid and flexible to meet the challenges we are facing with rapid growth. The individual cities constitute the backbone of ICORN, and their differences make ICORN flexible. At the same time the new organization needs to appear in a unified and consistent way.

ICORN's resources are first and foremost found in the member cities. It is at the core of the network's reason to exist to bring these strengths forward. It is a priority to make ICORN into a forum for sharing, exchanging ideas, and learning. Focussing on ICORN's core activities the administration centre will facilitate communication and capacity building in areas such as

literary activities, freedom of expression, migration and exile, and social and artistic integration and exchange.

The administration centre also needs to strengthen its resources to assess applications and oversee the placement process. Internal organizational issues and communication between board, administration centre, member cities and writers must be efficient and timely.

Global movement / immigration

Most of the work with immigration authorities, visa applications and resident permits is carried out by the individual cities. Still, both the administration centre and the network would benefit from a deeper understanding of rules, regulations, laws and possibilities when it comes to international migration. As part of the capacity building and development of ICORN both local coordinators and the administration centre staff should be able to assist and advice writers both within the network and on the waiting list on immigration and residency issues.

Partnerships and cooperation

PEN International is ICORN's most important partner. On the basis of a signed agreement their Writers in Prison Committee assesses and comments on all writers' applications to ICORN. It is of utmost importance to maintain and develop the cooperation with PEN. PEN's network is also important in recruiting new cities, and not the least in being a connecting link to writers at risk. PEN's members, both individuals and local PEN clubs, are also a potential resource in building networks for writers in ICORN cities. Strengthening ICORN's contact with International PEN, also with all its centres working with exile issues is a prioritised task for ICORN.

Referring to the Global movement sequence above, ICORN will continue to work with and receive advices and expertise from the European Council of Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) on immigration related issues. Other NGOs working with writers and/or human rights/freedom of expression are also important to ICORN, both as partners for lobbying and strategic goals, and as cooperating partners for literary projects and events. Well into 2012, and throughout 2013 and 2014, a strengthened, diversified and multiplied network of relevant cooperation partners will be a vital precondition for ICORN's further development and growth.