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PRESS RELEASE
For immediate release

The Palestine Festival of Literature
23-28 May 2009

“Thank you, dear friends, for your noble solidarity, thank you for your courageous gesture to break the moral siege inflicted upon us and thank you because you are resisting the invitation to dance on our graves. We are still here. We are still alive.”

(Mahmoud Darwish, May 2008)

The second **Palestine Festival of Literature** is announced today, taking place from 23rd-28th May 2009.

Because of the difficulties Palestinians face under military occupation in travelling around their own country, the Festival group of 17 international writers will travel to its audiences in the West Bank. It will tour to Ramallah, to Jenin, to al-Khalil/Hebron and to Bethlehem. To mark Jerusalem’s status as Cultural Capital of the Arab World for 2009, the festival will begin and end in Jerusalem.

Michael Palin will be taking part in the festival this year together with: Suad Amiry, Victoria Brittain, Carmen Callil, Abdulrazak Gurnah, Suheir Hammad, Nathalie Handal, Jeremy Harding, Rachel Holmes, Robin Yassin-Kassab, Brigid Keenan, Jamal Mahjoub, Henning Mankell (accompanied by his wife, Eva Bergman), Deborah Moggach, Claire Messud, Alexandra Pringle, Pru Rowlandson, Raja Shehadeh, Ahdaf Soueif and M G Vassanji.

The inaugural **Palestine Festival of Literature** in 2008 travelled to Jerusalem, Ramallah and Bethlehem reaching audiences of thousands. Author **Andrew O’Hagan**, who was involved in the 2008 festival, says:

“I had come as one of the writers attending the first ever **Palestine Festival of Literature**. Thousands of people turned out: they wanted to believe that Palestine is not just a cause but also a culture and a country, a place not simply for stone-throwing but for ideas and for modernity.

Chair and Founder of **PALFEST**, **Ahdaf Soueif** says:

“We were overwhelmed by the responses of both our audience and our authors last year; so we can’t wait to go back. We found that Palestinian cities – even in the extraordinarily cruel circumstances in which they find themselves – manage to produce brilliant art and top class education. **PALFEST** aims to help them carry on doing that.”

The Palestine Festival of Literature was inspired by the call of the late great Palestinian thinker, Edward Said, to “reaffirm the power of culture over the culture of power.” The Festival Patrons are Chinua Achebe, John Berger, (the late) Mahmoud Darwish, Seamus Heaney and (the late) Harold Pinter.





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PALFEST 09 is organized in **Cooperation with Yabous Productions, and in partnership with the British Council.**

Sandra Hamrouni, British Council, Director Palestinian Territories says:

"PALFEST is a remarkable initiative with great reach to bring people together through creativity and shared experience. The British Council is pleased to support the Festival for the second year running, as part of the legacy of our New Writing Project which aims to create relationships and opportunities for collaboration between writers, readers, publishers and translators, in the Arab world and the UK."

Rania Elias, Director, Yabous Productions Festival, says:

"Palestinian life is jailed behind barriers, held up at checkpoints, but it insists on being part of the wider world; this is why the Palestine International Festival of Literature enjoyed packed houses last year. Yabous is delighted to be PALFEST's Palestinian partners for this year here in Jerusalem, the capital of Arab culture for 2009."

NOTES TO EDITORS

- For the full programme of events please visit www.palfest.org or use the contact details below.
- All events are free of charge.
- Engaged Events, the organizing body of the **Palestine Festival of Literature**, is a UK charity that conceives, organizes and promotes cultural events.
- **Engaged Events is organizing the Palestine Festival of Literature 2009 in cooperation with Yabous Productions, a Palestinian non-profit organization based in Jerusalem working in performing arts.**
- **The Palestine Festival of Literature** will also have strong outreach and education components. Authors will be meeting Palestinian writers, and will be visiting and reading in Aida camp in Bethlehem, as well as at local schools and universities, including the Arab American University in Jenin, and Hebron University.
- **The Palestine Festival of Literature** is supported by: The British Council, The Sigrid Rausing Charitable Fund, UNESCO and Royal Jordanian Airlines.
- The Festival also gratefully acknowledges the support of our private donors.
- **Local Festival partners include; the Arab American University in Jenin; Birzeit University, The Freedom Theatre; the A M Qattan Foundation; Hebron Rehabilitation Committee; Hebron University; BADIL Resource Centre for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights in Bethlehem, Dar Annadwa in Bethlehem and Khalil Sakakini Cultural Centre.**
- For more information on the **Palestine Festival of Literature**, please contact:

Jerusalem

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Participant Biographies in Brief

Suad Amiry is a Palestinian writer and architect. She is the director of the Riwaq Centre for Architectural Conservation. In 2006 she was appointed Vice-Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of Birzeit University. Her book *Sharon and My Mother-in-Law* has been translated into 17 languages and was awarded the prestigious Viareggio Prize in 2004. Her second book was *No Sex in the City*. Her next book, which is scheduled to come out in Italian in September is *Murad Murad*: an account of an 18 hour trip she took, disguised as a male labourer, in the company of Palestinian workers struggling to get work in Israel. Amiry lives in Ramallah with her husband, sociologist and political activist Salim Tamari.

Victoria Brittain has worked as a journalist in Africa, Asia and the Middle East for many years. For more than two decades she worked for *The Guardian*, where she was Associate Foreign Editor in recent years. She also writes for various French media outlets and has been a consultant to the UN on issues of women and war, and to the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme. Most recently she has been a Research Associate at the London School of Economics. She is a patron of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, a trustee of Widows' Rights International and Gift for Life, Rwanda. Among her publications is *Enemy Combatant: My Imprisonment in Guantanamo, Bagram and Kandahar*. She has written a number of non-fiction books, which have been translated into various languages. She is a Board member of PALFEST. She lives in London.

Carmen Callil founded Virago Press in 1972 and ten years later became managing director of the publishers Chatto & Windus & The Hogarth Press. She is the author (with Colm Tóibín) of *The Modern Library: The 200 Best Novels in English Since 1950*. In 2006, she published *Bad Faith: A Forgotten History of Family and Fatherland*, a biography of Vichy figure Louis Darquier, whose daughter was Callil's therapist. Callil was born in Melbourne, Australia. She moved to the United Kingdom in 1960. She lives in London.

Abdulrazak Gurnah is the author of seven novels which include *Paradise*, *Admiring Silence* and *By the Sea*. *Paradise* was shortlisted for both the Booker and the Whitbread Prizes. *By The Sea* was longlisted for the Booker Prize, shortlisted for the Los Angeles Times Book Award and won the Radio France International 'Temoin du Monde' Prize. Gurnah teaches at the University of Kent. His most recent novel is *Desertion* (2005), shortlisted for a 2006 Commonwealth Writers Prize. He was born in Zanzibar lives in Canterbury, Kent.

Suheir Hammad is the author of *Breaking Poems*, *Zaatar Diva*, *Born Palestinian*, *Born Black* and *Drops of This Story*. She was an original writer and performer in the TONY award winning *Russell Simmons Presents Def Poetry Jam* on Broadway. Suheir appears in the award winning film, *Salt of This Sea* and her work has appeared in numerous anthologies and journals, as well as on stage in produced plays. She lives in Brooklyn.

Nathalie Handal is the author of numerous books, most recently, *The Lives of Rain* (short-listed for The Agnes Lynch Starrett Poetry Prize), and co-editor of *Language for a New Century*:

Contemporary Poetry from the Middle East, Asia & Beyond (W.W. Norton, 2008). She was a finalist for the 2009 A Room of Her Own's Freedom Award, and her latest poetry book, *Love and Strange Horses* (University of Pittsburgh Press) is forthcoming. Her work has appeared in numerous anthologies and magazines, including *The Literary Review* and has been translated into more than 15 languages. Palestinian of origin, she lives in New York City.

Jeremy Harding is the author of *Small Wars, Small Mercies: Journeys in Africa's Disputed Nations* (1993) and *The Uninvited: Refugees at the Rich Man's Gate* (2000), a report on clandestine migrants and asylum seekers in Western Europe, which won the Martha Gellhorn Award for Journalism in 2001. His translations of Rimbaud's poetry were published by Penguin in 2004. He is a contributing editor at the London Review of Books. His most recent book is *Mother Country* (2006). He lives in France.

Brigid Keenan is an author and journalist. She has worked as an editor on *Nova Magazine*, *The Observer* and *The Sunday Times*. On marriage to a diplomat she re-orientated her career into writing books and, whilst travelling the world with her husband, has published two fashion histories as well as *Travels in Kashmir* (1989), *Damascus: Hidden Treasures of the Old City* (2001), and the best selling *Diplomatic Baggage* (2005). Keenan is a founding member of the Board of PALFEST. She has lived and travelled in many countries in the Arab world and in Asia.

Jamal Mahjoub's novel *Travelling with Djinn*s (2003) was awarded the Prix d'Astrolabe at the prestigious Etonnants Voyageurs festival in France. His most recent works are *The Drift Latitudes* and *Nubian Indigo*. Mahjoub was born in London but grew up in the

Sudan. His first three novels — *Navigation of a Rainmaker*, *Wings of Dust* and *In the Hour of Signs*— form a loose trilogy dealing with Sudan and its history. *The Carrier*, his fourth novel, examines the development of the telescope and the link between scientific advances in the Arab world and the Renaissance, in particular heliocentricity and the separation of science and religion. Later works deal with migration and identity in today's Europe. He is currently writing a non-fiction book on the Darfur conflict. Mahjoub lives and works in Barcelona.

Henning Mankell, crime novelist and playwright, is the creator of the Kurt Wallander detective novels which have been published in 33 countries and consistently top the bestseller lists in Europe. A political dimension is always present in his writing. He has received major literary prizes and generated numerous international film and television adaptations. He was born in Stockholm and now lives between Sweden and Maputo, Mozambique, where he works as the director of Teatro Avenida.

Claire Messud's debut novel, *When The World Was Steady* (1995), was nominated for the PEN/Faulkner Award. In 1999, she published *The Last Life*, a story of three generations of a French-Algerian family, which won Britain's Encore Award. Her 2001 work, *The Hunters*, consists of two novellas. Her most recent novel, *The Emperor's Children*, was longlisted for the 2006 Man Booker Prize and has been translated into over 20 languages. She lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Deborah Moggach's many screenplays include the recent TV adaptation of *The Diary of Anne Frank* and the film *Pride and Prejudice*, starring Keira Knightley, for which she was awarded a

BAFTA nomination. She is the author of 16 successful novels including, most recently, most recently, *These Foolish Things*, *Tulip Fever* and *In the Dark*. She lives in North London.

Michael Palin established his reputation with *Monty Python's Flying Circus* and *Ripping Yarns*. His work also includes several *Monty Python* films, as well as *The Missionary*, *A Private Function*, *American Friends*, *Fierce Creatures* and an award-winning performance as the hapless Ken in *A Fish Called Wanda*. His television credits include two films for the BBC's *Great Railway Journeys*, the plays *East of Ipswich* and *Number 27*, and Alan Bleasdale's *GBH*. He has written books to accompany his seven very successful travel series *Around the World in 80 Days*, *Pole to Pole*, *Full Circle*, *Hemingway Adventure*, *Sahara*, *Himalaya* and *New Europe*. He is also the author of a number of children's stories, the play *The Weekend* and the novel *Hemingway's Chair*. In 2006 the first volume of his Diaries, *1969-1979: spent many weeks on the bestseller lists*. He lives in London.

Raja Shehadeh is a Palestinian lawyer and writer. He is a founder of the pioneering human rights organisation, Al-Haq, an affiliate of the International Commission of Jurists, and the author of several books about international law, human rights and the Middle East. Shehadeh is the author of the highly praised *Strangers in the House* (2002), *When the Birds Stopped Singing: Life in Ramallah Under Siege* (2003) and *Palestinian Walks: Forays into a Vanishing Landscape* (2007), published by Profile Books, for which he won the Orwell Prize for Political Writing in 2008. He lives in Ramallah.

Ahdaf Soueif is known for the bestselling novel, *The Map of Love*, shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 1999 and subsequently translated into more than 20 languages. A political and cultural

commentator with a special interest in Palestine, she writes for various newspapers in both the West and the Arab world. Her seminal article, "Under the Gun: A Palestinian Journey," was originally published in *The Guardian* and then printed in Soueif's 2004 collection of essays, *Mezzaterra: Fragments from the Common Ground*. Soueif has also translated Mourid Barghouti's, *I Saw Ramallah* from Arabic into English. Born in Egypt, Soueif currently lives in Cairo and London. She is Chair of PALFEST.

M.G. Vassanji is one of just two writers to have won Canada's most prestigious literary award, the Giller Prize, twice: in 1994 for *The Book of Secrets* and in 2003 for *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*. His latest work, *The Assassin's Song*, was also short-listed for the prize in 2007. Vassanji was born in Kenya and raised in Tanzania. He attended MIT and U Penn before moving to Canada in 1978, having specialized in theoretical nuclear physics. In 1989 he published his first novel, *The Gunny Sack*, which won the Commonwealth Regional Prize. Vassanji is the author of six novels, two collections of short stories, a memoir of his travels in India, and a biography of Mordecai Richler. In 2005, he was made a Member of the Order of Canada. He lives in Toronto.

Robin Yassin-Kassab's first novel, *The Road from Damascus*, was published by Hamish Hamilton (Penguin) in 2008. He has worked as a journalist and an English teacher in Pakistan, Syria, Turkey, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Oman. He is currently living in Scotland and working on his second novel.

Rachel Holmes is a writer. Her most recent book, *The Hottentot Venus: The Life and Times of Saartjie Baartman*, was published by Bloomsbury in 2007. She is currently writing a life of Eleanor Marx. Rachel is Head of Literature and the Spoken Word at the Southbank Centre, London, and runs the annual London Literature



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Festival. She is a founder and patron of FOTAC UK, which supports the Treatment Action Campaign in the fight for HIV and AIDS in South Africa, and Chair of Africa Beyond, celebrating African artists in the UK. She lives in London.

Alexandra Pringle is Editor-in-Chief of Bloomsbury Publishing. She began her career in publishing at Virago Press in 1978, becoming Editorial Director in 1984. In 1990 she joined Hamish Hamilton as Editorial Director and four years later left publishing to become a literary agent. She joined Bloomsbury in 1999. Her list of authors includes Donna Tartt, Hanan al-Shaykh, Barbara Trapido, Kamila Shamsie, Richard Ford, Margaret Atwood, Jhumpa Lahiri, Edward Said, Esther Freud, Leila Aboulela, William Boyd, Abdulrazak Gurnah, Anne Michaels, John Berger, Ronan Bennett, Colum McCann and Romesh Gunesequera. She is a Director of the Management Board, Bloomsbury Book Publishing Company Limited, and a Trustee of Index-on-Censorship. She lives in London.

Pru Rowlandson is the publicity director for Granta and Portobello Books: highly respected literary imprints that publish some of the best fiction and non-fiction from around the world. Between 2005 and 2007 she ran the Debut Authors Festival in Edinburgh, where many now-established writers gave their first public talks. From 1999 to 2005 she was the publicity manager for Canongate Books, an independent publishing house in Edinburgh. She lives in London.

Palfest Board

Victoria Brittain has worked as a journalist in Africa, Asia and the Middle East for many years. For more than two decades she worked for *The Guardian*, where she was Associate Foreign Editor in recent years. She also writes for various French media outlets and has been a consultant to the UN on issues of women and war, and to the Gaza



Community Mental Health Programme. Most recently she has been a Research Associate at the London School of Economics. She is a patron of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, a trustee of Widows' Rights International and Gift for Life, Rwanda. Among her publications is *Enemy Combatant: My Imprisonment in Guantanamo, Bagram and Kandahar*. She has written a number of non-fiction books, which have been translated into various languages. She is a Board member of PALFEST. She lives in London.

Alison Elliot's work straddles the university, civil society and the church. Formerly a lecturer in psychology, she is currently an Honorary Fellow at New College, University of Edinburgh, where she is Associate Director of the Centre for Theology and Public Issues. In 2004 she became the first woman to be appointed Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. She has represented her church on many ecumenical and civic bodies. As the church's spokesman on politics and social policy, she developed a particular interest in international issues. She chairs the Lay Advisory Group for the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh and has taken part in working groups on health, criminal justice, asylum policy, constitutional matters and land reform. She lives in Edinburgh.

John Horner (Treasurer) has had a long and distinguished career in advertising. He is a Fellow of the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising, a Business Mentor for the Prince of Wales Trust and the lead trustee of the Jaipur Heritage Trust, where HRH the Prince of Wales is patron. He is a director of BrandKind, a brand development agency with clients from Walls Ice Cream, to the English Tourist Board. In 1983, he set up his own agency which he subsequently sold to the Havas Group. The agency became the 20th in the UK, boasting clients from Peugeot to Orangina and Toshiba to Elle Magazine. It launched Westway, a film studio and production company, a research company and a design company, amongst several other ventures. In

1997 he set up a Strategic Brand and New Product Development Consultancy - Blue Logic whose clients came to include Kellogg's, Boots, The Post Office, Sainsbury's Homebase, Lego and Legoland. In 1999 he led a successful MBO of Models 1, the UK's leading model agency, boasting models from Yasmin le Bon and Twiggy to Linda Evangelista and Karen Elson. He acts as managing director to the company. He lives in London.

Ahdaf Soueif is known for the bestselling novel, *The Map of Love*, shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 1999 and subsequently translated into more than 20 languages. A political and cultural commentator with a special interest in Palestine, she writes for various newspapers in both the West and the Arab world. Her seminal article, "Under the Gun: A Palestinian Journey," was originally published in *The Guardian* and then printed in Soueif's 2004 collection of essays, *Mezzaterra: Fragments from the Common Ground*. Soueif has also translated Mourid Barghouti's, *I Saw Ramallah* from Arabic into English. Born in Egypt, Soueif currently lives in Cairo and London. She is Chair of PALFEST.

Sheila Whitaker was Head of the National Film Archive collection of stills, posters and original designs, Head of Programming at the National Film Theatre and Director of the London Film Festival. She has written extensively in film journals, *The Guardian*, *The Observer* and *Times Higher Educational Supplement*. She co-edited *Life and art: the new Iranian cinema* (BFI 1999) and *An Argentine Passion: the films of Maria Luisa Bemberg* (Verso 2000). She is Advisory Editor to I.B.Tauris for film publications, was Founder Editor of *Writing Women*, a journal of women's writing, and curated two programmes of Palestinian cinema at the ICA. She is a Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Letters (D.Litt) by the University of Newcastle and an Honorary Doctorate of Law by the University of Warwick.

Palfest team

Christina Baum was one of the main organisers of the Parati International Literary Festival (FLIP), the first and largest literature festival in South America, founded by the British publisher Liz Calder in 2003. When she left FLIP in 2007, she joined the charity People's Palace Projects (PPP), based at Queen Mary University of London, as project administrator. Since August 2008 she has been working for PALFEST. She speaks Portuguese, English, French and Spanish. Christina was born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where she studied English and Literature and worked as a language teacher and translator for several years. She lives in Beaconsfield, Bucks.

Omar Robert Hamilton. Since graduating from Oxford University (2007) and the London Film Academy (2008) Robbie's time has been divided between film-making and cultural festivals. He recently finished shooting a short film in Cairo and has just returned from Washington,DC., where he worked for two months on the Kennedy Center's tentpole festival: *Arabesque: Arts of the Arab World*. He has been involved with PALFEST since its inception. He lives in London.

Eleanor O' Keefe is an international promoter of arts and literary events. She has been a director of the Jaipur Literature Festival and the Shakespeare and Company Literary Festival in Paris. She is one of the co-founders of PALFEST. Dividing her time between France and London, she is currently working on a street theatre project in Marrakech and literary lectures with The Last Tuesday Society in London.