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Miami: City of Refuge and the Florida Center for the Literary Arts at Miami Dade College Welcome Writer-in-residence from Zimbabwe

Miami: City of Refuge writer-in-residence Chenjerai Hove

Miami, February 19, 2010 - A little more than a year ago, at the 2008 25th anniversary edition of **Miami Book Fair International at Miami Dade College** (MDC), organizers paid tribute to a very special program, *Cities of Refuge*, an international project that aids imperiled writers across the globe by finding them homes in partner cities where they may write openly and free of censorship and repression.

At the event, a group of exiled authors living in the US – Irakli Kakabadze from Georgia and Sarah Mkhonza from Swaziland, *International Cities of Refuge* Director Helge Lund and *Refuge* executive Board Members Russell Banks and Nobel Prize winner Derek Walcott spoke about the project which was attended by then Miami Mayor Manny Diaz and MDC President Dr. Eduardo J. Padrón. The wheels began turning and soon the city of Miami, Miami Dade College, and the International City of Refuge Network (ICORN) partnered together to make Miami the first ICORN member city in the United States.

The original cities of refuge organization, IPW (International Parliament of Writers) was founded by prominent writers Salman Rushdie, Russell Banks, Wole Soyinka and a dozen others in response to increased persecution in their native countries. The charter was later split into two entities: Cities of Refuge North America and The European Charter of Cities of Asylum. Today, the two charters have once again merged into a singular international organization called, the International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN). Operating under the same principals of the original IPW charter, ICORN is an association of cities around the world dedicated to the value of Freedom of Expression. Each ICORN city focuses on one writer that represents the countless others in hiding, in prison or silenced forever.

Today, the Florida Center for the Literary Arts at MDC, which has dynamic year-round programming - including the Book Fair, is proud to welcome **Mr. Chenjerai Hove**, of Zimbabwe, as *Miami: City of Refuge* writer-in-residence to the community. **The community is invited to meet him on Tuesday, Feb. 23, at 6:30 p.m., as he will read some of his work and discuss his experiences at Books & Books in Coral Gables, 265 Aragon Avenue.**

In exile, after his passport was forcibly taken away by the government in his homeland, Hove has catapulted into one of Africa's leading socially conscious literary minds. He is best known for his international award winning novel, *BONES* (1989) about a poor farm mother who loses her son in the Zimbabwean war of liberation. Born in 1956, he has been a fearless champion of resistance to the kinds of injustices and abuses that precipitate wars and conflicts. He has written to provide a voice to the voiceless in his beloved homeland.

The **government of Zimbabwe** first noticed Hove for his political novel *Masimba Avanhú? (Is This the*

People's Power?) and for his play *Sister Sing Again Someday*, which both address the situation of women in Zimbabwe. Hove's home was subsequently burglarized and his unpublished writings were stolen by the national police. After constant surveillance and threats to his family, he left Zimbabwe in 2001 leaving his wife and youngest child behind. Most recently, he has lived in exile in Stavanger, Norway.

As the *Miami: City of Refugewriter-in-residence* at the Florida Center for the Literary Arts at MDC, Hove will bring his politically and culturally rich stories of exile, injustice and ultimate hope to MDC students and the Miami community for two years beginning January 2010. It is also his hope to write and submit opinion columns to major publications.

Mr. Hove's visit is made possible by the support of the **John S. and James L. Knight Foundation**.

His work is political and heart breaking, but, as the **Amazon Book Editorial Review** writes, Hove's work "is angry and sad, but it is not bitter. In Hove's world there is still hope, there is still love, there is still emotion. There is potential for a better world where the human soul can be released to fly like a bird."

The **statistics** show how dangerous conditions can be for writers worldwide and why this project is so important. The **International Federation of Journalists** (IFJ) has called for more action from governments and the United Nations to protect the media as it recently announced a grim total of 137 journalists and media personnel killed during 2009. The number of targeted killings the same year at 113 is one of the highest ever recorded says the IFJ, despite calls by the United Nations for governments to put an end to attacks and persecution. According to the **Committee to Protect Journalists**, 136 journalists were also jailed in 2009. Asia, Central and South America, the Middle East and Africa remain the most dangerous places for writers and other journalists to work.

For more information regarding the program and Mr. Hove, please contact Pablo Cartaya, project coordinator for *Miami: City of Refuge*, at (305) 237-7418 or via email at pablo.hernandezcarta@mdc.edu.

The Florida Center for the Literary Arts at Miami Dade College promotes reading and writing throughout the year by consistently presenting high-quality literary activities open to all in South Florida. Programs and activities include hosting visiting writers; classroom collaborations; public reading series; creative writing courses; the Center's literacy-focused initiatives – Storytime, One Picture Book, One Community, Spanish Authors in America, and the Big Read in partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts; and Miami Book Fair International – the nation's largest and finest literary gathering every November at MDC. The Center also manages the college's acclaimed Spanish-language theatre program, Prometeo, which is its dramatic arts component. For more information, please visit www.flcenterlitarts.com.

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