

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o receives the Erich-Maria-Remarque Peace Prize 2019 Special award for „Sea-Watch e.V.“

22.05.2019. Every two years since 1991, the city of Osnabrück has awarded the Peace Prize, named after the world-famous writer Erich Maria Remarque, who was born in Osnabrück. This year the award will be presented for the 15th time.

The Erich-Maria-Remarque Peace Prize, endowed with 25,000 euros, is awarded to the Kenyan writer and cultural scholar Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o chiefly with regard to his enlightening anti-colonialist topics, his reference to traditional African theatre and narrative art and his advocacy of the preservation of his mother tongue as a mark of identification. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o understands communication among the different languages as a peace-building element. He is regarded as one of the most important voices in African literature. His essays, collected in his anthology *Decolonising the Mind*, determine the discussion of the continuing consequences of the colonisation of Africa to this day. Since 1984, he has been writing his literary texts only in his mother tongue, *Kikuyu* (Gikuyu), which he then translates into English. For him, writing in African languages is part and parcel of African literature, since it encompasses the myths and ways of thinking as well as the culture and the mentality of the people who speak this language. Through equality of the languages and decolonisation at all levels, ruling, post-colonial power structures in the countries of Africa could be overcome and an own strong identity achieved, which could ultimately also prevent the expected stream of refugees to Europe. His collection of essays *Decolonising the Mind* also contains a selection of lectures and articles that fundamentally illustrates his postcolonial criticism and cultural studies theses.

"Especially in his essays Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o refers at a very early stage to the highly topical discussion concerning the consequences of the colonial era - here, for instance, I am thinking of the question of the return of the captured cultural heritage - and the necessity of overcoming the power structures in the

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post-colonial states of Africa, which were also enabled or even only made possible in the first place by the European states," says Lord Mayor Wolfgang Griesert.

"With Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o we are honouring a writer who is concerned with the self-determination of African cultures and with a dissociation from colonial constraints. His attempt to create a dialogue through literature in spite of or indeed because of the different languages evokes understanding for this continent and can thus contribute towards peace. Also with regard to the avoidance of a new colonialism, as endeavoured today by China for example, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o is an important representative of independence through language", says the statement of the jury.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o vehemently advocates the right of peoples to cultural self-determination as an identity and peace-building characteristic and thus corresponds to the thinking and conviction of Erich Maria Remarque, who, in 1929, stated on the consequences of the First World War: "We finally know that all people in the world are equal; we know that all have the same concerns, the same joys, the same hopes and the same life. Today we take the trouble to look into each other's heads. And four years of war have only proven the value of peace."

The association "Sea-Watch" receives the special prize endowed with 5,000 euros. The aim is here to honour the civic commitment to the rescue of refugees at sea and to make it more visible to the public. "Sea-Watch" will also be honoured for their support of legal escape and entry routes as well as their demand for the rescue of refugees in distress at sea by the responsible European institutions. The initiative, which is financed exclusively by donations, is supported by volunteers from all over Europe. "Sea-Watch" has been involved in the rescue of well over 37,000 people.

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The award ceremony will take place on Friday, 29 November 2019 at 11 a.m. local time in the Friedenssaal (Hall of Peace) of the historic town hall of the city of Osnabrück.

General information about the awardees:

Kenyan-born author and cultural scientist **Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o** is regarded as one of the most important writers in East Africa and has repeatedly been considered a candidate for the Nobel Prize for Literature, among others for his critical essays in the book *Decolonising the Mind*, which has also been translated into German. Ngũgĩ has taught as a comparative literary scholar at Yale University, New York University and at the University of California, Irvine. From 1992 to 2002 Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o was at the NYU, both as a Professor for Comparative Literature and Performance Studies and as a "Remarque Professor" for language; but he has not actually researched or published on Remarque. During the Mau Uprising in the 1950s, his family was captured, his stepbrother killed and his mother tortured. In 1964 Ngũgĩ published his first novel *Weep Not, Child* which had already made him world-famous. He sees himself as an anti-colonial writer and has therefore been publishing in his mother tongue, *Kikuyu* (Gikuyu). He translates his works into English himself, but they have also been translated into many other languages. It was not only his progressive themes that have made him popular, but above all his resistance to British colonial politics and the post-colonial rule of Daniel arap Moi's government as well as his reference to traditional African theatre and narrative art. In 1977 he was tortured because of a critical play, imprisoned without trial and his books were banned. In the early 1980s he succeeded in obtaining political asylum in England. During a visit to Kenya in 2004, he and his wife were attacked and both returned to the USA, where they still live today. Ngũgĩ's anti-colonialist theses have dominated the discussion in Africa and worldwide since their first appearance 30 years ago (see also <https://ngugiwathiongo.com>).

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“Sea-Watch” was created at the end of 2014 as an initiative of volunteers dedicated to sea rescue. On 19 May 2015, the association Sea-Watch e.V. was founded. The association tries to fill the gap of an institutionalised, area-wide sea rescue with a clear mandate, such as Mare Nostrum (which saved more than 130,000 people but which was not taken over by the EU and therefore ended) as long as possible and within the scope of its possibilities. Furthermore, the members demand an international, institutionalised sea rescue with a clear mandate and, in the long term, above all legal and safe entry routes for those seeking protection in the sense of a #SafePassage. Since the beginning of 2015, the constantly growing organisation, which consists mainly of committed volunteers from all over Europe, has been working on the organisation and implementation of the project “Sea-Watch” (see also <https://sea-watch.org>).

General information about the Remarque Peace Prize:

The **Erich-Maria-Remarque Peace Prize** is awarded, following the ideas of its namesake, for fictional, journalistic or scientific works which set out to engage with inner and outer peace as well as for demonstrating an exemplary commitment to peace, humanity and freedom.

Under the chairmanship of Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Lücke, President of Osnabrück University, the jury consists of Prof. Dr. Heribert Prantl, Prof. Dr. Rita Süßmuth, Prof. Dr. Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, Dr. Johano Strasser, Dr. Hubert Winkels, Ms Jutta Sauer as well as Prof. Dr. Tilman Westphalen as the representative of the Erich-Maria-Remarque Society and Dr. Thomas Schneider as the director of the Erich-Maria-Remarque Peace Center and as the representative of the city of Osnabrück Lord Mayor Wolfgang Griesert and the press spokesman of the city of Osnabrück, Dr. Sven Jürgensen.

The Erich-Maria-Remarque Peace Prize has been awarded to Lev Kopelev (1991), Hans Magnus Enzensberger (1993), Uri Avnery (1995), Ludvik Vaculik (1997), *Houshang Golshiri* (1999), Svetlana Alexievishh (2001), Prof. Dr. Dr. Dr.

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Dan Bar-On and Mahmoud Darwish (2003), Leoluca Orlando (2005), Prof. Dr. Tony Judt (2007), Henning Mankell (2009), Tahar Ben Jelloun (2011), Abdallah Frangi and Avi Primor (2013), Adonis (2016) and to Asli Erdoğan (2017).

Special prizes have been awarded to Anja Lundholm (1991), Dörte von Westernhagen (1993), Milijenko Jergovic (1995), the Joint German-Czech Historical Commission (1997), the Founding Committee of the Iranian Writers' Association (1999), the International Historical, Educational, Human Rights and Charitable Society, MEMORIAL (2001), Yuri Andrukhowych (2005), Grigori Pasko (2007), Lukas Bärfuss (2009), the human rights organisation PRO ASYL (2011), the initiatives EXIT-Deutschland (2013) and "Pulse of Europe" (2017).

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