



Media Statement from Australian PEN Centres on Adelaide Writers' Week

The three Australian PEN Centres; Perth, Melbourne and Sydney, are deeply concerned about the decision to remove Dr Randa Abdel-Fattah from the Adelaide Writers' Week program, and the absence of a clear public explanation for that decision.

We wish first to acknowledge the long and distinguished history of Adelaide Writers' Week, as well as the exceptional contribution of its leadership to Australian literary and intellectual life. For decades, the festival has served as a vital forum for serious literary exchange and the testing of ideas — including those that are challenging, unsettling, or controversial. It is precisely because of this legacy, and the respect in which Adelaide Writers' Week is held by writers nationally and internationally, that this decision has caused such profound disappointment.

As centres affiliated with PEN International — an organisation with more than a century of experience defending freedom of expression while navigating internal disagreement and external pressure — we recognise the complexity of decision-making in moments of acute social tension. We acknowledge that the aftermath of the horrific Bondi attack created a highly charged environment, and that the Adelaide Writers' Week Board may have faced intense external pressures. We also recognise that Dr Abdel-Fattah is a polarising public figure.

However, controversy and discomfort are not incidental to the mission of a writers' festival of this standing; they are integral to it. Adelaide Writers' Week has earned its reputation precisely by engaging with difficult voices and contested ideas, rather than excluding them.

The cancelling of the festival after the majority of scheduled writers withdrew is unprecedented and deeply troubling. This response points not merely to disagreement with a single decision, but to a serious breakdown of trust, compounded by a lack of transparency. In these circumstances, we believe the writing community and the broader public are entitled to a fuller and more forthright account of how and why this decision was made.

If the removal of Dr Abdel-Fattah was influenced by pressure from lobby groups whose views do not reflect the broad values of Australia's literary community, then accountability around the process is essential. While a public explanation cannot undo the damage already caused, it may help begin to repair it and reaffirm the values of openness, courage, and intellectual integrity that Adelaide Writers' Week has long represented.

We offer these comments in a spirit of seriousness and shared commitment to literature, freedom of expression, and the essential role of writers' festivals as spaces where uncomfortable ideas can be confronted rather than avoided.