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**UWRF 2018: A HOTBED FOR FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN A REGION WHERE IT IS
CRUCIALLY NEEDED**

Ubud, INDONESIA –

The Ubud Writers & Readers Festival (UWRF) successfully delivered its 15th year from 24-28 October, with dynamic celebrations of Indonesia's thriving literature and arts industry, and compelling discussions of the region's most polarizing issues.

This year's UWRF became a hotbed for freedom of expression in a region where it is crucially needed, reinforcing the Festival's role as the primary platform for Indonesian writers and artists to share their work and air their country's biggest challenges. Feminism, gender identity, queer censorship, religious freedom, environmental activism and Indigenous rights were unpacked by over 180 authors, activists and journalists from across Indonesia and the world.

The UWRF's role as a major annual injection for local businesses was also strengthened, with an audience of 25,000 across its 200+ events spending an estimated USD 830,000, a 10% increase on the previous year. After the devastating natural disasters in Lombok and Palu, attendees donated almost USD 2,000 to local NGO IDEP Foundation's Emergency Response.

Indonesia's firebrand Minister for Fisheries and Maritime Affairs, Susi Pudjiastuti, set the Festival's environmental agenda with her trademark wit and straight-talking style. "If we have human rights, we also need ecosystem rights. Where is the protection for marine rights?" she asked BBC Indonesia's Rebecca Henschke during her opening address.

Director of Greenpeace Southeast Asia, Yeb Saño, was an impressive spokesperson for collective activism and female empowerment in the fight against climate change. "As a human species we survive because we work together," he told the capacity crowd at Taman Baca. "If you're looking for a simple answer on how we can solve climate change: empower women. We need to empower women to have a fighting chance against climate change."

From how #MeToo translates in Indonesia and the region, to the power of storytelling and sharing through art to enable healing, gender equality and feminism in many forms was a focal point of the Festival. "My generation is fighting for the recognition of sexual violence," commented Indonesian poet, academic and activist Saras Dewi. "The stories and knowledge even about our own bodies are denied to women," stated author and activist Eliza Vitri Handayani.



The importance of sharing stories for social impact was encapsulated by Festival headliner Hanif Kureishi: “We write characters that have to live in the world and change it at the same time by their stories being present. You can’t contribute to the narrative by being absent and being silent.”

One of the most stirring discussions of the UWRF was the Off Limits panel, during which young Indonesian writers who tackle topics still considered taboo in Indonesia shared their struggles and hopes. “Support can go in many ways and forms, but silence is never a support,” said award-winning queer author Norman Erikson Pasaribu.

Pasaribu is one of the 12 Indonesian writers announced during the Festival selected to attend the London Book Fair 2019, at which Indonesia is the focus country. The Indonesian program will celebrate the best of contemporary Indonesian literature, and the writers chosen represent the diversity of Indonesia’s literary landscape, and its multiple regions, religions, genres, and ages.

The remaining 11 are Agustinus Wibowo, Clara Ng, Dewi Lestari, Faisal Oddang, Intan Paramaditha, Laksmi Pamuntjak, Leila S. Chudori, Nirwan Dewanto, Reda Gaudiamo, Seno Gumira Ajidarma, and Sheila Rooswitha Putri. All except Rooswitha Putri are previous UWRF speakers.

“It has always been our mission to extend the reach of Indonesian writers, promote Indonesian culture and support local emerging writers,” commented UWRF Founder & Director Janet DeNeefe at the Festival’s 15th birthday celebration at Casa Luna.

“With Indonesia as the London Book Fair’s focus country next year, the future of Indonesian literature on the world stage is bright,” DeNeefe continued. “We feel proud to have supported hundreds of Indonesian writers and thinkers throughout our 15 years, and we’re excited about what we can continue to achieve over the next 15. We’re looking forward to welcoming you to our 16th year from 23-27 October, 2019.”

More Information

Ubud Writers & Readers Festival 2018

The 15th Ubud Writers & Readers Festival was held from 24-28 October, 2018.

Ubud Writers & Readers Festival 2019

The 16th Ubud Writers & Readers Festival will be held from 23-27 October, 2019.



About the Festival

The Ubud Writers & Readers Festival's mission is to create a world class festival that celebrates extraordinary stories and amplifies brave voices, tackles global issues and bold ideas. The Festival brings together a diverse mix of Indonesian and international writers, speakers, thinkers, artists, advocates, commentators and activists, to create a space for cross-cultural dialogue and connection.

The Ubud Writers & Readers Festival is one of the major annual projects of not-for-profit foundation, the Yayasan Mudra Swari Saraswati. It was first conceived of in 2004 by Janet DeNeefe, Co-founder of the Foundation, as a healing project in response to the first Bali bombing.

Testimonials

"The festival – surely the best in the world – ensures that you're never at a loss for intellectual nourishment." - [Harper's Bazaar](#)

UWRF is one of Penguin Random House's [Best Literary Festivals Around the World](#)

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