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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PWAC Condemns New CanWest Global Contract

The Periodical Writers Association of Canada condemns the latest contract demands by CanWest Global Communications Corp., and is urging all independent writers not to sign on the dotted line. In a new contract being distributed to some freelance contributors to CanWest Publications newspapers, creators are being asked to sign over complete ownership of their work. According to the contract, creators will give the media giant “the right to exclusively use and exploit the Content in any manner and in any and all media, whether now known or hereafter devised, throughout the universe, in perpetuity.”

“I’ve told some people about the “throughout the universe line” and they laugh in disbelief,” says PWAC President Liz Warwick. “And it *would* be funny if the contract didn’t have such negative implications for Canadian culture.”

"The Copyright Act clearly states what we write belongs to us," says Warwick. "It's not reasonable to ask us to give our work away for nothing. We used to see contracts like this five or six years ago, but we were able to work with publishers and show them such agreements weren't really in anyone's interest."

All-rights contracts make it extremely difficult for writers to earn a living from their words. Even just ten years ago, newspapers typically purchased from freelance creators the right to publish material only once. This allowed freelancers to sell their work in other markets, self-syndicating their work and making a decent living. Pay rates for newspaper articles are typically quite low, in many cases declining 50 percent or more over the past decade, hence the need for a writer to syndicate work to ensure a reasonable income.

CanWest's contract has appeared on the heels of a recent Ontario Appeal Court decision affirming the legal rights of freelancers to control and profit from their own material. This new contract effectively erases those rights and leaves Canada's independent writers out in the cold when it comes to profiting from their own work.

"In the end, it's Canadian culture that suffers," says Liz Warwick. "The harder it is to make a living at writing, the fewer people will choose to write and the fewer Canadian voices and opinions will be heard within Canadian media. The professional writing community, including The Writers Union of Canada, The Travel Media Association of Canada, the Canadian Media Guild and the Automobile Journalist Association of Canada, is outraged by this development."

PWAC is also taking issue with a clause that demands freelancers waive "in favour of CanWest and its assigns, all 'moral rights.'" Moral rights defend the creator's right to have their name attached to their work, and to not have it edited in a way that changes its meaning. Such a demand is at odds with international convention in the area of copyright.

"If Canadians want their stories told," concludes Warwick, "they need to stand up now and insist CanWest Global treat writers fairly."

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PWAC is the national association representing freelance writers and journalists across Canada.

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