



**Magiczny  
Kraków**

## **Krakow welcomes new beneficiary of ICORN**

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**Felix Kaputu, PhD, a writer, scientist, literary scholar, social activist and grantee of the Fulbright Programme scholarship and the University of California scholarship from Congo, became another writer who was granted refuge in the City of Krakow under the ICORN (International Cities of Refuge Network) programme. He will stay in Krakow till the end of the year, and his stay is organised by the City of Krakow, the Krakow Festival Office, and the Villa Decius Association.**

Born in Congo in 1959, Felix Kaputu is a specialist in African studies, art and philosophy. His academic work has also encompassed the topics of gender, African mythology and literature. He has done research and lectured, among others, in the USA, Japan and Belgium. In 2003, he received a scholarship from the Fulbright Foundation and the University of California. He is the author of 6 books and almost 60 publications on topics such as the difficult situation of women in Africa, HIV and AIDS.

In May 2005, Kaputu was arrested without a warrant by the Agency for National Security (ANR). He was accused of being responsible for the secession movement of 20,000 soldiers in the Katanga province, gun smuggling and encouraging students to rebel. According to unofficial information, he was to be sentenced to 30 years of imprisonment or death. He spent 10 days in prison, where he was refused food and threatened with death. He witnessed the use of physical violence and mysterious disappearances of other prisoners. Transferred to the Makala Penitentiary and Reeducation Centre in Kinshasa, he was eventually released thanks to the intervention of Amnesty International and efforts of the mass media and fellow scientists. Having been freed, he was under constant surveillance, which made it impossible for him to resume teaching. In 2006 he left the country as a grantee of the Scholars at Risk scholarship.

### **Krakow: City of Literature, City of Refuge**

The Polish city joined the ICORN network in 2011, the Year of Czesław Miłosz, and was the first member of this network in the region of Eastern & Central Europe. ICORN, which offers refuge to writers and human rights advocates who cannot freely live and work in their own countries because of political repressions, was formed in 2005 in Norway. One of the initiators of this network was one of the most persecuted writers of the 20th century, Salman Rushdie, whose *Satanic Verses* led to violent protests in the Islamic world and led Ayatollah Khomeini to issue a famous fatwa, a sentence obliging every true Muslim to kill the writer, on him.

When Krakow joined ICORN, the organisation's authorities noted that the Polish city is an important and entirely justified candidate that would serve as an excellent example for other cities in this part of Europe. Helge Lunde, Director of the ICORN network, noted that thanks to cultural traditions and a rich artistic and literary life, Krakow would be an ideal place of refuge and inspiration for persecuted artists.

It considered the city's geopolitical location as equally significant, calling Krakow a "Gateway to the East," which is important from the perspective of ICORN's interest in helping numerous writers in Poland's eastern neighbours. Since then, Krakow has hosted five writers: Maria Amelie (whose real name is Madina Salamova, from Northern Osetia, now in Norway), Kareem Amer (Egypt, now in Norway), Mostafa Zamaniniya (Iran), Lavon Barszczeuski (Belarus) and Asl? Erdo?an (Turkey).



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ICORN creates a continually growing network of over 50 cities, and its activity is one of the strongest voices in defence of freedom of speech and freedom to one's convictions as well as international solidarity. During 10 years of its activity, ICORN has found temporary places of refuge for several hundred writers, intellectuals, bloggers, and human rights activists. The network does not only coordinate a "shelter cities" programme, but it also cooperates with the governments of various countries and many organisations around the world, thus very tangibly fighting for freedom of speech and human rights.

International co-operation within ICORN has a strategic position in the Krakow UNESCO City of Literature programme, whose development strategy encompasses 10 thematic areas, including the development of ties between literature and human rights.