

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Ayelet Tsabari Wins  
\$100,000 2015 Sami Rohr Prize for Jewish Literature  
For “The Best Place On Earth”  
Meet the Winners and Finalists at a Public Forum  
On May 6 at the Museum of Jewish Heritage**

**New York, February 23, 2015** – The Jewish Book Council is pleased to announce that Ayelet Tsabari, author of *The Best Place On Earth: Stories* (HarperCollins Canada), is the winner of the 2015 Sami Rohr Prize for Jewish Literature. One of the largest literary prizes – an award of \$100,000 - the 2015 Sami Rohr Prize for Jewish Literature honors emerging writers who explore the Jewish experience in a specific work of fiction. The author’s potential to make significant contributions to Jewish literature is a primary factor in the award. Kenneth Bonert, author of *The Lion Seeker: A Novel* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt), was named as the runner-up and will be awarded a prize of \$25,000.

Ayelet Tsabari explores Israeli history through characters of Mizrahi background (Jews of Middle Eastern and North African descent) that are at the crossroads of nationalities, religions, and communities.

“I grew up not seeing myself and my family in literature, so writing *The Best Place on Earth* was a way to create the characters that were missing from my childhood stories,” says Tsabari. “By portraying characters of Mizrahi background I was hoping to complicate readers’ perceptions of Israel and Jewishness, and to expand and broaden their ideas of what a Jewish story and Jewish experience can be.”

Kenneth Bonert’s powerful novel tells of how a hard-driving mother toughens her son up to fight his way out of poverty in South Africa. A third-generation South African Jew, Bonert has produced an absorbing first novel.

All finalists for the Sami Rohr Prize are inducted into the Sami Rohr Jewish Literary Institute, an annual gathering of Sami Rohr winners, finalists, judges, and advisors. To date, all winners of the prize have continued with successful literary careers in both fiction and nonfiction. Some of these include Austin Ratner, Gal Beckerman, and Lucette Lagnado.

“We are welcoming a remarkable group of authors into the Sami Rohr Prize literary community, which now numbers over sixty people. They all write in English but each of the five was born in a different country, thereby representing the worldwide Jewish community,” says Carolyn Starman Hessel, Director of the Jewish Book Council, the coordinating organization for the Sami Rohr Jewish literary programs.

Noted philanthropist and businessman Sami Rohr, who died at age 86 in August of 2012, viewed his philanthropy as an investment in the Jewish people. His involvement in charitable efforts matched the attention he devoted to his professional work, and the award established in his name reflects his dedication to Jewish education, culture, and community. "Since Sami Rohr's passing, the importance of upholding his extraordinary legacy is even greater," says Hessel.

The Rohr Prize has been given annually since 2007 and considers works of fiction and nonfiction in alternating years.

This year, for the first time, the winners and finalists will be celebrated at a public program, sponsored by the Jewish Book Council together with the Museum of Jewish Heritage. The program will be held at the museum on May 6, 2015 at 7 p.m.

The winners and finalists of the 2015 Sami Rohr Prize for Fiction will also be honored at a private ceremony in New York on May 7, 2015.

**The following is a list of all of the finalists:**

Yelena Akhtiorskaya, author of *Panic in a Suitcase: A Novel* (Penguin Group 2014), deftly depicts the life of a family of Ukrainian emigres struggling to adjust to life in the United States.

Molly Antopol, author of *The UnAmericans: Stories* (W.W. Norton & Company 2014), offers an engaging collection of stories set in Tel Aviv, Prague and the Ukraine, featuring characters that are Israeli and Russian.

Kenneth Bonert, author of *The Lion Seeker: A Novel* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 2013), tells the powerful story of a poor Lithuanian Jewish family that migrates to South Africa to escape the Holocaust.

Boris Fishman, author of *A Replacement Life: A Novel* (HarperCollins 2014), invites readers into the richly comic world of aging Russian Jewish immigrants and their grandchildren.

Ayelet Tsabari, author of *The Best Place on Earth: Stories* (HarperCollins Canada 2013), brings to life the experiences of Israeli protagonists of Mizrahi background.