

January 2016

Dear IBBY Friends

The calendar has substituted the number 5 for its rightful successor 6 – nothing special and very predictable. Nevertheless, this event excites revelry all over the world.

2015 was a worrying year with terrorist attacks and wars that have made millions of scared people take flight in search of a safer life. None of us can escape the sometimes, cruel world events, even though we would like to.

Jella Lepman, founder of IBBY, wrote in honour of the first international children's book fair in Munich in 1946, that children hold no responsibility for war, regardless of the side they are on. IBBY continues her work by working to protect the rights of the child on all sides. When these rights are being violated, we will always choose to protect the child.

IBBY Italy gave us a perfect example when they chose to help the flood of refugee children arriving on the small island of Lampedusa in the Mediterranean. The political leaders of Europe had not moved an inch by the time the IBBY international community had rallied around this project.

In 2015 IBBY and its partners called on the US Government to care for the thousands of unaccompanied refugee children and families after they cross the Mexican/USA border on their incredible journeys from their war-torn and violent homelands in search of a place to live and grow.

Thanks to these activities, refugee children will be introduced and welcomed to the library and will be seen as individuals. A human being is a human being. A child is a child. An individual. Not an anonymous statistic. Books and reading save lives and give traumatised children a chance to become whole, contributing citizens as they grow up. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all who were involved in these important projects.

The first year of my IBBY presidency was a busy one and I have been invited as guest and speaker all over the world. It has been such a joy and inspiration to meet so many dedicated IBBY people.

Thousands of IBBY members all over the world are engaged in countless reading projects, campaigns that promote reading, literature awards, international children's book day activities, workshops, 'meet and greets', congresses and projects in crisis areas. IBBY members work to promote a reading culture and give every child the opportunity to become a life-long reader.

Thanks to the use of social media, there is a growing interest in IBBY's activities, especially among young people. The strength of IBBY is derived from its members, starting with its rich

history of world figures such as Jella Lepman, Erich Kästner, Astrid Lindgren and Pamela Travers, up to the present-day 77 National Sections. Always IBBY has believed that every child everywhere in the world must have access to books and the opportunity to become a reader in the fullest sense. We see this as a fundamental right and the doorway to empowerment for every child.

New Year is not just the time to reflect upon the past, but also the perfect moment to look into the future and contemplate what this New Year might bring.

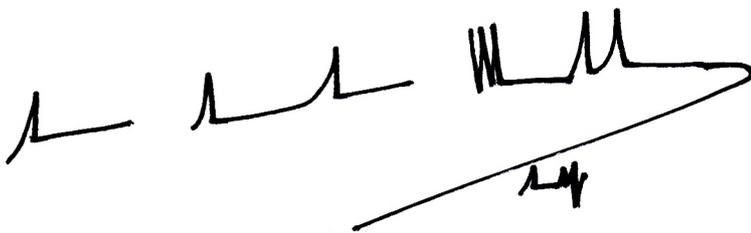
2016 is going to be an important IBBY year. In April, the new Hans Christian Andersen and IBBY-Asahi Reading Promotion Award laureates will be announced in Bologna. The Hans Christian Andersen Award has a very rich history with renowned winners and is still the only literary award for children and young people with a world jury. The IBBY-Asahi Award is unique because it creates a global platform for extraordinary projects that promote reading.

2016 is also the year of the IBBY's world congress in Auckland, New Zealand. With the motto *Literature in a Multi-Literate World* we shall enjoy a rich programme as we explore the excitements and challenges of literature and literacy education in our rapidly changing world. I look forward to meeting you there.

Throughout 2016 we will keep you up-to-date with news of new projects, current projects, events, as well as news of each other using the current media channels.

The IBBY mission to promote international understanding is more relevant than ever. The World Literacy Foundation (WLF) has warned that illiteracy is "a worldwide crisis". Children's early reading skills must be vastly improved to combat illiteracy. You and all the countless members of IBBY – past and present – have been working on this for more than sixty years. The findings of the WLF show that the importance of our IBBY work will continue to grow.

I hope that 2016 will be a truly happy year for all. If we encounter problems realizing our goals, I am certain that we will be able to count on each other to come up with a solution. After all, solidarity, tolerance and commitment are the pillars of a strong IBBY!

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several stylized, connected loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Wally De Doncker
IBBY President