

Speech Closing Ceremony

IBBY President Wally De Doncker

IBBY World Congress Auckland

Sunday 21 August 2016

12.15 p.m.

Dear friends,

First and foremost, I wish to say that I have really enjoyed this wonderful Congress in this beautiful city of Auckland. It has been an extraordinary Congress in many ways.

During an IBBY congress, our main focus is to listen to what others have to say. Some speakers will have surprised us; others may have confirmed what we had been doing for quite some time. Sometimes our opinions will have differed. One of the main strengths of an IBBY Congress is hearing opinions and views that allow us to reflect and thereby give us the incentive to search for mutual understanding.

Life-long friendships are often made at an IBBY Congress, including between those who live in countries that are somewhat hostile towards one another. That is what makes our organisation unique.

As Jella Lepman said and we always repeat: international understanding is the most important mission of IBBY.

I would like to thank all IBBY members for allowing me to continue my IBBY presidency. Over the next two years I intend to build on what we have achieved as well as start new initiatives that will ensure the future of IBBY and its activities around the world.

You may be wondering what lies ahead of us?

Well, the IBBY message of promoting a greater international understanding between people resounds increasingly as a consequence of a growing internationalization and globalization. As citizens of the world, we are obligated to cooperate whether we like to or not. We all want to live in prosperous countries, where everyone is respected, has access to suitable social security and health care, lives in a healthy environment, has had a proper education and can enjoy culture. There are countries that have everything to make people happy. Still, in order to reach and maintain this level of prosperity and wellbeing, we all have to try to live according to the same basic principles.

As long as there are people who are starving, as long as there are children who are living in misery and unhealthy environments, as long as there are children who do not have access to proper education, as long as there are children who are excluded from learning how to read... As long as this injustice remains, society in more prosperous countries will sustain more pressure as the flow of refugees increases. It is simply impossible that one child starves, while another lives in unprecedented luxury. It simply cannot be that one child dies of a disease that can be treated by a simple cure in another country. It is simply not conceivable that the life expectancy of one child is calculated at barely five years, while, for the other, it is calculated at almost ninety years. It is not just that children are treated differently based on gender.

Can the IBBY community change our world for the better?

Most definitely. We have to continue giving children the chance to learn how to read. Through which they become advocates of humanity and tolerance. That is our mission and goal.

We need to continue fighting to give children the chance to become empowered citizens, who are unafraid of critical thinking and are armed against demagogy and brainwashing.

IBBY and IYL were both founded as a means to rebel against novels that were polluted by a Nazi-philosophy. People still publish children's books containing stories that consider other people to be inferior; books that teach children how to hate others. Even now, books that secretly excuse dictatorial regimes and philosophies are being published. IBBY cannot allow this.

We should divest our books of hatred and demagogy otherwise things will never change for the better. No child is better than the other. No child deserves to be hated.

However, we should not focus our attention solely on repressive regimes. Children born in free democracies should also grow up to be critical citizens. We must teach children how to empathize with other people, other cultures, other beliefs. All of us here have the firm belief that books and stories are an excellent means to do that. Jella Lepman knew this very well.

Even in the free world, children should be able to reflect on whom they want to see at the head of their country or their community. They will have to learn to think during referendums concerning the futures of their countries. Without reading, without thinking, they could slip into making the wrong choices, which would most likely change their own conditions for the worst. Obliviousness often leads to unwise decisions.

I would like to advocate for a bigger role for libraries in our society. They can be a haven for all children. IBBY is exemplary when it comes to addressing this issue by rebuilding existing libraries, establishing new ones and creating innovative solutions to take books to children. These have included such activities as the motorbike libraries in Indonesia, the village libraries in India, the camel libraries in Mongolia, the container libraries in Ghana, right through to the latest – the *Library of Dreams* in El Salvador. Another is the dissemination of library cards to the children crossing into the USA from the dreadful reality of Central America and the refugee children arriving in Canada. IBBY works with refugee children, underprivileged children, disabled children, foreign children, sick children and children from war and disaster areas. A person who has access to reading has an opportunity to learn, to enjoy and to shape his or her own future. Whatever, however and wherever people read, one thing is clear: the power that books hold within them can change the path of a life.

I would also like to collaborate more closely with other organisations to achieve common goals, but of course without losing sight of our independence. The demand for IBBY's presence at big international fairs has grown. There is a need for an organisation that highlights the social impact of reading, this is a role for IBBY.

During the second term of my presidency we will also have to consider the practical future of IBBY. Some necessary decisions have to be made. Can IBBY continue working the way it does while striving to gain greater international importance? What about infrastructure and personnel? IBBY needs more central staff, more office space with meeting rooms, archives and reception rooms. What about our communication strategy? How should IBBY be marketed in

the future? How do we continue our expanding international projects? It is clear that IBBY is in need of more funds to ensure its longevity. How can we attract sponsors?

Planning for the future of IBBY will require the cooperation and input of all IBBY sections. But it is clear that the National Sections will remain the foundation of a strong IBBY – they always have been and always will be. Meanwhile we have set up a think tank to look at all these questions and the EC will present its recommendations to you at the 36th IBBY Congress in Istanbul in two years time.

Now is the time when I have the pleasure of expressing my gratitude to all with whom I have had the delight to cooperate during the last two years.

First and foremost, I want to sincerely thank the national IBBY sections: you are IBBY!

I would like to thank the two Vice Presidents Azucena Galindo and Akoss Ofori-Mensah. It was great working together with you. Many thanks for all your efforts.

I would also like to thank the members of the Executive Committee for their energy, enthusiasm and decisiveness.

A special gratitude goes to Ellis Vance our Treasurer; to Patricia Aldana the Chair of the 2016 Hans Christian Andersen Award Jury and President of the IBBY Foundation; to Angela Lebedeva President of the IBBY-Asahi Reading Promotion Award Jury.

Thanks to all members of the 2016 Hans Christian Andersen Award Jury.

And, to Björn Sundmark *Bookbird* Editor; Valerie Coghlan the President of Bookbird Inc. Board, and to Junko Yokota its Secretary.

Thank you to the members of the IBBY Foundation for their support and commitment.

Thank you to Leigh Turina and Sharon Moynes who lead the IBBY Collection of Books for Young People with Disabilities at the Toronto Public Library in Canada.

Thank you to the IBBY Secretariat in Basel.

Without all these people IBBY would not be able to function.

Thank you to Sylvie Dhaene of the Flemish Reading Foundation 'Iedereen Leest', Eva Devos and Natasha Wallez, presidents of both branches of IBBY Belgium for their full support.

Finally our heartfelt gratitude goes to our long-term and generous sponsors: the Minn family and Mr Kang at Nami Island, Mr Yamada and the Yamada Bee Farm, the Asahi Shimbun, and Sharjah Government through UAEBBY. We also have other generous sponsors who support IBBY's work, the Bunanta Family and CCPPG, and all the many sections and private individuals who have donated funds to IBBY's Children in Crisis projects. Without this constant support, it would be impossible to achieve the IBBY mission. We thank you sincerely and with all our hearts.

As we leave Auckland and travel back to our homes, we shall take with us the renewed commitment to the IBBY message of international understanding through books and stories. The next generation needs our help and support: this is our future.

Thank you.

Wally De Doncker