

Focus IBBY

Impressions from Trieste

by CAROLINA BALLESTER

From August 30 to September 1, the 39th IBBY World Congress took place at the Generali Congress Centre in Trieste, Italy. This marks the third time Italy has hosted the Congress, after Florence in 1958 and Bologna in 1970.

Trieste was a meaningful choice for its rich and complex history, explained Elisabetta Lippolis, vice president of IBBY Italy and coordinator of the 2024 IBBY World Congress Organizing Committee.

The city has witnessed all the horror and tragedy that Jella Lepman wanted to spare future generations when she founded IBBY. At the same time, as a frontier city, Trieste has also witnessed the benefits that dialogue and mutual understanding can bring, as we in IBBY well know. Trieste heads one of the most proactive regions in Italy, promoting books for children and young adults as well as reading campaigns supported by its multicultural community and partnered by its extended library network. However, Trieste is also facing huge challenges on account of the current international situation.

The Congress's spirited slogan—"Join the revolution! Giving every child good books"—became a rallying cry for the 630 IBBY members and children's book enthusiasts who traveled from sixty-five countries for the occasion.

The Congress was charged with many moments of profound emotion: Chiara Carminati and Alessandro Sanna's unique performance combining poetry reading and live illustration; Michael Rosen's brilliant keynote speech; compelling teenagers taking the Congress main stage to share their inspired visions of the world of tomorrow; an exulting IBBY community reunited in a spontaneous



IBBY Japan celebrating the opening of the Congress in front of the iconic poster.

dance at the Hans Christian Andersen Gala dinner...

The colossal academic program, curated by a scientific committee headed by former IBBY vice president Della Passarelli, encompassed 116 oral sessions and 110 poster sessions, alongside plenary roundtables, keynote speeches, and the much-expected IBBY international award-giving ceremonies.

A beautiful blue sky crowned the event and the notorious south wind—*Bora*, as Trieste people call it—quieted down for the occasion. In the next pages comes a gust of news on a Congress not to be forgotten.

Pre-Congress Day: 2024 IBBY Forum

Since the mid-2000s, the IBBY Forum has established itself as a successful pre-Congress event that brings IBBY members together for discussion around topics of common interest.

After six years of interruption, the IBBY Forum returned in Trieste, adopting a renewed format of plenary sessions and smaller group discussions. The forum brought together eighty participants, including representatives of IBBY Sections from forty-six countries and several IBBY honorary and individual members. An active role was offered to the candidates to IBBY offices to moderate the discussions, as a means

to make themselves acquainted to the session-attending delegates.

Taking place on the afternoon of August 29, the IBBY Forum covered two topics:

Engagement and participation: Ideas for active membership within the IBBY Sections and within the IBBY international community

Protecting the rights of the child: Meaning and implications in our everyday work and in the context of humanitarian crises

The conclusions and recommendations issued at the forum will be the starting point of future working groups and IBBY Sections' possible joint projects.

The forum was followed by a cocktail in the library of Savoia Excelsior Palace, an Austro-Hungarian building of the early twentieth

century, reminding us of the rich cultural heritage of the city. Later in the evening, many Congress participants attended a tribute concert to Ennio Morricone offered by the Trieste Symphonic Orchestra, specially organized for the Congress by the regional authorities.

Exhibitions Galore: From Jella Lepman to the Sea

Illustration and book exhibitions were significant parts of the Congress official program.

Much expectation surrounded the exhibition *Jella Lepman: Let Us Begin with Children. Books as Bridges*, which opened, also on August 29, in Sala Veruda. The IBBY Italy curators, Silvana Sola, Paola Vassalli, and David Tolin, invited twenty illustrators to give visual substance to the most important aspects of the life of Jella Lepman, founder of IBBY and the International Youth Library. The showcases will soon be available for loan to the IBBY Sections.



Group discussion at the IBBY Forum.



Artwork by Régis Lejonc, French illustrator and 2024 IBBY Honour List nominee.



Michael Rosen and Charalambos Demetriou at the IBBY Forum cocktail gathering.



Sylvia Vardell, Elisabetta Lippolis, and Silvana Sola.

The Bologna Children’s Book Fair, a founding member of IBBY Italy, contributed meaningfully to the Congress program with a showcase of over one hundred books selected among the best submissions to the Bologna Ragazzi Award Special Category of 2024—“Books on the Sea”—which echoed with the coastal nature of Trieste. Also part of the Bologna effort to support the Congress were two exhibitions dedicated to Gianni Rodari and Roberto Innocenti, the only two Italian winners of the Hans Christian Andersen Award to date.

The Congress was also the occasion for IBBY International to bring together its most recent book collections. Titles by the 2024 Hans Christian Andersen Award candidates, as well as the full 2024 Honour List, 2023 Selection of Outstanding Books for Young People with Disabilities, and 2023 Silent Books Selection—altogether over four hundred books from around the world—were displayed in the main auditorium.



Books on the Sea, a Bologna Children’s Book Fair project.

A First in the History of IBBY World Congresses: The Young Readers Program

IBBY Italy worked closely with the IBBY Sections of neighboring countries to bring together an innovative element to the program—the invitation to teenagers as authentic protagonists of a Congress. A group of fifteen young girls and boys from Austria, Slovenia, Germany, and, of course, Italy, arrived in Trieste on August 27 to bring their voice and sensitivity to the event, not as a testimonial presence, but as

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real protagonists. Their program included two plenary roundtables held in the largest auditorium, interviews with the winners, and activities in different locations of the city.



Young Readers and program organizers.



Roundtable, “Hearing from Young Readers on Books and Reading as a Driver of Change.”

Bright Spotlight on the IBBY Reading Promotion Awards

On opening day, the winners of the 2024 IBBY-Asahi Reading Promotion Award and IBBY-iRead Outstanding Reading Promoter Award were presented their award. The two award ceremonies were introduced by the president of the 2024 IBBY Reading Promotion Awards Jury, Junko Yokota, who invited co-jurors Ingrid Källström and Tina Bilban to present the jury laudation.

IBBY-Asahi Reading Promotion Award winner ATD Quart Monde was represented by street library project officer Marie Aubinais. She received a check of \$10,000 and a diploma

from the hands of the Asahi-Shimbun bureau chief in Bruxelles, Tadashi Sugiyama, editor-in-chief, Europe/Brussels Bureau. Aubinais, a major expert on street libraries and training of volunteers, explained the origins of the project:

The street libraries were born of a conviction: culture is a powerful vector in the fight against exclusion. Despite compulsory schooling, illiteracy now affects nine percent of the French population, and remains statistically linked to extreme poverty.... Of course, access to reading has evolved: municipal libraries have multiplied, and cultural mediation professionals are reaching out to children and their parents, but this is still far from universal. In some circles, books are not an everyday object, and can be a source of apprehension for children who have had a difficult school career. In a friendly, caring atmosphere, street libraries reconcile children with the joy of reading and encourage them to reveal and share their talents.



IBBY-Asahi Reading Promotion Award ceremony.

Later in the afternoon, Basarat Kazim and Irene Vasco, both winners of the 2024 IBBY-iRead Outstanding Reading Promoter Award who traveled from Lahore, Pakistan, and Bogotá, Colombia, respectively, received their awards from the hands of Wen Li and Xinting Wang, representatives of the generous award sponsor. In their acceptance speeches, the laureates

described their life paths and the intimate convictions that sustain their lifelong contributions to reading advocacy.

Basarat Kazim said:

Children have been at the core of the work I have done. Trusting and believing in them has brought in rewards. We have always relied on the children's advice and the strategies we have employed have been child-driven. The best thing about Alif Laila and its work is that it belongs to the children of Pakistan.

Irene Vasco explained:

Reading is essential to be a free citizen who actively participates in the construction of a country. However, reading is not enough. It is necessary to take a step forward in educating citizens that must be able to write a right of petition, a consultation, news about their community, a message. Writing is also an act of freedom, which allows personal expression, preservation of memory, persistence of a legacy.



Junko Yokota, Irene Vasco, Wen Li, and Ingrid Källström during the IBBY-iRead Outstanding Reading Promoter Award ceremony.

Aubinais, Kazim and Vasco, three women hailing from three different continents and accumulating decades of experience in reading promotion, were brought together on stage on

the second day of the Congress to describe their experiences and present their wide array of approaches to reading advocacy. Junko Yokota, chair of the Reading Promotion Awards Jury, moderated the session. Elena Pasoli and Luis Zendera, both members of the jury, presented the winners.

Hans Christian Andersen Award Time

The Hans Christian Andersen Award ceremony is one of the most expected moments of the Congress. On the evening of Saturday, August 31, 2024, Hans Christian Andersen Award winners Heinz Janisch and Sydney Smith received their diplomas and medals in front of an auditorium full of over five hundred people.

The president of the jury, Liz Page, hosted the ceremony and introduced the generous sponsor of the award, Nami Island Arts and Education, represented by its vice-chairperson, Lee Kye-Young. She also greeted the jury members



Hans Christian Andersen Award
Jury president and candidates.

present—Evelyn Arizpe, Brenda Dales, Sabine Fuchs, Shereen Kreidieh, and Pavle Učakar—and called the candidates present to come on stage to receive their diplomas. These were Samar Barraaj, author candidate from Lebanon; Cai Gao, illustrator finalist from China; Gusti, illustrator candidate from Argentina; and Lee Gum-yi, author finalist from Korea.

In their acceptance speech, the two laureates, who had never met before attending the

Congress, echoed beautifully with each other in their common willingness to approach readers with the honesty of remaining themselves.

Heinz Janisch started his presentation with a beautiful tale from Ethiopia, told in his characteristic short, sharp, and philosophical style:

There was this man who had worked hard for his master for a long time, he had served him for many years.

One day he walked up to his master and asked him: “What can I do to be free at last?”

His master sneered: “You want to be free? I’ll tell you what you can do. See that mountain peak over there? If you manage to survive for an entire night on that peak, naked—no clothes, mind you—you will be free the very next day.”

The man takes leave from his best friend, fully aware that this is forever. How is he supposed to survive that night?

Night falls and the man trudges up the mountain with a heavy heart, higher and higher, until he reaches the peak, which is covered in ice and snow. It is freezing.

His master has sent along two men to make sure there is no foul play and that the man does not seek shelter anywhere.

Naked and utterly defenseless, the man stands on the peak. The freezing cold gets to him.

He has gone up with a backpack full of logs of wood and has lit a fire for him, a fire at night.

The man looks at the fire, which has been lit for him, and it warms him.

His friend makes sure the fire does not go out, and this is how the man stays alive in spite of the snow and the ice, with his eyes on the fire that has been lit for him and that lights up the darkness.

As the morning dawns, the man gets down from the mountain. He is free. He celebrates his newly found freedom with his friend.

In his speech, Sydney Smith brought the audience to true heights of emotion and concluded with these heartfelt, intimate words:

It has been said before, but it bears repeating. As picturebook creators, we are invited into this sacred place. Into the bedtime ritual, the morning quiet time, the classroom circle, the library story time. And we lend our words to be spoken by the voice of the reader, the teacher, the parent, the child. To be heard by the child. Those words could be said in a way that the child hears it for the first time from the person they need to hear it from the most. The person who hasn't yet found the right words. And we say, here, take mine.

And what if those words were:

You are loved, you are not alone, everything will be all right.

It would not take long to discover that every book I've made and will make ends with that very sentiment.

Now, from here I see this the view that allows me to see further than ever before. I can see the winding path behind me, but I can also see the paths ahead, to other exciting endeavors. I can see an entire mountain range spread out in front of me with countless destinations. More peaks and more jungles. I choose to receive this prestigious honor as an invitation to explore and continue following my compass, following my heart.

But first I might just sit and enjoy the view for a while.



Heinz Jansich with publisher Herwig Bitsch and Fred Minn, Nami Arts and Education.

The formal ceremony was followed by a festive gala dinner held at the Generali Congress Centre.

IBBY Honour List 2024 Launched at the Congress

The recent IBBY World Congress also marked the official launch of the 2024 IBBY Honour List. The 184 books composing the list were exhibited in Trieste for the first time as part of the Congress's official program.

Selected for the 2024 list are sixty-eight entries in the category of Writing, fifty-five in the category Illustration, and sixty-one in the category Translation. The 2024 selection features titles from fifty-nine countries in fifty-two different languages—an unprecedented linguistic variety, which includes for the first time books in Afaan Oromo, Amharic, Anuak, Somali, and Tigrinya from Ethiopia; isiNdebele from South Africa; and Udmurt from Russia.



Honour List ceremony.

Thirty-eight nominees and publishers of nominated books attended the official diploma-giving ceremony on Sunday, September 1. The Honour List presentation film, which is now available on the IBBY website and official YouTube account, was revealed for the first time, and all attending guests received their diplomas from the hands of IBBY outgoing president Sylvia Vardell. During the ceremony, all the nominees were invited to say a few words and share the meaning of their nomination.

The 2024 IBBY Honour List is due to travel to different locations. IBBY Sweden has collaborated with the Halland Art Museum to present the list in an exhibition opened on October 5.

The books were also shown at the Frankfurt Book Fair later in October and will be presented at the Bologna Children's Book Fair next April.

IBBY Welcomes a New Executive for the Term 2024–2026

The 2024 IBBY General Assembly, held on Saturday, August 30, and chaired by Sylvia Vardell, outgoing IBBY president, was attended by fifty-seven IBBY Section delegates, six of which also acted as proxy representatives for other Sections who could not attend the Assembly. A busy agenda was prepared for this important biennial meeting, including—in addition to the customary IBBY financial and activity reports—a presentation and discussion on the proposal of new statutes for the organization.

The General Assembly also saw the elections of IBBY executive officers for the term 2024–2026. The new Executive Committee (EC) will be headed by Basarat Midhat Kazim, elected as IBBY president. Tina Bilban and Luis Zandrera were reelected for a second consecutive term as EC voting members. Eight new voting



Outgoing IBBY president Sylvia Vardell greets new president Basarat Kazim.

members will be joining the EC: Tobeckwu Anyachebelu, Charalambos Demetriou, Hazel Hernández, Elisabetta Lippolis, Jane O'Hanlon, Virginia Phiri, Tucker Stone, Luis Zandrera, and Mingzhou Zhang. Also part of the new EC are the president of the 2026 Hans Christian Andersen Award Jury, a position to which Shereen Kreidieh was elected by the General

Assembly; the newly appointed chair of the IBBY Trust, Redza Khairuddin, and IBBY treasurer Hasmig Chahinian, who were confirmed in their positions; and Carolina Ballester, who was reconfirmed as IBBY executive director. Valerie Coghlan, who was reconfirmed as Bookbird, Inc. president, is currently a permanent guest to the EC and should, after the approval of the new IBBY statutes, join the EC as a full ex-officio member.



Outgoing and incoming EC members on September 2.

The new EC group was formally presented at the IBBY Congress closing ceremony. Following the presentation was Basarat Kazim's first speech as IBBY president, in which she commended the diversity of the IBBY community:

We are all for one and one for all. IBBY is strong because it owns the wisdom of eighty-five cultures. It is my deepest desire to acknowledge all the wisdom, all the hard work that comes from all of us. IBBY thrives when all of us are healthy and strong. The breadth of our membership provides us our strength. Living at a time when conflicts are tearing the world apart, IBBY with its healing touch, its mission of bringing books and children together, becomes yet more relevant.

The new Executive Committee held its first introductory meeting on September 2 and appointed Tina Bilban and Tucker Stone as IBBY vice presidents. Other subcommittees, including the Reading Promotion Awards Jury

and the Membership Committees, were formed during that meeting. Detailed information about the members of the EC and composition of subcommittees can be found on the IBBY website.



“Past, Present and Future”: Elisabetta Lippolis (IBBY Italy), Patti McIntosh (IBBY Canada), and Luis Zendrera (IBBY Spain), representing the IBBY Congresses 2024, 2026, and 2028, respectively.

Ciao Trieste, Hello Ottawa

As is the tradition, the Congress closing ceremony was the framework of the handover between the organizers of the current and future IBBY World Congresses. Patti McIntosh, acting president of IBBY Canada, highlighted the main features of the 2026 event, which will take place from August 6 to 9 in the country’s capital, Ottawa. Placed under the theme “Listening to Each Other’s Voices,” the Congress aims to

celebrate IBBY’s core values of plurality and inclusion. Preliminary information is available on the Congress official website, <https://www.ibbycongress2026.org>. Registrations are open from now on and a call for papers to constitute the program will be launched in June 2025.

Regional Conferences in 2025

While the IBBY community awaits the occasion to be reunited again at the next Congress, the year 2025 will also be marked by several regional conferences:

- IBBY Europe Regional Conference, Bologna, Italy, April 3, 2025.
- IBBY Asia-Pacific Regional Conference, Suwon, Republic of South Korea, August 30–31, 2025.
- USBBY will soon release the dates of its next conference due in the autumn of 2025.

More Information

The full acceptance speeches of all IBBY international award winners can be found on the IBBY website: <https://www.ibby.org>.

Many more pictures of the 2024 IBBY World Congress are available on the Congress website: <https://www.ibbycongress2024.org/press-review/>.

Information about the upcoming regional Congresses will be shared in this column and on the IBBY website.



Carolina Ballester was born in Paris and studied in Spain and France, obtaining an MA in political science from the Madrid Complutense University and degrees in Chinese and Arabic from the French National Institute of Oriental Studies (INALCO). She worked as a translator and as cultural attaché at the Consulate of Spain in Shanghai. In 2013, she joined the Shanghai International Children’s Book Fair team as program manager, and over ten years she promoted and developed international interest in children’s illustration as well as served on juries for children’s illustration catalogs and contests. Carolina brings to IBBY an interest and wide knowledge in children’s literature and illustration, as well as international experience and fluency in several languages, including French, Spanish, English, and Mandarin. Carolina joined IBBY as executive director on September 1, 2022.