

Basel, 6 January 2023

Dear Peter Rahbæk Juel, Stefan Birkebjerg Andersen, Henrik Harnow, and
Torsten Bøgh Thomsen,

I write to respond to your letter and to address your questions and concerns. But first, I would like to thank you for your kind words about IBBY and our work in bringing books to children around the world, promoting reading, and working toward peace. I would also like to commend you on your work in sharing the literature and life of Hans Christian Andersen around the world. I, myself, have visited the Hans Christian Andersen House and Museum Odense when the IBBY Congress was held in Copenhagen several years ago. It was such a meaningful experience for me, as it is for many, many others.

I understand your concerns about the IBBY Hans Christian Andersen Award and its administration and am grateful that you have contacted me directly to share those concerns. The misinformation spread via social media is so negative and destructive as we have seen in many situations around the world and I welcome this opportunity to clarify the situation.

With 80 national sections around the world, our members work in all kinds of circumstances toward our common goals. We serve the children who are often the first victims of war, oppression, and social injustice. In this work, we often find ourselves at odds with governments and politicians, but we persist and are generally effective in our goals. But it is also important to recognize that our IBBY members are not representative of their governments. If that were true, we would be in constant conflict since our members come from the USA, Palestine, Iran, South Africa, Haiti, and also Ukraine and Russia, among many others. Instead, we work as an IBBY family to provide funding for projects that promote reading, to offer books and materials to refugee families, and to recognize excellence in writing, illustrating, and promoting children's literature.

The current Jury President of the Hans Christian Andersen Award is Anastasia Arkhipova and she is an excellent example of this service. She is currently a professor at the Stroganov Moscow Academy of Arts and Industry and has been an IBBY member for more than 20 years. She was elected to the IBBY Executive Committee (2006-2020) and also served as a member of the Andersen Award Jury. As an artist and illustrator, she has published books for young people across the world from Brazil to Korea. She is a highly qualified and very experienced specialist in the field of illustration for children and young people. She is NOT a supporter of genocide or of Russian's attacks on Ukraine and she has never defended the war. She has NO effective role in the Board of the highly controversial and propagandistic organization Moscow branch of the Russian Union of Artists (MOCX), an association which has been mistaken for the Moscow Union of Artists (MCX), where she is a long-standing and recognized member. She was legitimately elected as the Andersen Jury President in a General Assembly of the IBBY Congress in Malaysia in September in the presence of representatives of IBBY Denmark, Sweden, Norway, among other 40 country delegates. There was no opposition to her serving as a candidate and no objections were raised when she was elected.

That said we are fully aware of the gravity of the situation and the damage that the award and Hans Christian Andersen's name are suffering due to the perceptions created via social media. This is why an extraordinary Executive Committee meeting has been called on 10 January to address the crisis. We are saddened that a kind and hard-working IBBY member like Anastasia has been so maligned. She grieves for the people of Ukraine, especially for the children, but has little recourse to express her views in a repressive country like Russia. But she is also mindful of the perception of the outside world, as are we all. We hope you will bear with us as we weigh these issues in our upcoming meeting.

Thank you again for reaching out and for your support thus far.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sylvia Vardell". The script is cursive and fluid.

Sylvia Vardell
IBBY President