

## **Speech at IBBY World Congress**

Dear President Mingzhou Zhang, Dear Executive Director Liz Page, Dear IBBY friends, Ladies and gentlemen, against the backdrop of a global pandemic, International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) has overcome immense difficulties to hold its World Congress, so that we are able to meet online or offline to promote children's reading around the world as we always have done. I would like to express my heartfelt admiration for IBBY, and special thanks to IBBY Russia and the whole team of the Organization Committee of this Congress!

In the reconstruction after World War II, some far-sighted people around the world believed that children's books could play an important role in enhancing mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence, and devoted themselves to the promotion of children's reading. IBBY was established in 1953 by the visionary Jella Lepman with the aim of fostering international understanding through children's books. For 68 years, IBBY has promoted the publishing of great children's books and children's reading around the world, laying the foundation for peace, friendship and mutual understanding of humankind.

In 2010, the iRead Foundation was established in China as an organization committed to the promotion of children's reading and improvement in children's reading quality. Our mission is that every child

can enjoy the joy of reading and become a lifelong reader. We believe high-quality children's reading can promote a better future.

The iRead Foundation is fulfilling its mission and vision by implementing and funding a number of projects. The Foundation's various book lists such as Early Reading Book List, Primary School Library Core Book List and the annual iRead 100 Recommended Children's Books, help Chinese schools, families and non-profit organizations choose and purchase outstanding children's books and books for teachers. The book lists have been highly appraised and widely used by schools, parents and non-profit organizations.

Reading Start is an early-reading program for children aged 0 to 6 years and their families. Under this program, we distribute reading backpacks for free, we have developed an application supporting early reading, we train early-reading promoters, hold national early-reading summits, and have advocated making December 28th as the Parent-Child Reading Day. These efforts have made tens of millions of people aware of early reading, and now over one million families with children aged 0 to 6 years have started reading together with their children, and many communities have benefitted by the work of trained early-reading promoters.

Reading for All is our grant-giving program. It has funded dozens of non-profit organizations working with rural and migrant children. Many children are now able to have access to high-quality books and have developed good reading habits because of their work. Reading for All also supports research in children's reading theories and practices. The research results produced have played a significant role in guiding children's reading practices.

In 2018, because we share similar missions and visions, the iRead Foundation and IBBY established the IBBY-iRead Outstanding Reading Promoter Award. Every two years, the Award selects two people who have made outstanding and unique contributions to children's reading around the world.

From the nominations submitted by IBBY National Sections, jury members, including myself, got to know the remarkable work of people who have been promoting children's reading. We were deeply moved by every nominee, and this undoubtedly made it very hard to choose the winners. Here I would like to thank Jury President Redza Khairuddin and all the jury members for their hard work committed during the selection process.

I remember one nominee traveled to Eswatini, formerly known as Swaziland, for many years to train local workers, collect local stories and take books to the children there. In Sri Lanka, one nominee has improved

children's reading conditions in remote villages. He began with a basket library 10 years ago and in many of these villages the socio-cultural effects of the program have been very positive. One nominee mobilized communities in Sweden and the Netherlands, so that on arrival, refugee children are welcomed with books in their home language. One nominee has driven the progress of children's reading in China by advocating from the national policy level, researching and writing books on education as well as working with thousands of schools to introduce reading classes. In the selection process, we were impressed by all the nominees' firm belief in promoting children's reading, the pursuit of continuous innovation, and the spirit of social responsibility and philanthropy. I would like to extend my highest respect to all nominees, and my warmest congratulations to the two first winners of the IBBY-iRead Outstanding Reading Promoter Award: Marit Törnqvist from the Netherlands and Zhu Yongxin from China. Thank you for your outstanding contribution to promoting high-quality reading for children all over the world, and making the world a better and more peaceful place.

Li Wen

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