

****Opening speech Wally De Doncker**

IBBY World Congress Auckland

18 August 2016, 9:50 a.m.

Dear IBBY-friends,
Tena Koutou,

It's an honour to take part in the opening of the 35th IBBY Congress this morning. On behalf of IBBY, I would like to thank those who have organised this year's world congress – thank you for all your preparations and intense efforts to make this Congress a wonderful event for IBBY members from all over the world.

Looking at the history between New-Zealand and IBBY, it's obvious that we have a lot in common, even without realising it ourselves.

Since its origin, New-Zealand has always recognized that international understanding is of the utmost importance. In 1642, Dutch sailor Abel Janszoon Tasman discovered a, from European perspective, unexpected country during his long trip across the Pacific. He set sail from the Javanese port Batavia in search of new markets. He came across an archipelago that had not been mapped yet. The Dutch were greeted by Maori in canoes who circled their sailing ships. The Maori blew a shrill welcome on their wooden wind instruments. This was in fact an invitation to battle. Abel Tasman did not know this custom, however, and he sounded the trumpets to show he intended well. Without realising it, he had accepted the invitation. The canoes disappeared for the night, but returned the next day at the exact moment in which a longboat made its way from one of the sailing ships to the other. With mutual understanding, the attacks would probably have been avoided. Creating international understanding between people is one of the main goals of IBBY.

New Zealand is a country that addresses human rights in its constitution. The country has also ratified numerous international treaties as part of the United Nations. The 2009 Human Rights Report by the United States Department of State noted that the government generally respected the rights of individuals, but voiced concerns regarding the social status of the indigenous population. Universal suffrage for Māori men over 21 was granted in 1867, and extended to European males in 1879. In 1893, New Zealand was the first self-governing nation to grant universal suffrage.

As a world organisation, IBBY defends human rights. During the 2012 IBBY General Assembly in London, the members approved the introduction of a formal commitment to the principles of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child as ratified by the United Nations in 1990 to the current IBBY Statutes. IBBY supports the right to read for each and every child, regardless of gender, culture and religion. Those who can read will be able to emancipate themselves from ignorance and demagoguery. Therefore, we will continue to advocate for all children to have the right to great literature, including children from underprivileged families, immigrant children, refugees, disabled children and sick children.

In 1893, New-Zealand introduced universal suffrage for women. At that time, it was the first country to do so. In many European countries, it took until after World War II for women rights to be fully recognised. Even today, there are still countries and regimes that prohibit girls from reading and learning how to read. Half a billion women all over the world are still illiterate. IBBY cannot and will not stand idly by. To me, this is an issue of personal frustration. I am a father of two daughters and grandfather of three grand-daughters and two grand-sons. I have never understood why there should be a distinction between the rights granted to boys as opposed to girls and those granted to men as opposed to women.

IBBY rallies for the right to read for each and every child, regardless of gender. Those who are able to read, will be able to emancipate and armour themselves against ignorance. Eventually they will react against demagoguery.

As we can see New Zealand played a very important role defending human rights. However, we are deeply dismayed by the rigorous immigration procedures that have prevented a number of our colleagues from joining the IBBY World Congress. We shall miss them and continue to call on all governments as well as UNESCO and similar international associations to join it in condemning such unfair, divisive and counterproductive activities that prevent people of good will from coming together to work towards the betterment of the world.

The promotion of children's and youth literature is also important to international understanding, human rights and common goals.

In 2006 national treasure Margaret Mahy was the author laureate of the Hans Christian Andersen Awards: she thrilled the participants in of the IBBY Congress in China when being presented with her award We have come to know New Zealand in recent years as the backdrop to the filming of the classic stories of Tolkien: the Lord of the Rings and the Hobbit.

The Congress celebrates the multiplicity of language, literacy and literature in the world today. Throughout society, literacy and literature are represented by many languages and many scripts, yet the expression of ideas, imagination and emotion captured in very different contexts can be expressed universally. However, the increasing globalisation is also putting pressure on the realm of children's and youth literature. Over recent years, there has been growing concern about the lack of children's and youth literature in regional languages, novels from indigenous authors and illustrators.

Looking back over my IBBY presidency of the last two years, I can only feel gratitude. Within IBBY lies a strength that fuelled by the legacy of Jella Lepman, has shown its impact all over the world. It seems like only yesterday that I gave my maiden speech in Mexico City. At that time I set myself some goals to achieve during the following two years:

Being more attentive to those less fortunate.

The two years that have passed since the 2014 IBBY Congress in Mexico City have been challenging ones. The world has experienced so many different crises, natural and man-made, and because of these we have been confronted with the migration of millions of refugees. The members of IBBY have been busy trying to find solutions to help the children who are caught up in this turmoil. 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. IBBY Lebanon is working with traumatized children fleeing their homes in Syria. The results shown in the improved behaviour of the children are stunning and demonstrate that the power of books and reading is irrefutable. In 2015 IBBY and its partners called on the US Government to care for the thousands of families and unaccompanied refugee children 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. Their situation is tragically getting worse as more and more children are being deported to their violent homelands. This is a catastrophe brought about by a disregard for human life, in particular that of children and young people.

IBBY will continue to encourage and implement new initiatives wherever children are in need.

Raising awareness of IBBY

Thanks to increasing social media use, people are gaining awareness of IBBY. The activities and rich history of IBBY receive more and more attention from young people. Furthermore, by increasing the use of international press agencies IBBY is enjoying more and more coverage. The 2016 IBBY press conference at the Bologna Children's Book Fair was for the first time live-streamed across the world. This innovation and the widely distributed press releases ensured that the announcement of the 2016 winners of our two awards, the Hans Christian Andersen Award and the IBBY-Asahi Reading Promotion Award, had an enormous impact.

Within our own IBBY community, the website, Facebook and Twitter pages of IBBY international are constantly being updated with news of members and activities related to IBBY. Together with regional and national sections' social media, news is being shared, re-tweeted and highlighted. The electronic regional and national IBBY newsletters are increasing, both in numbers and in volume, and are exemplary examples of how our IBBY sections work and collaborate. The creation of the European website with a selection of children's books recommended by the European National Sections has proved to be a successful experiment, one that could be easily replicated in other regions.

Collaborating with new partners

There have been numerous meetings to strengthen our collaboration with well-known organizations focussed on the promotion of reading. IFLA and ILA have long been strong partners and we will renew our 'Memorandum of Understanding' with these world organizations. IBBY and ALMA are also exploring new paths of collaboration. The continuing success of the 'IBBY Collection of Books for Young People with Disabilities', housed at the North York Central Library of the Toronto Public Library network, is impressive. The presence of IBBY is also growing at major book fairs around the world thanks to the collaboration and support of the various fairs' managements.

Supporting exceptional projects

I am very pleased by the multitude of projects organised by IBBY. Nothing is further from the truth. Some sections are establishing new libraries and buildings, other IBBY members travel in dire circumstances with mobile libraries to guarantee the right to read for children in war and disaster zones, others rebuild and revive bombed libraries, others make books available to

refugee children and are setting up the distribution of library cards to be able to give these children a form of identity. The many projects that are supported by the IBBY-Yamada workshop programme and the IBBY Children in Crisis Fund, as well as all the projects proposed for the IBBY-Asahi Reading Promotion Award ... are all exemplary of what IBBY stands for.

I am delighted to see different IBBY sections collaborating in the organisation of conferences, meetings, seminars, and other events, all the time carefully deliberating and supporting each other. Within IBBY sections new plans are being forged and new experiments are being set up to further support the rights of every child.

Meanwhile, behind the scenes, we are continually working with national IBBY sections to further IBBY's aims and bring them closer to the mission of bringing books and children together.

Like you, I have been greatly looking forward to this IBBY Congress for a long time. We are here to learn, to communicate, to meet old and new friends, to find inspiration...

Kia Ora (I wish you good luck)

Wally De Doncker, August 16, 2016