

Opening speech Mingzhou Zhang
37th IBBY World Congress
Moscow Russia

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of IBBY International, I warmly welcome you to the opening of the 37th IBBY World Congress!

The COVID-19 pandemic, postponed this Congress from last year and it is still affecting us through the necessary travel restrictions in place. So, although it is with great sorrow that so many of us cannot meet in the amazing city of Moscow as planned, our hearts are flying from all corners of the world and we are with you in spirit!

Our warmest and most sincere congratulations, as well as our special thanks go to IBBY Russia and the Organizing Committee for their ceaseless care and massive effort to organize this first hybrid IBBY World Congress! Thank you, Maria Vedenyapina, Angela Lebedeva, Denis Beznosov, Anastasia Arkhipova, Tatiana Lukonina and all the countless people behind the scenes who have worked so hard – you have overcome so many obstacles and set-backs that on behalf of IBBY International, I thank you one and all.

I would also like to extend our gratitude to the Congress Chair, Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation Tatiana Golikova, and to the Deputy Head of the Federal Agency for Press and Mass Communications Vladimir Grigoriev for your continuous support of this Congress.

Let me also take this opportunity to extend my sincere thanks to all speakers for your professional contributions to the Congress online as well as in-person.

One of the challenges was to reach all participants not only in Moscow, but also across the world, on different continents, in different time zones, and in different languages. To do this IBBY Russia has worked with an IT company to develop an innovative Internet platform designed to meet the challenges of the 37th IBBY World Congress. This development will undoubtedly lay the basis for future online events, such as IBBY Congresses. It is an impressive achievement.

As IBBY members, we work towards bringing children and books together. Even though the current pandemic is testing our resources and imagination, there are many projects in the IBBY world that manage storytelling, workshops, seminars and more online or via mobile phones. Social media and websites can deliver many online resources!

Like the national sections, the IBBY Executive Committee has continued in its work and has regularly met via virtual meetings – many having not yet even met in-person! I would like to take this opportunity to thank my colleagues on the IBBY Executive Committee, it has not been easy to keep IBBY moving ahead, but they have risen to the challenges and IBBY is stronger than ever. Others that deserve

our thanks are Patsy Aldana as chair of the IBBY Trust for her tireless search for funding; Junko Yokota for leading the Hans Christian Andersen Award Jury; Petros Panaou and Janelle Mathis for their excellent editorship of *Bookbird*; and Ellis Vance for his much-appreciated advice and work as IBBY Treasurer. I would especially like to thank Vice President Basarat Midhat Kazim for representing me in my role as the IBBY President at this Congress.

I would like to sincerely thank Valerie Coghlan and Evie Freeman for their exceptional work on the new IBBY publication: *Bookbird. A Flight through Time*. This is an outstanding book that records the history of *Bookbird* and, by doing so, much of IBBY's history.

Despite the challenges of the past year the work done by Leigh Turina and Bonnie Ing at the IBBY Collection for Young People with Disabilities in Toronto has continued and the 2021 Outstanding selection of 40 titles has been a great success. Thank you both and appreciation also goes to the Toronto Public Library for facilitating this important and ongoing project.

Our gratitude must also go to the IBBY Secretariat in Basel, which has remained open and working as usual keeping close contact with IBBY national sections and our working partners around the world. The Secretariat has developed social media platforms to share news of IBBY as well as about the current activities of the national sections. IBBY now has a YouTube channel, Facebook and Twitter feeds, Instagram and its own Blog – we shall see what new technology is available to us by the time of the next congress in Malaysia!

The fact that all the administration is done by just three people demonstrates how the commitment of IBBY members worldwide can inspire us all. My thanks go to Liz Page, Nina Garde and Susan Dewhirst – IBBY functions because of your steadfastness.

Without our generous sponsors much of what we do at the international level could not take place. We are very grateful to Nami Island Inc for sponsoring the Hans Christian Andersen Award; the Shenzhen iRead Foundation for the IBBY-iRead Outstanding Reading Promoter Award; the Asahi Shimbun for the IBBY-Asahi Reading Promotion Award; the Yamada Bee Farm for the IBBY-Yamada programme; CCPPG for sponsoring the printing of the last three IBBY Honour List catalogues; and to all the other donors who have given towards the Children in Crisis Fund and the general administration of IBBY.

As the theme of this World Congress implies, we are delighted that despite all the difficulties and challenges, we are creating a great big world through children's books. In this, the spirit of IBBY carried down from founder Jella Lepman is indomitable.

During the pandemic we have learned to be resilient and adaptable. As we move forward to face new challenges with renewed optimism and confidence, we have to

find new ways to bring the joy of reading as well as access to high-quality books to children everywhere.

Enjoy this special Congress as it offers many opportunities and new ways of communication. Nevertheless, even as we celebrate, we must not forget our colleagues in the most difficult places: Haiti, Afghanistan, Gaza, Lebanon, El Salvador, to mention just a few. You are in our thoughts.

We miss each other and I look forward to addressing you in person in Putrajaya in 2022!

Thank you and I wish you many happy hours as you enjoy this inspiring and informative Congress.

Mingzhou Zhang

IBBY President

Moscow, Russia Friday, 10 September 2021