

# Address by the President

delivered by IFLA President Sinikka Sipilä  
at the 81<sup>st</sup> IFLA Congress in Cape Town, South Africa

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Dear colleagues,

I wish you all welcome to the closing session of the 81st World Library and Information Congress. It has been an intensive and interesting week where we have discussed how libraries can act as dynamic forces in our societies, advancing access to knowledge, promoting development, in fact, helping to transform our societies. We have all enjoyed a wonderful congress in a special African atmosphere and spirit. I would like to warmly thank the National Committee and volunteers for their great work together to devise and organize such a successful conference.

Before we depart, I would like to take this opportunity to share with you my experiences and thoughts about my term as IFLA President, as this is my last IFLA Congress in this role.

When meeting IFLA members in various countries I have experienced how strong IFLA's status is among its members and in the field. IFLA is a well-known brand and a respected actor in the library and information field and beyond. Throughout its 87 year history, IFLA has been the leading international body for the library and information sector. IFLA is a standard-setting body, a leader in the professional advancement through its guidelines, manifestos and declarations. Its Strategy and Key initiatives have acted as signposts for the development of libraries in all parts of the world. During the last few years, under the leadership of our dedicated Governing Board and the management of our able and visionary Secretary General, Jennefer Nicholson, IFLA has been transformed into a strong international advocator for libraries. They have been supported by the hard-working staff of IFLA HQ, the Regional Offices, Language Centres and Preservation and Conservation Centres our and members in IFLA units and committees.

Given the unique position of IFLA as a global voice for libraries, the IFLA Presidency is a great honour and source of pride not only to the individual who is elected to that position but also to each country having an IFLA President. It feels especially important for a small country like Finland, my home country, where libraries, in fact, are the cultural service used most by Finnish citizens – the main force driving forward towards an even stronger and more innovative society. Therefore, the main national project to celebrate the 100th Anniversary of our country's independence in 2017 will be the new Helsinki Central Library.

Finnish is not a major language – it is only spoken by the 5 million or so Finns (and is considered one of the hardest languages for non-Finns to try to master). I understand the need to enjoy literature in one's own language and appreciate IFLA's policy to have seven official languages. It is also very encouraging to see the large number of translations of IFLA publications into many languages. For instance, the Trend Report is now available in 19 languages and the Lyon Declaration has been translated into 24 languages.

In my opinion, if libraries are to fulfil their important role in fostering democracy, advancing civic participation, enhancing overall socio-economic development and promoting literacy, then the general public must have access to a wide range of up-to-date material in their own language, especially in the public libraries

I am very pleased that my Presidential theme, *Strong Libraries, Strong Societies*, has been discussed in many countries. The theme has been received very well. There have been two President's meetings, one held in Finland and the other in Turkey dedicated to this theme as well as other conferences which have tackled this and other important issues on IFLA's agenda. One conference was held in Namibia on the theme *Strong Libraries, Strong Societies: the Role of Libraries in Socio-economic Development*. The speakers who came from all over Africa described good examples and best practices on the theme. The proceedings of the conference are now published in a book which was launched at this Congress. It is a great testimony to the efforts made here in Africa to building stronger libraries and better societies.

Another conference on my theme was held this May in Milan, Italy, in conjunction with the World Expo, at the Bibliopride Conference. Delegations from Southern European countries and Turkey arranged a meeting devoted to lifelong learning, the digital divide, social inclusion and access to good quality information resources. I would like to warmly thank the organisers of all of these events for their great support to my Presidency.

My international library career started here in Africa, in Tanzania in 1991 at a library in an educational centre for South African refugees. Now, 24 years later my career has come to its end here in the new, free and democratic South Africa since I finish my term as IFLA President at this conference. I will also retire from the Finnish Library Association later this year. The librarian's profession has been my calling not just my job. I am very grateful for all the great experiences and the social network that this profession has given me during my nearly 40 years of service. Dear colleagues, I have enjoyed so much meeting so many of you in so many parts of the world. I will miss you all. And I will miss IFLA.

Before I conclude, it is time for thanks.

I would like to give my sincere thanks to all of you with whom I have worked and who have supported me in so many ways during my terms of IFLA President and President-Elect. Without your support, my work would not have been possible. My special thanks go to the Governing Board, Secretary General Jennefer Nicholson and all of the IFLA staff.

I am grateful to the Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland for their continuous support to my IFLA work. Without the dedicated IFLA Team both in Finland and earlier within the IFLA Governing Board members, it would have been impossible to run the office of IFLA President. I send also my warm thanks to my family, especially my husband Keijo, at home for all their support.

Dear colleagues, I thank you all for being part of my great journey as IFLA President and President-elect. My wish to all of you, and especially to my colleagues and friends Donna Scheeder, the incoming IFLA President, and Glòria Pérez-Salmerón, the incoming President-Elect is that this great journey will continue and will encounter new possibilities and confront new challenges. Let it be a clarion call to all libraries and librarians – let's move forward to build strong libraries and strong societies!

Thank you very much!

**Sinikka Sipilä**

IFLA President 2013-2015