



Address by IFLA President Ingrid Parent at the Closing Session of the 79th IFLA World Library and Information Congress in Singapore

Good afternoon dear Colleagues and friends.

Welcome to the closing session of the 79th World Library and Information Congress. It has been a wonderful week of sharing ideas and discussing the infinite possibilities that our libraries hold for us all. The agenda, to say the least, has been exhaustive and exhausting. Our Singapore hosts and volunteers have been absolutely fantastic, and we have all experienced an unforgettable week.

Because this is my closing address in my role as IFLA President, I would like to share a few personal thoughts with you.

It is hard for me to believe that my two years are coming to an end. They seem to have gone by in the blink of an eye.

At my opening speech two years ago in Puerto Rico I quoted Sonya Sotomayor from her confirmation hearings to become the first Hispanic Supreme Court Justice in the United States. She said, "I am a very ordinary person blessed with extraordinary opportunities..." I think her sentiments capture the way I feel as I look back on my tenure as President of IFLA.

One thing I think all Presidents are quite surprised about when they first take on the job is the awe and nervousness local library colleagues greet us with - when we meet for the first time. I saw that happen quite often when I was picked up from the airport in many different countries. Of course you quickly learn that it really isn't awe and reverence for you, but rather for the office of President. And they are soon relieved to find out how "normal" you are - that in fact you are a "regular" person just like them. But I think their initial nervousness, among other things, demonstrates the respect they hold for our Federation.

I have indeed been blessed and learned so much from literally thousands of our IFLA colleagues. It has been so gratifying to see their enthusiasm for their jobs and their libraries and their hopes for the future. I came away from each of those encounters feeling equally enthused about the state of libraries around the world.

I like to think my visits brought attention and visibility to libraries that I hope encouraged and motivated them in the invaluable work they are doing. And I have been witness to how much good, and how appreciated IFLA is, the world over, by its membership. And certainly I saw firsthand how a sense of community can - and is - being developed by libraries and librarians.

Because as all of us in this room know - libraries do more than drive access to information for their users, which continues of course to be a fundamental mandate for libraries all around the world. But they also have the power to be a force and a catalyst for change, for individuals, in communities, and in society as a whole. Never before have libraries had such an opportunity to democratize access to

information and make a real difference in peoples' lives. I saw so many examples of that during my many visits to libraries on every continent.

In that regard, I heard a very interesting expression recently that I think encapsulates what librarians do best. In a recent speech given by Canada's Governor General, His Excellency The Right Honourable David Johnston, he talked about "the diplomacy of knowledge". Among other things he defined it as "our ability and willingness to work together – across disciplines and across borders – and to share the knowledge we uncover and refine to improve the human condition."

And when you think about it, isn't that what we, as an association, are all about? Whatever progress we make on copyright, or reconstruction in Haiti, or the recent launch of the IFLA Library – to name but three of the countless initiatives we have embarked upon – it is the working together – across borders that makes our joint efforts so powerful. That's the collaboration and convergence parts of my theme at work - libraries around the world all working to the same objective regardless of their size or economic means.

As we look to the future, the Trend Report we released earlier this week has given us a road map of what to expect in the future, particularly in the areas of education, equitable access to information, privacy, empowerment and technology. We have our work cut out for us. But the challenges are going to be so incredibly interesting. And I think they will attract a new generation of librarians who come from incredibly diverse backgrounds and interests. That is exactly how it should be.

Now, I would be most remiss if I did not acknowledge and thank the so many people who have been such a great help to me over the past two years. Of course there are too many to single out each by name. So, just let me say that I have been incredibly well supported in so many ways, big and small. First, I am indebted to all our staff at IFLA Headquarters in The Hague, and in the regions, so capably led, of course, by our Secretary-General, Jennefer Nicholson. Without them and their constant help and kindness, my job would have been impossible.

I am doubly grateful for such support because I really had to rely on colleagues who took my place at conferences in the Crimea, in Australia, and in a few other venues when I had to attend to urgent personal matters at home. That they would step in for me at the last minute meant so much - and I am very grateful that they did so. It shows what an incredible team we are.

As for my colleagues from Canada I am proud of the values that Canadians promote, such as respect for diversity, for freedom of expression, and for their commitment to multilingualism and multiculturalism. I extend my heartfelt thanks to them for all their support and encouragement.

Let me also say how delighted I am that - with this conference - we have launched a book called "The Canadian IFLA Adventure", a history of our 85 years participation with the Federation. I am sure it will be a best seller!

In my opening remarks a few days ago I mentioned our multilingual website and the progress we are making in providing important documents and standards in as many languages as possible. I just wanted to make special note that all this work is being done by volunteers from all parts of the world. On their own time! That is incredibly generous, and I can't thank them enough for their commitment to what I consider essential work - if IFLA is truly going to serve all its membership. If there is a library heaven, surely our translators will be first in line to be welcomed in.

And most especially from my perspective, I want to thank my husband Marc, who has put up with my frequent absences from home, and my exhaustion when I return from one of my extended trips abroad. It would have been impossible to do this job without his moral, emotional, and very patient support. Merci beaucoup Marc for the sacrifices you have made over the past two years - and for keeping things safe and sound at home during the times I was away. I am so very grateful.

And finally, I want to say a few words to my successor, friend and colleague, Sinikka Sipilä. As you know every President of IFLA brings different qualities and priorities to the role. In recent years we have even come from very different places. I was preceded by Ellen Tise from South Africa, I am from Canada, and Sinikka is of course from Finland. So three separate continents, three very different personalities. But, like our librarian colleagues, it is not our differences, but rather our commonalities of values that allows our Federation to prosper and move forward.

Sinikka, I am very excited for you and your theme of Strong Libraries, Strong Societies. If you ever want to talk or exchange views on any issues you are dealing with, I am only a phone call or email away. I know, under your guidance, IFLA will become better than ever.

To all my colleagues, if I have any advice to leave with you, it is an adaptation to the environmentalist slogan to "Think globally, Act locally". The New Zealand Public Libraries Board - in their Strategic Framework - have revised this slightly by suggesting we "Think globally, Act nationally, [and] Deliver locally." If we all do that we will be serving the cause of libraries very well indeed.

All in all, it has been an extraordinary journey. I have done my utmost to see that IFLA remains in a prominent place not just within the library ecosystem, but also in the world at large.

And so, sadly for me, it is now time to get off centre stage. There is an African expression in the Zulu Language that says: "kusinwa kudedelwana". It translates roughly to: "You did your dance, and now you leave". I have done my dance and now it is time to take my leave.

I will miss guiding IFLA – and being in the forefront of what is happening in libraries all around the world. But I will miss you - my library colleagues - even more. The friendships, the support, the laughs, and perhaps even a few tears – have left me with a lifetime of memories that I will cherish forever. I have indeed been so very blessed by just knowing you. And incredibly proud of the work we do together.

So now, before I get too emotional, let me symbolically dance off the stage, even though in fact I am staying right here for the next hour or so.

Thank you one and all. Merci beaucoup.

Ingrid Parent

IFLA President 2011-2013