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<h2>Libraries: Dynamic Engines for the Information Society</h2>		
<p>Alex Byrne President International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions</p>		
Meeting:	68 Opening	
Simultaneous Interpretation:	Yes	
<p>WORLD LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CONGRESS: 72ND IFLA GENERAL CONFERENCE AND COUNCIL 20-24 August 2006, Seoul, Korea http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla72/index.htm</p>		

Your Excellency Honorary President of the National Organising Committee for the World Library and Information Congress 2006, First Lady Yang-Suk Kwon, and President Ki-Nam Shin, Member of National Assembly

Members of the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea,
Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Presidents and directors of library associations,
Distinguished guests,
Delegates, colleagues and friends

It is a tremendous honour and pleasure to participate in the opening of the World Library and Information Congress 2006 here in Seoul, Korea. We are very grateful to the National Organising Committee and the Korean professional community which proposed that we should come to Korea and which has worked so hard to bring us together in this Congress. Our wholehearted commitment to professional dialogue, to learning about the history and culture of this ancient land, and to interacting with Korean and other colleagues will justify the faith and dedication of the organisers. We are especially grateful to the Government of the Republic of Korea which has supported this Congress so strongly and, in particular, for its provision of very generous funding to assist participation by delegates from developing countries. In doing this, the Government has showed both its commitment to the creation of a global information society and its recognition of the importance of libraries as dynamic engines for the information society.

As we have just seen and heard, Korea is a very ancient land with a long and proud cultural tradition. It will be our privilege this week to sample some of the culture, some of the cuisine and some of the spirit of both ancient and modern Korea.

The story of the invention of movable metal type printing is instructive. We are told that, during the Koryo Dynasty in 1126, all of the palace buildings, including tens of thousands of books in the royal library and national academy, were destroyed by a fire which had been deliberately lit. The desire to replace the valuable collection led to the invention of cast bronze type in 1234 by Chwe Yoon Eyee and to the subsequent printing of important works, including the oldest extant movable metal-type book, *Jikji*, which was printed in 1377. Thus, a lamentable disaster provided an opportunity to develop a powerful new technology which eventually had immense social consequences. The modern Republic of Korea has shown similar inventiveness and has become a powerhouse of technological and industrial development. Through the strength of its government supported research institutes and the vitality of its industries and people, Korea is developing high value added industries and creating a knowledge based economy. The social consequences of this national drive will be no less significant than the invention of movable metal type as Korea becomes and exemplar of the information society.

Events over the past month have forcibly reminded us that we continue to live in uncertain times; in times in which the desire for peace and justice is too often subsumed by the rages of hatred and violence, often fuelled by ignorance and envy; in times in which international law and human sympathy are put aside in the supposed interests of nations and sects.

We cannot permit ourselves to be intimidated and to become complicit in the processes which set peoples against each other. As information professionals, we are committed to facilitating access to information for all. We are committed to enabling unrestricted access to information by the peoples of the world, to the unbiased provision of information through our libraries and information services. In doing so, we set our faces against what has been called, appropriately, “the republic of fear”¹.

As we meet at this first World Library and Information Congress following the completion of the World Summit on the Information Society in Tunis last November, we are conscious that our shared commitment to access to information is a vital key to the creation of an information society from which all can benefit. We know that information access is crucial to addressing the United Nations Millennium Development Goals and especially to achieving alleviation of poverty, reduction in disease and infant mortality, and repair of environmental degradation. We understand that we have a key role to play by working in partnership with other professional sectors and with governmental and intergovernmental organisations, including UNESCO, in supporting concerted action to take on these big challenges for humanity.

The challenges confront all of our libraries and information services, our associations and IFLA, as the global voice for the sector. For those, like me, who work in a university, there is a particular challenge and opportunity to influence the new generations of leaders to develop a broad understanding of the issues facing the world and an ethical and compassionate disposition to addressing them. We also support research into the issues and into finding solutions whether through fundamental research or through the development of applied solutions. We enable industry, the professions and the wider community to operate to the advantage of our nations. Public libraries similarly benefit the broad community and have a commitment to social, cultural and economic development. Those of us in schools can help form young minds through the literature, ideas and facts to which we expose the students. Our special libraries and information

¹ Makiya, Kanan. *Republic of fear : the politics of modern Iraq*. Berkeley : University of California Press, c1989.

services facilitate the functioning of government and business. And our national libraries take a big role in providing leadership and also in contributing to the identity and self knowledge of their nations. Almost all of us are engaging with the important priority of promoting information literacy which is crucial to navigation of the information society.

Our associations, of course, foster these contributions by promoting the development of strong libraries and information services, capable staff and influential policies and programs. IFLA takes these concerns to the global stage, as we did throughout the World Summit negotiations, and as we continue to do in promoting the implementation of the Summit's Action Plan and through such forums as the World Intellectual Property Organisation and the World Trade Organisation.

In doing this, IFLA demonstrates our commitment to the three pillars – society, profession, members – and to our core values. We are vitally concerned with the big issues facing our societies, including those that I have touched on, and particularly those that relate closely to our professional concerns including the freedom to know and the ownership of knowledge. We are also focussed on the specific concerns of our profession and those of our members including bibliographic standards, measurement and evaluation, and professional communication.

We will address all of these issues and more during our Congress here in Seoul. It will be an invigorating and inspiring time in which we will be challenged by new thoughts, stimulated by colleagues and exhausted by activity. We will go home with a will to take on the big challenges of the information society. We will be determined to work in partnership with colleagues and with those in other fields to realise the promise of the World Summit on the Information Society, to make this world better informed and more tolerant for the benefit of all.

In taking up these challenges, we set our faces against ignorance and intolerance. In standing for the rule of law, we reject the republic of fear and those who would promote hatred and violence whether perpetrated by individuals, groups or states. Rather we look to the future with a vision of an information society which will truly be for all peoples. In doing so, we promote the harmony and prosperity of our nations and of the international community of nations. Just as the disaster which befell the Koryo palace and library led to the wonderful innovation of movable metal type, we hope that the challenges facing the global community can be turned to the benefit of all peoples through the creation of new technologies and new ways of thinking.

By applying our knowledge, skills and ethical values as information professionals, we contribute to the development of that information society for all. In our daily work and through the services we provide to our clients, we demonstrate that libraries are the information society in action.

As I said at the outset, it is indeed a tremendous honour and pleasure to participate in the opening of the World Library and Information Congress 2006 here in Seoul, Korea. We thank the National Organising Committee, the Korean professional community and the Government of the Republic of Korea for inviting us and supporting this Congress so strongly. We shall enjoy and take full advantage of the opportunities for professional dialogue and interaction.

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