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Keynote Address

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Former President of the Republic of Korea

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Libraries: Prime Movers for the Age of Knowledge and Information

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The 72nd World Library and Information Congress

Seoul, Korea

Mr. Alex Byrne, president of the International Federation of Library Associations, Mr. Shin Ki-nam, chairman of the Organizing Committee, Mr. Kim Myung-gon, minister of culture and tourism of the Republic of Korea, Mr. Oh Se-hoon, mayor of Seoul, Mr. Han Sang-wan, president of the Korean Library Association, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to congratulate the 72nd World Library and Information Congress on its opening today. I wish this magnificent gathering every possible success.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The early ancestors of mankind subsisted by hunting and gathering, wandering from place to place for a long time. Some 10,000 years ago they started building agrarian societies in the fertile plains and valleys along the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, the Indus River and the Yellow River. From these agrarian communities were born city-states, where rulers and administrators maintained security and order for their citizens, attending to public administration and living environments. Amid such development knowledge arose, education spread, and libraries emerged here and there.

The old agrarian societies began their transitions to industrial societies in the mid-18th century. Expansion of intellectual activities in industrial societies, such as industrial production, international trade and transactions, and technological advancement, stimulated mass distribution of education and creation of libraries. Industrial production required land, labor and capital goods, which were all visible resources. Industrial societies continued their enormous material development throughout the 20th century.

Now, in the 21st century, the age of knowledge and information is in its high gear. In a knowledge and information-oriented society, creative brains become leaders of the economy and knowledge workers, not manual workers, are in great demand. This is an age when invisible knowledge and information take the role of prime movers leading all sectors.

I think the time has come for libraries to assume a role that is unprecedented in importance. Needless to say, libraries performed many important roles in the

past agrarian and industrial societies. But those roles were only secondary and limited in scope. In the 21st century, libraries will perform pivotal roles in determining whether this age of knowledge and information will succeed or not in attaining its desired goals.

First, libraries should be repositories for all of the knowledge and information accumulated by humankind. They will have to store all kinds and forms of material and information. Today's advanced information technology is enabling libraries to accomplish this immense task.

Second, libraries should fulfill more dynamic roles. They should exchange knowledge and information with users inside and outside their country, thus going beyond their traditional reference and lending services.

Third, libraries should upgrade their services as "ubiquitous libraries" by digitalizing their resources for online use. These services should be accessible to anyone, regardless of time or location, through digital communication devices including personal computers, mobile phones and DMB (Digital Multimedia Broadcasting).

Fourth, it so far has largely been the privilege of the haves to receive a good education and attain knowledge of high quality. Nowadays, however, individuals around the world, no matter how poor they may be, can access whatever knowledge and information they need by visiting libraries via the Internet such as the U.S. Library of Congress and the National Library of Korea. All they need is a single personal computer. In the 21st century, the paramount role of libraries must be to provide economically handicapped individuals and nations with opportunities for intellectual contacts at the highest level. No other institutions can take this crucial role in removing dark shadows of the "information divide."

Fifth, libraries of the 21st century can help fight poverty and narrow the gap between rich and poor. The economy of our times depends no longer on visible resources and capital goods but on invisible knowledge and information. Therefore, poor nations as well as poor individuals can create wealth through active contacts and use of knowledge and information. For the first time in

history the world is offering the poor invaluable opportunities to increase property and realize upward mobility. And libraries are taking a central role in this notable movement.

The world will never achieve genuine harmony and peace without hope of eliminating poverty. Poverty lies at the roots of today's global unrest and raging terrorism. Those who are filled with anger and despair over their impoverished circumstances serve as hotbeds for terrorism, sheltering terrorists. Some partake in violent terrorism even at the cost of their lives. They need to see hope emerge from poverty by taking advantage of library resources. Those who are now drowned in the swamp of desperation will then turn their backs on terrorism. Stern measures against terrorists must be accompanied by charitable hearts showing the poor the way to find hope in their everyday life so they can resist temptations of terrorism.

Sixth, libraries should be expanded into open arenas for dialogue among civilizations. The ongoing confrontation between Christianity and Islam in the Middle East is driving the entire planet into insecurity and destruction. Mutual understanding, reconciliation and cooperation between the two civilizations will be impossible without dialogue. Instead, misunderstanding, distrust and hate will just continue to pile up. As a consequence, armed conflict and terrorism do not cease for a single day in our world today.

All library organizations in the world should work harder to increase mutual understanding, friendship and cooperation through dialogue and information exchanges between Islam and Christianity, suffering Africans and people of advanced nations, and East and West. These efforts will contribute significantly to uprooting terrorism and leading the world to peace, not to mention eradicating poverty. Libraries should become a driving force toward peace. And libraries should also become training centers for democratic citizens of the world to promote global cooperation amid diverse civilizations.

Distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen,

Now, I would like to speak briefly about the intellectual and cultural traditions of the Korean nation and our efforts to develop these traditions in the 21st century.

In Korea the first library was founded in the fourth century by King Sosurim of the Goguryeo Dynasty. The following centuries saw the installation of many repositories for books and documents in the royal palace, Buddhist monasteries, Confucian academies, public offices and private households. At the same time documentary culture continued to make remarkable development. Korea invented the world's first movable metal types in the 12th century, contributing radically to its print culture in terms of quality and quantity. *The Annals of the Joseon Dynasty*, a vast amount of records covering some 500 years beginning in the 14th century, is now included in the UNESCO List of the Memory of the World Register. Our ancestors established *Jiphyeonjeon*, a palace institute for academic research, the *Gyujanggak* palace library and *Sadae Mungo*, the Four National Archives, to preserve their intellectual resources. At *Hongmungwan*, the Office of Special Advisers, and *Seonggyungwan*, the National Confucian Academy, public officials and students actively made use of these intellectual assets to hone their scholarly abilities.

The civil service examinations, called *gwageo*, greatly contributed to development of knowledge and education in ancient Korea. Our nation never had a system for hereditary government posts. Even the son of a first state councilor, or *yeonguijeong*, the equivalent of today's prime minister, could not join the government without passing state entrance examinations. This system was markedly different from Europe, where noble titles have been passed from father to son. As the state examinations were the only paths to officialdom, young men had to study hard to pass them and they needed library resources for their studies.

Buddhism and Confucianism from China introduced ancient high culture to Korea. Most of China's neighbors who accepted China's advanced culture were Sinicized. Even the Manchus who established the Qing Dynasty and ruled over China for almost three centuries were almost completely assimilated into Chinese society. It was an inevitable phenomenon of annihilation that occurs when culturally less developed people come in contact with advanced culture. Koreans were an exception, however. Our forebears passionately embraced Chinese high culture but they subjectively absorbed and re-created it. Thus they

established their own schools of Buddhism and Confucianism enriched with their indigenous thoughts and cultural traits.

The clear cultural identity and popular zeal for education among the Korean public evolved into an undaunted power to fight against political dictatorship for almost five decades. Hundreds of people lost their lives and thousands of others were imprisoned and tortured in harsh persecution. I had to face death no less than four times and spent six and a half years in prison and another 20 years in exile abroad or under house arrest and surveillance. But we never succumbed to dictators as we were armed with unshakeable confidence and burning aspiration for democracy. And we finally overcame the legacy of three successive authoritarian governments with the power of people. Korean democracy has thus been firmly set up on the rock.

In this new century, Korea stands on the forefront of the global wave of an age of knowledge and information. Underneath this dynamic advancement of Korean society is the nation's proud intellectual heritage and educational tradition and, no doubt, the power of people that won democracy through unrelenting struggle. I did my best to realize an age of information during my tenure as president. Now I believe the world is recognizing our accomplishments.

My government successfully implemented a policy to network all libraries across Korea and turn their resources into digitalized databases. New search systems were developed and electronic libraries were constructed. Through these efforts the foundation was laid for the "ubiquitous library" with a nationwide service system that can be easily accessed by anybody, anywhere, with any type of equipment. Today, library services are available everywhere -- in farming villages, mountainous areas and remote islands.

Distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen,

Let me emphasize once again. The 21st century is an age of knowledge and information. And this age calls for libraries to play a pivotal role in order to realize its ideals. As I have already mentioned, successful libraries will make a successful world. Libraries are the reservoirs for storing knowledge and

information. Libraries are the locomotives pulling history forward. And you have the vital mission to drive these locomotives.

I hope that this congress will lead to historic momentum for libraries around the world so they rapidly progress in their activities toward faithfully completing their mission in the 21st century. I hope that you all have a pleasant and fruitful time in Korea.

Thank you.