

Opening Address by IFLA President Barbara Lison



87th World Library and Information Congress
26-29 July 2022, Dublin, Ireland

Full text of IFLA President's address given at the Opening Session on Tuesday 26 July 2022

Lord Mayor of Dublin, Caroline Conroy,

Former President of Ireland and Chair of The Elders, Mrs Mary Robinson,

Members of the Irish National Committee and of the IFLA Governing Board,

IFLA Members and volunteers,

Our sponsors and supporters,

Our partners,

Ladies and gentlemen, both of you in the room here, and who are joining us online, Veterans of IFLA conferences and first-timers,

It's good to be back!

It has been three years since we last met in person. Three years of hardship and uncertainty, but also of courage and resilience. Three years of isolation and frustration, but also of connectedness and innovation. Three years of loss and sadness, but also of reflection, and even optimism, about the future. For communities, and for the libraries, library and information professionals, and library associations that exist to serve them.

Now, after three years, we can be together again, in person. We can rekindle old friendships, and form new ones. Share what we've experienced, what we have learned, and in turn learn from the experiences of others. Not just recharge our batteries, but move up a gear, benefitting from the opportunity that the pandemic has given us, undoubtedly, to think hard about what really matters. To make a major step towards building a sustainable future, for communities, for our field, for our Federation. And what a place to do it.

Back in early 2020, IFLA had to take the painful decision to cancel our Congress, planned for Dublin. To put the brakes on the work being done by our Irish National Committee formed from the Library Association of Ireland, and working closely with Dublin City Council and others, by our volunteers. A painful decision, but a necessary one, in the circumstances.

Faced with this, it would have been possible to give up, to cut losses, to move on.

But the team here persisted. They showed extraordinary flexibility at a difficult time, and agreed that the opportunity for the global library field to meet here in Dublin, to experience the warmth, the history of the city, the energy and innovativeness of Ireland's library field, this was not something that should be lost. A courageous and visionary decision, and one for which I, and IFLA, are so grateful. To the City Council, the Library Association of Ireland, the National Committee, the Convention Centre here involved in this decision. One that means that we are able to be here today, this week, benefitting from the hospitality, the history, the heart that Dublin, that Ireland offers. It is thanks to this – to the possibility to come to Dublin, that we have been able to come back together.

I am aware that the pandemic is not over. So many friends, committed IFLA Members, volunteers and supporters have not been able to travel, although I am happy that so many of you have joined us online. We are not out of the woods. But without discounting the challenges we still face, it is time to move forwards, on the basis of a shared commitment to building a positive, sustainable future. We are, after all, just five years away from our Federation's centenary! And so I hope that all of you here in person, joining us online, and in turn your colleagues, your networks, have the energy, the ambition, the desire to contribute to building this.

We are lucky, within IFLA, to have recently been joined by two great new colleagues on the IFLA Governing Board. Following our extraordinary elections this year, we have a new President-elect and Treasurer. You'll be hearing from Vicki McDonald shortly, as she takes on the crucial role of President-elect, and so President of IFLA from 2023 to 2025.

She brings a great combination of experience as State Librarian of Queensland, former President of the Australian Library and Information Association, and extensive service in IFLA's professional units, including as Chair of our Professional Committee and in that position on the Governing Board. Unfortunately, Vicki cannot be with us here, due to statutory obligations at her own library, but I'm very happy to share a welcome message from her. Do also come along to the President's session tomorrow, at 1pm here in the auditorium to hear more. Over to you Vicki:

[video]

Jaap Naber is our new Treasurer, coming to us from Rotterdam Public Library, where he plays a crucial role in helping the institution to maximise its own impact and sustainability – invaluable skills that he now brings to, the benefit of IFLA.

Thank you, Vicki and thanks to Jaap who is with us here today. I look forward to working with you both!

While it is great to be able to share some new faces, I know that there is one that a lot of you will be missing here today.

That is Donna Scheeder, IFLA President 2015-2017, who very sadly passed away earlier this year. It is hard to think of anyone who had a warmer, more positive impact on so many people across the library field than Donna.

Her presidential theme – a call to action – was more than a theme, it was something she lived. Everywhere she went, everywhere she served – including as a member of IFLA sections, a Governing Board member, and ultimately as IFLA President – she shared her intelligence, her energy, her commitment to ensuring that libraries, and library and information professionals, were recognised, and supported, in order to fulfil their potential to make a difference. From the meeting rooms of conference such as this, to the United Nations, she was a consistent and powerful voice for our profession, for our field. She had an immense loyalty to and belief in what IFLA stands for and could be, and played a crucial role in securing our future. A crucial positive legacy to the field. And of course, to me, to so many others, she was a friend who will be sorely missed.

Thank you, Donna.

Please join me in the minute of silence for Donna.

Thank you!

Barbara Lison
IFLA President 2021-2023