

## **IBBY President's speech of welcome for the 2019 IBBY European Regional Conference**

Dear friends, good morning

On behalf of the International Board of Books for Young People, I have the great honour and pleasure of opening the second IBBY European Regional Congress here in Bologna. You have our warmest congratulations and best wishes for a successful day.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Bologna Children's Book Fair, and in particular Elena Pasoli, for her continuing and enthusiastic support of this regional conference. The organisers of today's meeting have worked hard and long to make this conference possible – thank you to all those on the organizing committee. An international team working towards international co-operation and understanding made this possible – congratulations!

IBBY was founded in Europe and is now an international network of people from all over the world who are committed to bringing books and children together. IBBY members meet every two years at a world congress and in between these there are the regional conferences. Each of these regional conferences, of which there are now five – Africa, Asia and Oceania, North America, South America, Europe – has its own unique outlook that reflects the region.

I truly believe that you are what you read and that is why the theme of this year's IBBY European Regional Conference "Languages in Europe: children reading in a multilingual environment" is so interesting.

We are living in a diverse world where understanding, tolerance and cultural co-existence are the only options for a mutually beneficial future for our children – no matter who they are, where they are and what they believe in.

The talks and discussions that will take place around today's theme will be very important. They will encourage all national sections, not only in Europe but also sections in other parts of the world, to think deeply and promote reading widely from the perspective of different languages. Thus encouraging a deeper international understanding through children's books – the IBBY mission since Jella Lepman first began her work.

When we think about the current turbulence in our world, especially the worrying rise of nationalism and populism, our IBBY mission is becoming even more urgent and relevant. As an international network, IBBY's strength lies in its unity and we can work towards this through regional conferences such as you will enjoy today.

I wish you every success today: enjoy the lectures, engage in discussions, and leave here this afternoon with a renewed sense of commitment and wonder in the multi-faceted and multi-lingual world of children's literature in all its glory and potential.

Thank you!

Mingzhou Zhang

Bologna

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