



## Acceptance Speech Delivered by Ingrid Parent at the 77th IFLA Congress in San Juan, Puerto Rico



Distinguished guests, dear colleagues, chers amis,

Let me first of all thank our hosts here in Puerto Rico.

Al empezar, quisiera ofrecer mi más sincera felicitaciones (enhorabuena) a la Doctora Luisa Vigo-Cepeda, Presidenta del Comité Nacional del Congreso Mundial IFLA dos mil once 2011 en Puerto Rico y a todos los demás organizadores de este congreso memorable. Se ha necesitado mucho trabajo y organización para llevar a cabo un acontecimiento de tal envergadura. A todos ustedes quiero decirles que pueden sentirse muy orgullosos del fruto de su duro trabajo que ha culminado en un congreso de gran éxito. ¡Naturalmente, también entiendo que han de sentirse aliviados que llega a su fin y que pronto puedan descansar!

First off, I would like to offer my congratulations and gratitude to Dr. Luisa Vigo-Cepeda, Chair of the 2011 WLIC National Committee, and to all the organizers of this momentous conference. It takes a tremendous amount of work and organization to pull off an event of this size and scope. To them I say, you can take great satisfaction in seeing how all your hard work has resulted in such a marvellous success. And I dare say, you are somewhat relieved it is all over and you can get a little rest!

Dear colleagues, what an amazing week it has been. We will return home a little tired perhaps, but also infused with enthusiasm and ideas inspired by the discussions we have had. This conference has been an admirable testament to just how important and useful our joint deliberations and sharing of ideas have become. At a time when libraries are under severe constraints in our respective national and local economies, and when freedom of expression is being challenged in many countries, the global collegiality and cooperation provided by our Association is more important than ever.

It is of course a tremendous honour and privilege to be taking over the role of the IFLA presidency. It has brought to mind a few words that Justice Sonia Sotomayor, the first Hispanic American to be named two years ago to the US Supreme Court said at her confirmation: "I am an ordinary person blessed with extraordinary opportunity. " I thank you all with great humility for giving me this opportunity to lead our federation and to work with you over the next two years.

I will be the first to acknowledge that I have a daunting task in succeeding Ellen Tise. I have known and worked with Ellen for a number of years. That she has put her very clear vision and distinctive leadership stamp on our organization is somewhat of an understatement. She has taken her theme of "Libraries Driving Access To Knowledge" to all parts of the world with incredible energy, integrity and passion.

We also owe her our gratitude for taking the initiative to focus on human rights and her dedication to Open Access and copyright issues. I know these have been subjects near and dear to her heart throughout her tenure, and that she will continue to promote her values in the future.

As I think about Ellen's theme, and Claudia Lux's before her - Libraries on the Agenda - what immediately comes to mind are the notions of continuity and forward movement.

I believe my own theme of Libraries – A Force for Change – encompassing and promoting the principles and practices of inclusion, transformation, innovation, and convergence - follows in that tradition.

In whatever language we say the theme, I truly believe that libraries can be – and be seen to be – a true force for change in a world where nations are increasingly facing social and economic challenges.

Over the past 17 years I have attended all the IFLA Annual Conferences, as well as participated in or chaired numerous section, division and governance committees. During that time I have been witness to an amazing evolution in the roles and influence of libraries at national and local levels the world over. And as we all know, over the past few years the speed of that evolution has been increasing at a tremendous rate.

I believe that libraries, perhaps as never before, are in a unique position to be at the center of the democratization of access to information. And in such a context – libraries of all types and sizes can indeed be a positive force for change and influence at local, national and international levels.

To reach that goal I see great merit in focusing our attention on a re-examination of our attitudes and assumptions about ourselves and our users that in turn will lead to new ideas about how we might better serve our users as institutions and as professionals - and how IFLA might better serve its own members.

It is clear that to realize their full potential libraries must provide inclusive and transformative services which are not only innovative in their own right, but forge new collaborative alliances within and beyond their walls.

To that end we must serve all, without judgement, prejudice or bias. By democratizing access to information, libraries can indeed empower individuals to freely learn, improve their lives and create new knowledge.

Libraries have the potential to innovate by harnessing the power and potential of today's rapidly changing technologies, and can play an essential role for people who wish to access information - irrespective of its format or how it is retrieved or sent out.

And finally we must take on, perhaps as never before, proactive convergence of resources and initiatives. Through collaboration and partnerships, we can reach across disciplines - uniting libraries, museums and archives, and others involved in managing documentary heritage across the world. This opportunity not

only unites us across professions, but it makes us more relevant in an age where users want increased access to information from the most convenient and comprehensive sources possible.

Putting such principles into practice will always be a work in progress. But I believe they closely align with IFLA's Strategic Plan and the key initiatives that the Governing Board has identified as intrinsic to that Plan.

A case in point is our Outreach Programme for Advocacy and Development of the Profession to maximise opportunities for strategic advocacy at major events – both within and outside our profession. I would be remiss if I didn't mention the tremendously important work being carried out by our Association on copyright exceptions and limitations, particularly in our advocacy efforts with the World Intellectual Property Organization [WIPO]. A great deal of work is now being done in formulating the recommendations that we will be advancing at the WIPO meetings in November. It is exactly this sort of advocacy that promotes the role of libraries and their values on the international stage.

As important as it is to establish principles and plans for action, it is only when they play out at the local level that we are reminded how incredibly important libraries remain to our constituents – the people who walk in through our doors, or use our services. I would like to share a few stories to illustrate this importance.

I am a little hesitant to describe an incident from my hometown of Vancouver, British Columbia but I will. In mid-June our professional ice hockey team was playing a team from Boston in the final game for hockey supremacy in North America. For local citizens, and for all Canadians, it was a very big deal. And we lost the game!

To our great shame some of those same citizens decided the appropriate response was to riot – through burning and looting in the downtown city centre. Despite it all, there were a few upsides. Law abiding citizens, in some cases at the risk of their own personal safety, rushed in to defend people and property. One of those properties was our beautiful Vancouver Public Library, which is an architectural gem in the centre of the city, and unfortunately was almost at the geographic epicenter of the riot.

The overriding sentiment of those who rushed to defend the library from possible damage, and those who commented on Twitter during those few tense hours was basically “protect our library.” The end result was that the library only suffered a few broken windows, where regrettably some other buildings were badly damaged.

“Protect our library” became a rallying cry for how strongly citizens felt about preserving and keeping safe their local library. Similarly, the rallying cry of “This is our library. It belongs to our children” was in the minds of the people who protected the library in Alexandria Egypt during the revolution that took place there last January.

Un autre exemple de préservation et protection est le cas de Haïti qui a subi un tremblement de terre dévastateur au début de 2010. Quelques mois plus tard Ellen et moi avons visité Haïti et avons constaté les

terribles dommages occasionnes par ce tremblement de terre. Mais ce qui m'a frappe fut la force de caractere indomptable de ce peuple. Malgre la devastation qui les entourait, les enfants vetus fierement de leur uniforme scolaire se rendaient a l'ecole. Le besoin vital d'apprendre et de recevoir de l'instruction et de frequenter des bibliotheques demeurait incroyablement forts et presents chez eux.

(Another story of preservation and protection, perhaps more familiar to many of you, regards Haiti, which as you know suffered a devastating earthquake in January of 2010. In June of that year Ellen and I visited Haiti and we saw first hand the tremendous damage that the earthquake had visited upon the island.)

And of course, in the intervening 18 months, there have been other major natural and man-made disasters the world over, resulting in great damage to local infrastructures.

(From a personal witness perspective, of course, the human devastation as well as the destruction and impact on buildings and cultural artifacts that I saw in Haiti will never leave me. What struck me was the indomitable spirit of the people, and in spite of the devastation all around them, amid the mounds of concrete and earth cluttering the streets - children in school uniforms were going to their schools. The need to learn and be educated and wanting to use their libraries remained incredibly strong.)

What these examples tell us is that the preservation or restoration of libraries remains key to a community's, a city's, or a nation's cultural identity and survival. And of course, IFLA has a major role to play in preserving, protecting, and promoting libraries and their use around the world.

Whether we are talking about broad principles and practices or local stories – they all speak to the next steps on the journey we will take together over the next few years. With libraries all over the world under various degrees of stress of all sorts, it is more important than ever that we find strength in our numbers by supporting the work of our Association. By pulling together, I believe our visions and values will work to our collective and individual member advantage. And to the benefit of all people - where we can literally help change lives for the better.

As your President I will need your assistance and support as we pursue this adventure together. It will be a challenging and very exciting time.

I wish you all a speedy and safe trip home and I hope to see you all at next year's WLIC in beautiful Helsinki.

Thank you very much, Au revoir, Hasta luego.

And now I would like to declare the closing of the World Library and Information Congress for 2011.

**Ingrid Parent**

18 August 2011

San Juan, Puerto Rico