

IFLA President-Elect Christine Mackenzie's Acceptance Speech

Dear colleagues, dear friends

Good afternoon, kaló apógevma

I am so happy, so proud and so delighted to be standing here as the incoming President of IFLA.

In Australia, it is customary to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land where we are meeting. I was born in the Kurnai region in Australia and if I was attending a meeting there, I would pay respect to their elders past present and emerging. Today I would like to acknowledge our indigenous colleagues from around the world and highlight that the United Nations has declared that this year is the Year of Indigenous Languages.

Firstly, let me introduce myself and tell you something about me. My childhood was spent on a dairy farm in Victoria, Australia where I was the eldest of eight children. I rounded up and milked cows, fed calves and mucked out the dairy. My aunties who lived down the road gave me two great loves – reading and cooking. The country school I attended had an excellent library and from an early age my Aunty Sheila introduced me to the Maffra Public Library. It was a treasure trove for me, and I devoured books as a child, I just loved escaping into other people's worlds.

When it came to choosing a career, it wasn't that difficult. Especially as I knew I didn't want to be a teacher or a nurse, which were the other options for a girl back in those times. I moved to the big city, went to University and ended up a librarian. And for over forty years I have been practising as a public librarian and have managed three library services. I cannot imagine that any other career could have suited me so well or given me so many opportunities.

Three events have really defined my professional career. In 1990 I took off with my family for 6 months to do a job exchange at Baltimore County Public Library in Maryland. To call it eye opening would be an understatement. Baltimore County was led by one of the library world's great disruptors, the late Charlie Robinson, and it totally changed my way of thinking about libraries. Two years later I undertook a management course that provided me with a great many tools, and as well one of the most significant things I have done. The optional subject was simple – do something that you don't believe you can do. I parachuted out of an aeroplane at 3,000 feet by myself. After that, I figured I could do anything.

The third thing that happened to me was that I was selected to be part of the Bertelsmann Foundation's International Network of Public Libraries. This was in the early 2000s and I continue to feel the impact of that amazing opportunity through to today and my closest friendships. It is why I joined the Metropolitan Libraries Section, why I stood for the Governing Board and the reason that I stand here before you today.



It is a wonderful time to be involved with IFLA and to be your President. I am honoured to have worked with 3 Presidents and 2 Secretary Generals during my time on the Governing Board. I would like to acknowledge two people who today have received Fellowships - Donna Scheeder is a wonderfully smart, loyal and determined woman and generous in her support.

Deborah Jacobs has made an awesome contribution to the library field and also to IFLA – a contribution that has enabled this transformation of IFLA we are witnessing through the Legacy Grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and I am so proud to call her my friend.

Jennefer Nicholson has been supportive and encouraging for many years and laid the foundation for where we are today. Our Secretary General Gerald Leitner is the architect of the Global Vision and the new strategic framework that has been launched at this conference. And our immediate past President, the incomparable, glorious, Gloria Perez Salmeron – whose warmth, passion and love of life has brought energy and joyfulness to the role. Hola Gloria!

And so, to my agenda over the next two years. I am really looking forward to working with the new Governing Board to implement the Strategic Framework – it is both ambitious and achievable. It is truly our strategy – we all own it. So many people – so many of you here today – have contributed to this plan, through the Global vision project and the Ideas Store and I hope that you recognise your input.

My Presidential theme is “Let’s work together.” Collaboration is at the heart of our profession; it is part of our DNA. We must work together to make the library field strong and there were some wonderful examples described in my President elect session yesterday. And we must also work with like-minded organisations, those that share our goal to strive for a sustainable future for our world. Our strong and united library field can make even more impact when we amplify our voice through strategic and powerful partnerships.

Over the next two years we have important work to do. We now have our strategic framework and so over the next year we need to ensure that IFLA has the right structure to achieve the strategy. This will involve all levels of IFLA – the Governing Board, the Professional Units and our Strategic Committees. I hope that the experience of the Global Vision encourages and reassures you that this will be a truly consultative and inclusive process.

The other big piece of work we will be engaged in this coming eighteen months is publishing the new Trend Report. I am really looking forward to this new edition and being better able to understand where both our world and our profession are heading.

It is very special to be meeting here in Athens, often described as the first known democracy in the world. President Barack Obama delivered a speech in 2016 at the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Centre as part of his State visit to Athens. He spoke about democracy:

And I quote... “In all of our communities, in all of our countries, I still believe there's more of what Greeks call philotimo - love and respect and kindness for family and community and country, and a sense that we're all in this together, with obligations to each other. Philotimo - I see it every day – and that gives me hope. Because in the end, it is up to us. It's not somebody else's job, it's not somebody else's responsibility, but it's the citizens of our countries and citizens of the world to bend that arc of history towards justice. And that's what democracy allows us to do. That's why the most important office in any country is not president or prime minister. The most important title is 'citizen.’”¹ End of quote.

We know that libraries are essential for democracy, for access to information, for freedom of expression, for supporting citizens to live to their full potential, for the world's sustainable

development. Every day, libraries make a difference to people's lives, and they make society a better place. Let's work together to make libraries as powerful and as good as they can be!