

Hugo Setzer speech (final)
Sharjah World Book Capital City Reception
Monday April 22nd 7:30-9:30pm (UAE time)

Good evening everyone,

It is an honour for me and for the International Publishers Association to be here with you tonight.

And it is an honour to be here, on behalf of IPA, because we are proud to partner with UNESCO and other fine organizations to make this happen. I remember all the work involved and the enthusiasm of our former IPA president, Pere Vicens (who I think is in the room), to envision and put together this beautiful initiative. Since 2001, when Madrid was named World Book Capital, 19 cities in different parts of the world, including now Sharjah, have had the privilege of hosting World Book Capital.

Since then, there has been also a great deal of work involved by former IPA Executive Committee member Trasvin Jittidecharak and former IPA president Ana Maria Cabanellas. Thank you all.

It is an honour for me to continue your great work and the IPA is proud to see that this initiative is still going strong and creating an ever-growing network of cities around the world united by a love of books and literature.

Thanks must also go of course to UNESCO for its ongoing commitment to the World Book Capital City programme. I would like to thank Madame Audrey Azoulay, Director General of UNESCO and her team, specially Ian Denison.

And this initiative is also so important to us at IPA because it deals with the core of our work: books. Books that, as the promotional video shows, open doors and allows us to learn, to dream, to travel, to meet people and so much more. And this is all possible because of literacy. Maryanne Wolf wrote in her recent book "Reader, Come Home: The Reading Brain in a Digital World" that "*The acquisition of literacy is one of the most important epigenetic achievements of Homo Sapiens.*" And this is part of what we are celebrating today: books that allow literacy for the enhancement of the human race.

And what a better place to celebrate this year's World Book Capital than Sharjah? A city where its Ruler, His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Muhammad Al-Qasimi, has been decidedly investing for the past 40 years in education, culture and literacy, with the result that nowadays Sharjah is considered the cultural capital of the UAE. A city with flourishing universities, libraries, museums, a thriving publishing industry, a fantastic project of a "*publishing city*" and one of the most important book fairs worldwide.

A city that has put together an awesome program to celebrate this occasion, starting by a motto I really love:

Open Books, Open Minds

And your manifesto captures beautifully the magic and opportunity that books provide.

Through books we can learn, we can meet other cultures, we can dream. We can understand each other. As Madame Azoulay puts it in her message to celebrate World Book Day: “*books are also the doorway to mutual respect and understanding between people*”.

Reading the manifesto brought that glint to my eye. That sparkle when you talk about something you feel passionate about.

The sort of sparkle you might see when someone describes their favourite book. Books are so powerful. Their ability to educate and entertain, to challenge us and inspire wonder.

When we look at the conflicts in the world today we need the power of books more than ever. We also need to keep working to ensure that more people have access to books. We need to keep embracing technology that can help make accessible books a widely available reality.

Congratulations Sharjah on taking the World Book Capital City torch from Athens. Congratulations to His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Muhammad Al-Qasimi, to Sharjah Book Authority and its Chairman, Ahmed Al Ameri, to the Emirates Publishers Association and its President, who to my delight also happens to be IPA Vice-President, Bodour Al Qasimi.

Books are a source of light.

Sharjah’s programme for this year and its continued focus on publishing is a shining light.

Keep that light burning bright and if you’ll allow me to quote from the Sharjah World Book Capital City manifesto again:

Open a book, open your arms, your heart, your mind.

Shukran