

IFLA WLIC 2023: Closing session speech

Vicki McDonald

24 August 2023



Thank you Barbara

Firstly, I would like to add my congratulations to all who have made this year's WLIC such a success.

There are of course, so many colleagues to acknowledge and thank.

- Theo Kemperman and the Dutch National Committee for their hard work across many years to deliver an extraordinary week
- Members of our professional council, regional council, advisory committees who have led the curating, planning and delivery of our program
- Our standing committees who planned and delivered the sessions
- The congress volunteers – who as always have been fantastic, and
- The amazing staff at IFLA Headquarters

Each of you have contributed to an enriching professional program which has been superbly complemented with so many opportunities to enjoy the Dutch hospitality and explore this beautiful city. A personal highlight was the Opening ceremony – what a great start to a remarkable week!

This afternoon, of course marks the commencement of my term as IFLA President.

Like all Presidents before me – I acknowledge the privilege that you have granted me.

It is a responsibility that I do not take for granted.

Libraries have been my professional life – which I suspect is the same for many of you.

And, my participation in IFLA has been one of the most professionally rewarding experiences.

When I started my career as a library assistant, I never imagined that I would have the opportunity to work with so many talented and skilled professionals representing the global library and information sector.

I have spoken several times this week of how as a profession and a sector we achieve so much through our innate commitment to collaborate – to share our skills and expertise freely with each other.

Always done on the premise that there will be positive outcomes for the stakeholders and communities we serve.

That camaraderie, mutual respect, and a willingness to listen and learn from each other strengthens our ability to serve and to make a positive difference.

Looking back and also ahead, I believe that we have much to reflect on regarding how we work together and what we can achieve.

The last couple of years have been challenging for IFLA – and no doubt each of us has our own views on what could have been done differently.

But, it is important to move forward.

Tomorrow, the first formal meeting of the 2023-2025 Governing Board will take place.

It will be an important session for each of us.

An opportunity to meet and get to know each other, but also to discuss and agree how we will map out our work for the next two years.

Tomorrow and in the coming months, we will need to consider the legacy we want to be known for and agree on our priorities.

Some of these priorities are already evident – and from conversations with you, I know that you have an expectation that they will be at the top of the agenda for the new Governing Board:

- **Financial sustainability** – like all associations, our funding models and streams have shifted. Earlier this week, we released the mid-term report on what IFLA has achieved to date with the Gates Foundation Legacy Fund which is managed by Stichting IFLA Global Libraries.
It certainly reflects some great work. Whilst our partnership with SIGL will allow us to continue to deliver our strategic programs, that funding stream has a finite timeline.
We need to be actively looking at what new partnerships we can develop and what new revenue streams can be activated.
- Over the last few years, even before COVID-19, there was discussion on our **Congress model**.
We have already reduced the number of days, but do we need to reconsider how often we meet? When there is pressure on each of us to be carbon neutral – do we need to reconsider when, where and how frequently we come together?
But we also need to balance these considerations with the value of coming together and the boost a Congress has to the library sector in the host region.
- In 2021 we introduced a **new governance structure** – after two years of operation, it is timely to undertake a ‘health check’.
Is it meeting our expectations? Do we need to make some adjustments?
- Our vision is to be “**the global voice of libraries**” – how do we ensure that we are earning that privilege? What more do we need to do to truly own that role?
- Our current **Strategy**, that emerged from the Global Vision workshops in 2017 and 2018 comes to an end in 2024.
This week, across a number of sessions we commenced discussions on our new Strategy.
It will provide the framework for our work – for IFLA staff, our professional and regional committees, the advisory committees, and our advocacy work.
The conversations started this week to develop the Strategy will need to continue.
Together with the Governing Board and IFLA staff, I will be inviting you to share your aspirations for the future IFLA – what do you want us to achieve in next 4 – 6 years?
- Last year, the Governing Board developed the **Plan for Securing IFLA’s future** in response to a number of issues raised by members and volunteers.
The Plan has a focus on strengthening our governance, being more transparent in our communication and ensuring financial sustainability.
Whilst much has been achieved – there is more work to do.

I believe that we need to engage with our library associations and institutions members in a more structured and open way – there needs to be confidence that our communication is authentic. This will be a personal priority during my term.

- And we also need to consider how we **work together as a Governing Board**.
How do we ensure rigorous and frank debate and provide opportunities for diverse voices to be heard?
How do we work together in a trusted environment and meet our obligations in the *Code of Ethics and Conduct for Members of the Governing Board*?
How do we engage members in our decision making?

Each President is invited to choose a theme to guide their work during their term. The theme I have chosen is **Stronger Together**.

In the President-elect session earlier today, we explored how we are stronger by working together with our communities, within our sector, with our partners and within IFLA.

And, of course on Monday morning at the Opening ceremony Princess Laurentien encouraged us to tap into the ecosystem.

Now, more than any other time in our Federation's history, it will be important that we work together the leverage our strengths and address areas that are holding us back.

As a federation, we approach our centenary in 2027 from a strong position.

IFLA is a key player in international policy making and advocacy.

For example, we have a solid relationship with UNESCO and we are active at the United Nations.

Both of these organisations actively seek our contributions.

We need to build on these partnerships.

Our volunteers – more than 1000 experts in their respective fields provide IFLA with an unparalleled skill base able to connect locally and globally.

You are clearly invested in IFLA, you care about its work and future and have a demonstrated track record of professional achievements.

What other professional association can match our passion, enthusiasm and dedication?

I acknowledge and thank you for this commitment.

I will be honest with you – I know that there is much to be done. And, sometimes I do feel a little apprehensive.

But, I approach my Presidency confident that we can achieve our aspirations.

I am looking forward to working with president-elect Leslie Weir and the Incoming Governing Board: Alejandro, Dilara, Jaap, Kirsten, Loida, Nthabi, Silvia, Stuart and Te Paea.

I will be working with a talented Governing Board that has rich diversity in experience in the library and information sector and within IFLA.

We will be very capably supported by a skilled, passionate, and committed IFLA team.

Here, I would like to acknowledge our Secretary General Sharon Memis.

Hopefully, you have had the opportunity to meet Sharon this week.

She has made an immediate impact and is working effectively with the IFLA Headquarters team.

There is a renewed excitement in The Hague on what can be achieved.

We have seen their achievements showcased this week – sometimes it is hard to believe the team is only 20 individuals!

In closing, I would like to acknowledge outgoing Governing Board members: Ayub, Jonathan, Mandla, and Yasuyo. As volunteers they have committed significant time to their responsibilities.

In their work, they have sought to make the best decisions with the information they had available.

On your behalf, I also thank Barbara Lison. Barbara has brought great energy to the role of IFLA President. Despite the challenges faced, I have been constantly impressed by her positivity.

Throughout her presidency she has demonstrated a willingness to ‘get the job done’ and an unwavering commitment to the field.

Her presidential theme “Libraries building a sustainable future” provided strong alignment to the SDGs, but also the broader context for our work program and achievements.

I wish all outgoing members the best for the future.

So – as I said earlier, tomorrow the work of the 2023-2025 IFLA Governing Board commences.

I can commit to you this afternoon, that personally I will be working to ensure a strong, sustainable and future oriented IFLA.

In doing so, I am aware of the responsibility and privilege that you are entrusting in me.

In response I seek your collective advice, guidance and support.

By working together we will be **Stronger together**.

Thank you.

Vicki McDonald

IFLA President 2023-2035