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**Welcoming Address at the Opening Ceremony of the
World Library and Information Congress**

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Mayor of Seoul
Korea

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National Delegates to the World Library and Information Congress 2006,
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen!

I sincerely welcome you all to Seoul, a modern city that still preserves a vivid scent of 600 years of rich history and culture. It is this city's infinite honor to be hosting the WLIC, which is highly respected around the world as the Cultural Olympics.

In the 21st century knowledge-based society, knowledge and information is a critical factor for growth that determines the competitiveness of not only individuals but also entire nations.

In that sense, “Libraries-Dynamic Engines for the Knowledge and Information Society,” the slogan of the Seoul Congress is an insightfully accurate description of our reality. Today’s libraries are the key to academic development and information society’s further enhancement. They are also the treasure house and valuable source of information, which directly determines our quality of life.

That is why the number of libraries closely accessible by the residents is a powerful indicator for determining a nation’s level of development and welfare.

Andrew Carnegie, the U.S. steel tycoon who emphasized the social obligation of the rich, established the Carnegie Foundation and donated roughly 2,500 libraries. More recently, one of the world’s richest couples, Bill and Melinda Gates established a foundation that focuses on public health, education and libraries around the world.

These are examples that highlight the importance of libraries as an essential infrastructure to humankind’s welfare and social development.

Despite their rising importance, today’s libraries are facing the most challenging call for change with the advent of the so-called digital age and the development of information and communication technology.

Today’s libraries need to provide much more than traditional paper-based knowledge. They need to create knowledge and information networks that encompass the latest technologies such as Internet-based e-books and multimedia content as well as more traditional media.

When it comes to IT, Korea is one of the leading nations with the world’s No.1 Internet penetration rate. Korea provides the most optimal environment for building and experimenting information infrastructure for the digital age.

I hope that the WLIC 2006 Seoul provides an opportunity for library experts from around the world to share and development ideas and visions about the role and function of libraries in the knowledge-based society.

National Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen, who have gathered in this beautiful city!

Seoul is an amazing city where timeless tradition and dynamic modern civilization coexist in harmony.

It is also the home to the beautiful river Han and the refreshing cheong-gye-cheon stream that flows through downtown Seoul.

During your rather short stay in Seoul, I invite all of you to fully enjoy all the wonderful experiences this city has to offer and return to your homes with bundles of charming memories and priceless friendships.

I also sincerely wish for the success of the WLIC 2006 Seoul. I hope that all of you succeed in opening new horizons for global library development through broad exchange of information and in-depth discussion of current issues.

Thank you.

August, 20, 2006

Se-hoon Oh, Mayor of Seoul