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Congratulatory Address

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First Lady of the Republic of Korea

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Mr. Alex Byrne, president of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), Mr. Ki-nam Shin, President of the Organizing Committee, and distinguished guests,

I would first like to congratulate you all on the opening of the 72nd World Library and Information Congress. Delegates of library organizations from all over the world, I welcome you with all my heart.

The World Library and Information Congress is an arena of knowledge and information where the past, the present and the future of our civilization come together. For over seventy years, people have gathered together at IFLA annual meetings to learn and share; thus contributing not only to the development of libraries but also to the harmony and prosperity of human beings.

It is a great pleasure that such a meaningful event is taking place in Seoul, Korea and I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to those who have worked hard to prepare for this congress.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are now experiencing exceptional and powerful cultural changes that are unprecedented in the history of mankind. With the development of the internet and information technology, civilization is becoming interconnected and unified at a very fast pace. Now, regardless of time or distance, anyone can acquire the knowledge and information they desire.

On the other hand, these increasing opportunities for learning and communication call upon us to be more prepared for new developments and innovations. While having more knowledge is in itself important, to stay competitive in the future will depend on how fast one can find the information he/she needs and how creatively one puts it to use. Therefore no individual or nation can be confident of the future unless they engage in continuous learning and promote innovation.

Libraries are the most dynamic engines leading such an era. They are centers for continuing education that provide new information and stimulate the imagination, and also centers for leisure and cultural activities that enhance our quality of life. Accordingly, libraries are expected to play an important role in society.

The issue of information divide is another significant reason for us to focus on the role of libraries. The increase in information flows and the emergence of the knowledge-based society will enrich our lives, but, on the other hand, it may deepen the polarization between nations. It is my opinion that libraries will play a very significant and effective role in resolving this problem.

Korea has been making extraordinary strides in its effort for the qualitative and quantitative development of libraries. In the three most recent years, 3,800 school libraries and nine children's libraries were opened, and last June the National Library for Children and Young Adults was opened. Also, by 2011, Small Libraries, which act as community centers will be expanded to every local community nationwide.

Furthermore, we will continue our efforts to improve and advance the library system with such undertakings as the digitalization of library resources and by actively participating in international cooperative programs.

Distinguished guests,

A long time ago, in the 13th century, Korea made an important contribution to the advancement of civilization by inventing the metal type and printing press. And Korea is still one of the few nations trying to make dynamic progress in the area of utilizing information.

As a nation that has retained its cultural heritage and also built a state-of-the-art information infrastructure, Korea, I believe, is the right place for you to meet and share views on the present and future of libraries.

I sincerely hope that this congress will provide valuable opportunities to share research information and practical experiences on libraries from many countries and so lead to increased cooperation between libraries throughout the world.

Once again, let me congratulate you on the opening of the World Library and Information Congress and I hope your stay here in Korea will be pleasant and productive.

Thank you.