

Induction of Her Majesty the Empress as Honorary Member of the International Youth Library

February 1, 2019

Her Majesty the Empress has been requested by Dr. Christiane Raabe, the Director of the International Youth Library in Munich, Germany, to become an honorary member of the International Youth Library. After due consideration by the Imperial Household Agency, it has been decided that Her Majesty will accept the request.

1. The International Youth Library, IYL, was founded by the German journalist and author Jella Lepman in 1949, soon after the end of World War II. After the devastation of the war, Jella Lepman wanted to provide children living under impoverished postwar conditions not only with food to feed their hunger but also with books to nourish their minds, and to build a more peaceful and freer world through stories for children. (Her Majesty has talked about these circumstances in Her address at the opening ceremony of the Jubilee Congress to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the International Board on Books for Young People, IBBY, in 2001; the speech was later published as a book in both English and Japanese, the English title being *From Basel*.) Today the International Youth Library has a collection of about 650,000 books in more than 130 languages. It also compiles a catalogue of recommended books from around the world every year and offers a scholarship program for foreign researchers to support the goal of pursuing research in the area of international child and youth literature. In recent years it has been conducting touring exhibitions of children's books in various countries.
2. The founder of the International Youth Library, Jella Lepman, also founded the International Board on Books for Young People, IBBY, in 1953, in Switzerland, to promote international

understanding through children's books. The International Youth Library works closely with IBBY and has been a pioneer for children's libraries around the world. There are currently only two international children's libraries in the world: the one in Munich and the other, the International Library of Children's Literature of the National Diet Library in Japan, founded in 2000, 51 years after the founding of the one in Munich.

3. Her Majesty the Empress has enjoyed reading from a young age and has engaged in various activities involving children's literature for many years. She took an interest from early on in Japan's unique "*Bunko* Movement," community-based personal library, which was developed as a way of making up for the scarcity of children's libraries in Japan and through this, made acquaintances with such figures as Momoko Ishii, Kyoko Matsuoka, and Tayo Shima. At the opening ceremony of the International Library of Children's Literature in Japan, Her Majesty gave a congratulatory address at the invitation of the library. At the request of the Japanese Board on Books for Young People (JBBY), the Japanese branch of IBBY, Her Majesty was engaged in translating poems by Michio Mado into English in four years in succession. The approximately 80 poems that Her Majesty translated introduced the poet to the English-speaking world, and in 1994, Michio Mado received the Author's Award of the Hans Christian Andersen Award, known as the Nobel Prize for children's literature by IBBY. While Japan had produced two winners for the Illustrator's Award prior to this, Michio Mado was the first Japanese to receive the Author's Award, and the first poet from Asia to win the Award after 38 years since the Author's Award was established in 1956.

On the occasion of Her Majesty's overseas visits, the Empress has taken time in between Her official duties to visit children's libraries in cities such as Paris, Washington, D.C., Toronto, Curitiba etc. In 1993, Her Majesty visited the International

Youth Library in Munich and met with authors, illustrators, and the library staff.

In 1998, at the request of IBBY India, Her Majesty delivered a keynote address via video at the 26th Congress of IBBY, a biennial conference held in New Delhi. In the speech, She recounted Her memories of reading books as an elementary school pupil while living in evacuation in the countryside near the end of World War II and spoke about how reading provided Her with opportunities to know about the joys and sorrows of people other than Herself and taught Her to realize that in order to live, one has to bear life's complexities. (The speech was later published as a bilingual book in English and Japanese under the title *Building Bridges*.) In 2002, at IBBY's invitation, Her Majesty attended the Jubilee Congress of IBBY held in Basel, Switzerland, as one of the honorary patrons of the Congress. In Her opening address then, Her Majesty spoke about the benefits She received from books and expressed Her appreciation, in particular, to those who help to provide children with books as librarians. In Her speech then, She especially mentioned about children who are forced to spend their days in fear and dread in the areas of strife. She spoke of Her hope that people, not only shed tears for those children, but rather place hope in them, for they might one day lead the future of the world "with the new wisdom that only those who have experienced utmost sorrow and pain could possess", and requested that IBBY continue to keep those children in their thoughts.

4. Dr. Christiane Raabe, the Director of the International Youth Library, impressed by Her Majesty's thoughts about books and about the people bringing children and books together and also finding an incredible affinity between Her Majesty's thoughts and the ideas of Jella Lepman, Dr. Raabe has requested that Her Majesty become an honorary member of the institution. Dr. Raabe noted, in addition to Her Majesty's deep ties with books,

Her open-mindedness and Her interest in the smaller and bigger questions which move the world, Her humanistic education and Her broad knowledge of history and literature – all those gifts in connection with a remarkable sense for language and intonation and the attentive, amiable and very natural character forwarded towards the conversational partner.

5. In view of Her Majesty's long-standing involvement with children's literature, the Imperial Household Agency has decided to transmit the request to Her Majesty who accepted this honour with surprise and pleasure, and Her Majesty will accept the request by the International Youth Library and become its honorary member. Honorary membership is symbolic and does not involve any obligations. The other two persons to have become an honorary member of the library in the past are Erich Kästner (1899-1974), one of the most famous German authors after World War II, and the late Astrid Lindgren (1907–2002), the Swedish author of children's literature, best known for her Pippi Longstocking series. Her Majesty will be the third person to accept this honorary position.