

# The forest that was and is...



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Congress Organiser/Honorary Secretary SACBD

There is an old saying about 'Not being able to see the wood for the trees'. From my position as Congress Organiser of the 29th International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) World Congress, I was so deeply surrounded by herbage that I couldn't see many of the trees, let alone the shape of the wood. For IBBY is a migrating forest with trees as old and elegant as the Company's Garden and as tentative and promising as any at Kirstenbosch.

Every second year there is a replanting. In September 2004 the IBBY forest flourished in Cape Town - the first ever IBBY Congress in Africa. For statistics: we welcomed a total of 590 delegates from 68 different countries, including 19 countries of Africa. These included eight keynote speakers, 70 speakers, 16 workshop presenters, 28 poster sessions, 19 writers and illustrators in panel discussions, ten official storytellers and many more. Our organising team numbered about 30, with nearly 100 adult volunteers, 92 young Book Bökkies, about 100 librarians, approximately 70 exhibitors, around 30 press, 123 young musicians at the opening, with students from University of Cape Town, University of the Western Cape and Stellenbosch, VIPs and casual visitors making well over a thousand people involved. In 2006 the forest will be replanted in Beijing, China.

After six years of dreaming and planning, the most recent months included agonising whether we would attract enough delegates. In the end we had too many and were almost overwhelmed. At the gala opening at Artscape Opera House, we underestimated the ability of Cape Town to gate-crash a good party. We catered for 650 guests and there must have been over 800. After that we got stricter on 'Show your ticket'. Amid the happenings and happiness at the Baxter Theatre Centre, one excited American lady stated, 'You have started a revolution!' and there were those who reckoned we had set a new standard for IBBY Congresses. Our innovations included the constant involvement of children, shorter times offered to speakers (with resulting contrasts of opinions), and as much outreach into South Africa as we could manage. So the children of our country truly did benefit from our hosting of the top world conference on children's books. An extract from one appreciative letter:

*Congratulations! What a superb conference - it was inspiring, stimulating, thought provoking and fun too! And faultlessly organised. The word 'classy' is the word that for me describes every single aspect of your organisation: from the setting in the Baxter, with their very helpful staff - technical and front-of-house; to the beautifully - published conference material; to the details like the bead necklaces to hold the registration namecards; to the fact that the Information Desk was always manned; to the children's artwork on display in the Baxter lobbies; to the brilliant idea of using the upstairs corridor for poster displays to the posters-on-*

*a-stick used by the charming young Book Bökkies; to the proteas on the platform; to the lively story-telling sessions over lunch hour each day.*

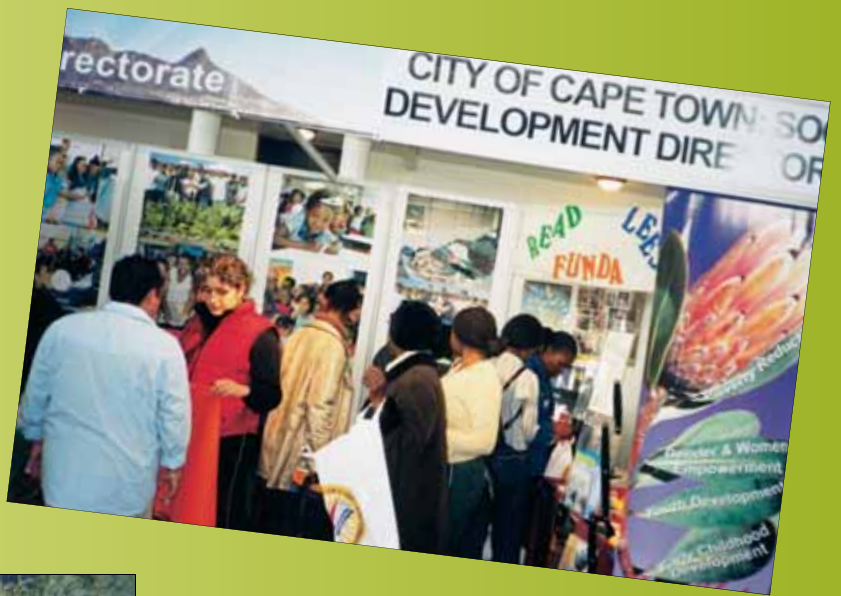
*Oh, I could go on and on. You didn't leave a single detail to chance, and each detail was presented with style. I felt very proud to be a South African.*

Others expressed a reawakened pride in South African children's literature which was strongly represented. From such authors as Lesley Beake, Dianne Hofmeyr, Peter Slingsby, Riana Scheepers, Philip de Vos, Reviva Schermbrucker, Dianne Stewart, Robin Malan, through such illustrators as Niki Daly, Piet Grobler, Paddy Bouma, Marjorie van Heerden, Ann Walton, to the positive evidence of the Proudly South African: 100 Representative Children's Books exhibition. This exhibition has already started off north to the Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA) conference in Limpopo and (thanks to the sponsorship from Yamada Bee Farms in Japan) will still be traveling around South Africa well into 2005. The South African children's Book Forum (SACBF) will not go into retirement! Our local pride was swelled with the presentation of the prestigious IBBY-Asahi Reading Promotion Award to the First Words in Print project of the Centre for the Book.

Let us remain proud. The 29th IBBY Congress in Cape Town was a success. All our visitors confirmed that. Personally, I think that much of the success came from the deliberate combination of amateurs and professionals involved. We knew that certain areas were beyond us, so we engaged professionals to handle the registration, accommodation booking, local transport, simultaneous translation, tours, exhibition stands, catering and (somewhat belatedly) publicity. But it was the amateurs (meaning people who do things because they love doing them) who designed and controlled such areas as the conference programme, the volunteer helpers, the décor, the library displays, the social atmosphere, the musical (and circus) entertainment. These provided an enthusiasm and whole-hearted delight which proved irresistible. Continued thanks and congratulations to all concerned.

It was hugely exciting to see things happening as a result of the IBBY Congress. At the National Library a superb exhibition of historical South African children's books - probably the first time that such an august building has ever brought youth literature to the fore. At the Centre for the Book, three book exhibitions in one. At Milner Library, a huge celebration of Canadian children's books and exciting illustrations from the Bologna Children's Book Fair at Bellville. In Huis der Nederlanden in Pinelands (where the SACBF has its office) a special display of Dutch children's books, thoroughly topical since Max Velthuis was the illustrator winner of the Hans Christian Andersen Award. One should also mention that the author winner, Martin Waddell from Ireland, spent probably as much time in visiting local schools as he did at the IBBY Congress!





**iBbY**

The culmination of a great event  
Share in the creativity, joy and fun that was part of  
the special mix of the 29th international congress  
hosted for the first time ever in South Africa





