



**Speech by Trasvin Jittidecharak, IPA Executive Board Member  
Yerevan, Armenia, 22 April 2012 - Opening of World Book Capital 2012**

As initiator of the UNESCO World Book Capital program 10 years ago, and as Jury member, the International Publishers Association (IPA) attaches great importance to this international endeavour aimed at promoting books, reading and literacy.

As representative of the IPA leadership here in Yerevan, let me take this opportunity to congratulate Armenia, in particular the Armenian Ministry of Culture and the members of the Armenian publishing community on presenting a winning bid for World Book Capital 2012. Yerevan was nominated on the account of the “quality and variety of its detailed, realistic, grass-roots programme, focusing on universal issues and linking all the aspects and actors of the book chain”.

This is a momentous time for publishing in Armenia, which is something we are all very excited about. IPA is also very excited to have a new affiliate member in Armenia since the beginning of this year, the Armenian National Publishers Association (ANPA).

Yerevan is the 12<sup>th</sup> Armenian Capital in Armenian history. It is also the 12<sup>th</sup> World Book Capital since Madrid in 2001. And IPA does not lose sight that 2012 also marks the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first printed book in Armenian by publisher Hagop Meghpart in Venice, Italy. In short, this is really a year of symbols for publishing in Armenian and in Armenia.

IPA’s staff in Geneva, Switzerland, is very much looking forward to cooperating with ANPA and the Armenian publishing community on a number of projects, including a copyright seminar to be held as part of the programme of Yerevan World Book Capital. We are now looking at a date in late September, but this is not final yet. Another venue for cooperation is a seminar on freedom to publish.

As representative of Bangkok World Book Capital 2013, I am also very much looking forward to working with Armenian colleagues. As early as this Frankfurt book fair, following a suggestion by the Armenian side, I am delighted to inform you that we should be able to inaugurate the first World Book Capital stand in the world’s largest book fair. We hope this stand will be a permanent feature.

As I said, this is a momentous time for publishing in Armenia. Yet this is also a time of challenges for Armenian publishing.

Out of the 250 Armenian publishers, only 30 publish more than 10 titles a year. Readership is low. Distribution is not strong enough. Library funding seems to be insufficient. The application of the standard VAT rate of 20 % on most books and all e-books is a major handicap for reading in the country. Overall, the sector is not profitable.

The Armenian publishing sector therefore needs a lot of support, especially in this special year for Armenian publishing. This should be a year of rebirth and rejuvenation. In this context, IPA views the establishment of a strong national book policy in Armenia as an essential component of an ambitious national economic and cultural policy.

The key elements of a national book policy are:

1. the promotion of reading;
2. the adoption of national statistics on the book;
3. the adoption and implementation of a strong national copyright law; the fight against book piracy;
4. the freedom to publish and the freedom to write. Freedom to publish is a fundamental subset of freedom of expression, and is a prerequisite for a thriving publishing industry, which is itself an essential part of a democratic society and a basis for a knowledge economy. A society's taboos should not be enshrined in legislation;
5. the promotion of the book trade and book distribution, in particular through: a. the modernisation, the creation of new, and the support to existing book shops, b. the support of national collective stands including all publishers in international book fairs, d. the creation of national book fair adopting international standards, etc.;
6. the creation of specific publisher training courses/schools;
7. the development of a licensing system and of collective management;
8. the establishment of a national open and market-based school book procurement policy;
9. the development and the support of a national libraries network;
10. the development of the presence of books in the public sphere (e.g.: Radio or TV programs on books and literature, creation of literary awards like the Orange award in Armenia, education campaign on copyright, etc.);
11. Other ideas specific to Armenia may include for instance, the establishment of a pan-Armenian federation of Armenian publishers worldwide.

Finally, we see this as vital for the development of publishing and reading in Armenia, the adoption and implementation of a fiscal policy which does not tax reading. Most books and all e-books are applied the standard VAT rate in Armenia (20 %). Exempting ALL books and e-books, when Yerevan is World Book Capital, as many countries do, would send a clear signal that Armenia no longer tolerates the taxation of knowledge, and wholeheartedly supports the development of a knowledge-based economy. Thank you.