

Speech by the Senator Dr. Klaus Lederer on the occasion of the opening of the International Literature Festival Berlin on 08 September 2021

Dear Mr. Schreiber, Dear Ulrich,
Dear Ms. Slimani,
Dear Authors,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

it gives me great pleasure to welcome all of you on behalf of the Senate of Berlin, and to especially welcome the authors who have traveled from afar, to the opening of the international literature festival in Berlin this evening.

The diversity with which literature is presented at this year's festival is once again impressive!

The ilb 21 »in numbers«, as I recently received them from Mr. Schreiber: the participants include 269 guests from 47 countries, there are over 200 events, 2 exhibitions, 2 concerts, 3 film screenings, 15 translators, 66 moderators, 25 actors, and 10 interpreters. 166 authors from every continent will present their work over the next 10 days. They will come together in person or via livestream, engage with other authors from various disciplines, discuss their work and their worldview, and, of course, read from their latest works.

In this context, dear Mr. Schreiber, I think it is remarkable that you have once again invited not only the »celebrities« from all over the world to participate in this exchange, but also excellent authors who are not yet so well known outside their home countries. In this exemplary way, you have succeeded in bringing this literature to a worldwide forum, something that has, in some cases, been prevented by repressive policies in the respective countries of origin.

There is no doubt that intercultural exchange is greatly enhanced by this festival of »Literatures of the World«. The translations prompted by this festival play an important role. They are what facilitate the mutual exchange and are often even what make it possible in the first place. Of course, we are happy about the translations into German so that a large audience in our country can read the work of the authors. But

it would be great for the international significance of Berlin as a city of literature if, as a result of this festival, texts by authors appearing here were increasingly translated into other languages as well, so that readers outside Germany also benefit from »ilb«.

Can global dialogue take place through literature? This festival can address this question and certainly make a contribution to it. The presentation of well-known and as yet unknown voices, who convey different impressions and perspectives from their countries, will arouse curiosity, and possibly inspire the listener to want to know more.

The world-encompassing digital communication systems, media, tourism, not to mention economics, have significantly changed the function, content, and forms of the arts. One might think that this would almost automatically improve the familiarity with, understanding of, and respect for other cultures. But superficial awareness alone is not enough to comprehend the social, cultural, and historical reality of a time or a culture. Offering more depth to promote understanding is the classical task of literature, but also of other forms of cultural expression.

In the coming days, we will certainly hear in the many discussions with the artists to what extent the economic and political environment influences literature in their countries. Indeed, this festival also differs from others in that it focuses on the reality of life in which literature is created, in addition to the artistic and aesthetic significance of the texts. The »Reflections« series within the festival is an expression of this programmatic effort.

In the truest sense of the word, this festival will be a place of »world literature«, which Johann Wolfgang von Goethe already wished for in 1827. He wrote: »It is becoming more and more obvious to me that poetry is the common property of all mankind...National literature is now a rather unmeaning term; the epoch of world literature is at hand.«

The fact that this dialogue of literature is taking place in our city is an honour for us! – For Berlin was and is a city that has always magically attracted artists, especially

writers from both Germany and abroad. Some settle in Berlin forever. The atmosphere of Germany's largest city, with all its light and dark sides, is always described as highly stimulating. Before the pandemic, literary events were held in the city virtually every evening, featuring not only German authors, thanks to the large and growing number of different cultures and languages living here.

Finally, I hope all of the authors have an attentive audience. But I also hope that, in addition to conversations and discussions with your colleagues from all over the world, you will find time, if you were able to come to Berlin, to take a few strolls through our city. It is worthwhile to get to know the »extra-literary« Berlin as well.

Dear Mr. Schreiber, I thank you and your whole team for your great, tireless work! I wish the 2021 Literature Festival great success once again!
Thank you very much!

(Translation: Andrew Stonehouse)