**The Lebanese Library Association (LLA) 5th Conference
in collaboration with Asia and Oceania Regional Section of the International
Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA)**

*Libraries as a Power of Change
May 18-20, 2021
Virtual Online*

The Lebanese Library Association (LLA) organized its fifth conference in cooperation with the Asia and Oceania Regional Section (RSCAO) of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) entitled *Libraries as a Power of Change* from 18-20 May 2021 virtually Zoom. The conference was opened in the presence of Ms. Barbara Lison, President-Elect of IFLA, Ms. Tina (Tao) Yang, Chair of RSCAO, and the Lebanese artist, Georges Khabbaz.

It lasted for three days and included thirteen sessions, with eighteen speakers from Austria, Saudi Arabia, China, Egypt, Germany, the USA, and the UK, in addition to Lebanon.

The conference began with a speech by Dr. Fawz Abdullah, President of the Lebanese Library Association (LLA), in which he welcomed the conference guests, participants and attendees, emphasizing the role of the Lebanese Library Association, which represents the interests of libraries and information services and their beneficiaries as a voice for all. He added that its activities aim to support this sector on all Lebanese territories, keen on fair use of information services for sustainable development, education, cultural stimulation and enrichment, economic activity, and informed participation in democracy. Dr. Abdullah highlighted that the Covid-19 crisis forced us to reconsider the ways to provide information and to shift more to digital groups so that the user can access information for free.

Dr. Abdullah emphasized the principles of LLA, which are: intellectual freedom as a foundation for democracy and lies at the heart of library service, freedom of access to information, the promotion of transparency, accountability and openness in the decision-making process, and the removal of barriers to the flow of information, which encourage inequality, poverty, and despair.

The opening was followed by a dialogue with artist George Khabbaz, who dealt with the relationship of art with the library through research tools, the protection of intellectual property, and the strengthening of the role of art and libraries in upgrading society. Khabbaz stressed the importance of the role of libraries in the development of the citizen and the country. He added that Lebanon is a country of culture and openness, and artistic and musical works must be among the library's holdings because they are part of the nation's cultural heritage, wishing that the wounded Lebanon would rise again to play a stronger role.

Through its various sessions, the conference addressed topics related to innovative artificial intelligence projects in libraries, strategies for empowering local communities, mitigating digital divides, and ways to enhance user participation in cultural contexts.

In the last session, Ms. Randa Chidiac, Vice-President of the LLA, Ms. Joanne Farchakh Bajjaly, Founder & Director of Biladi, and Mr. Karl Hasberg, former president of Blue Shield International, participated in a panel session: Emergency Response: Cultural Property Protection. They covered the issue of the explosion of the Port of Beirut and the accompanying heavy losses to libraries, museums, and heritage buildings. The session documented not only the massive destruction but also the cooperation that took place between the three bodies and the procedure adopted to assess the losses and start the necessary repairs.

As usual, dedicated and generous sponsors partnered with LLA to organize the event. The information service sponsors were ProQuest, Springer-Nature, Taylor and Francis Group, Naseej, and Oxford University Press.

The conference which was attended by about 365 people from Lebanon, various Arab countries, Cyprus, Germany, the USA, and the UK ended on the evening of May 20, 2021.