**Summation and Concluding Remarks**

Delivered by

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At the

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

What a week we have had. First the Sixth Baku Global Forum, which many of you, like me, have had the privilege of attending, and now these sessions devoted to the International Summit of the Book. The eminence of the participants, the quality of the discussions and the breadth of the topics covered were all amazing and they represent a special challenge for me as I try to summarize, selectively and incompletely, what we have learned and to reflect on where we go from here.

The book as we defined it for purposes of this gathering is not the physical book as artifact. It is the compilation of words and sentences, usually not less than 40,000 words, which treats ideas, and allow their travel through space and time. The format in which these words are kept, be they in scroll, codex, electronic or audio format, is secondary to the text and the meanings it conveys from author to reader. And how the reader receives and perceives the text is very important, almost as important as the initial intent of the author when he or she wrote the original text. The great works tend to be multi-layered and have a special built-in ambiguity that allows the historical or socio-economic and political context to change and still the text is interpretable by the reader in ways that are meaningful to his or her context. In that sense, these great works have stood the test of time.

The book as artifact, is what was known as the codex, and which we have come to call the book. The codex is a format of leaves bound on one side, which we call the spine, and usually bound in a heavier cover, allowing writing on both sides of the leaf and convenient storage and reading. It replaced the scrolls of papyrus or parchment which had been the way of writing and storing information for millennia. Except for the weight, and perhaps its lack of ease of searchability, it is an outstanding way to store and retrieve information, which has simplicity, longevity and user-friendliness on its side. And many of us love the books as artifacts and appreciate holding them in our hands, interacting with them, and even reveling in the special smell of old leather-bound books as we go through their pages into a past kept alive by their availability to us.

But again, here, in this meeting, we are willing to accept that the format is secondary to the idea of the Book as a certain number of words and sentences (supported by still and moving diagrams and images).

The Book in that sense, is a vehicle for ideas and expressions that cover everything from science to fairy-tales, from history and biography to poetry and drama, from adventure and science-fiction to mathematics and philosophy… It is as unbounded as the human imagination, and as uncharted as the reactions of the human mind to the constantly unfolding present as it morphs into an unknown future.

But in the process of our discussions, it became evident that the book so defined is not only a primary expression of a society’s culture it is also a way of articulating that society’s values and cumulatively records its cultural heritage and the legacy of past generations.

Here language becomes an important point of discussion: is it a bridge or is it and obstacle? How faithful can translations from one language into another be? And how about the growing archaism of the words and formulations of ancient books – important as they me be to our specific culture – to the modern ear and the contemporary brain? Perhaps here it is interesting to reflect with T. S. Eliot on the ability of good works in any culture to cover and assist the transformation of a language from its archaic form into its contemporary expression, a task that every generation which will produce its own writers must face as they relate to the past and invent the future. And when they are right, just right, there will be a balance in the language, appropriate for its day, easy flowing and yet retaining just enough of the inherited language that its evolution is gradual, even imperceptible, except for the intentional transformation that poets bring, where the effect is to intentionally create an imbalance. But, in general, the best writing will create a new language, where in the words of T.S. Eliot ...

Every phrase and sentence is right

When every word is at home

Taking its place to support the others

The word neither diffident nor ostentatious

An easy commerce of the old and the new

The common word exact without vulgarity

The formal word precise but not pedantic

The complete consort dancing together

Every phrase and every sentence

 is an end and a beginning.

T.S. Eliot – Four Quartets

The book thus defined, and written in the language of its time, plays a role in the development of every nation, from the basic textbooks for the education system needed for the teaching of both the humanities and the sciences, to the needed readings and instruction of good citizenship, and international understanding. As we have heard from eminent leaders, it is an essential element in the assertion and definition of national identity and in the development of a viable relation between the government and the governed. Books can also help in promoting harmonious relations between various cultural communities that coexist within a national polity. And here the Summit has explored the profound questions dealing with the role of free speech, the importance of a free press, the limits of censorship, the threat of hate speech, and whether there is a role for government sponsored information.

These questions, which we have really only evoked, require much more discussion in future meetings. Indeed, with the explosion of the new social media and the new digital platforms, and with the presence of extremism and populism, each society must strive to find the proper manner of ensuring freedom of speech and access to information along with anti-terrorism, state security and people’s democratic rights.

The book has been the primary means of preserving our past heritage, with the accumulated books throughout our historical past being the record of our history, and our thoughts and beliefs as a society through time. Our histories, our philosophies, our science and our social legacies, are all understood by the record and the context provided by that legacy, and punctuated with the great works of the past. Appropriately, since we are here in the land of Nizami, we did hear a special tribute to the legacy of the great Nizami Ganjavi.

Today, as the new technologies open up new vistas to interact with this vast legacy, from the priceless pioneering digital collections (from the original Internet Archive to Google Books and the Hathi Foundation) to new electronic platforms that are emerging every day, we have enriched the lives of many and increased the potential access of the next generation beyond measure.

But what about copyright in this digital age? What about very poor places where access remains a problem? We should look at what has been achieved so far, and what is likely to happen in the next few years. Clearly we have barely scratched the surface of these complex and rapidly changing topics.

National Libraries in all countries play a special role, as do the national archives. Traditionally, National Libraries are the legal deposit of the national imprint, and they are also responsible for the preservation of the nation’s cultural heritage. But they are also called on to address the development of national information policies in the context of this rapidly changing digital world.

We did hear from a number of Directors of the National Libraries who shared their experiences, delineated the challenges as they see them, and discussed their expectations. In this time of rapidly changing technology and global connectivity, many of the inherited policies and approaches clearly call for visionary updating and transformation.

Not only are the platforms from which we read our books changing (electronic books, audio books) but also the manner in which we get to access the information in, and from the text, including one-click (or touch) links to videos, images and hypertext links, as well as hidden dictionaries and footnotes, and a certain fluidity from augmented reality to other means.

In addition, the formidable rise of social media, fake news, lies, and inappropriate speech on the internet requires that we teach our children media literacy in addition to traditional textual literacy and numeracy. More importantly we will need to teach them to have a critical mind and to value civility in public discourse.

As such, the education system and the traditional textbook approach to teaching has changed and is changing. Our children will need a new literacy, and life-long learning is becoming a reality. Thus, new innovations for both the book and the methods of education are needed. It is no longer just the need for Media literacy, it will be about the formation of the citizens of the future.

In the formation of the citizens of the future, Libraries will have a central role to play. In fact, T.S. Eliot even went as far as to say:

“The very existence of libraries affords the best evidence that we may yet have hope for the future of man”

― T.S. Eliot

Long known as the great repositories of the heritage of the past, the great libraries of the world have now been involved in a major effort to connect knowledge beyond boundaries and to make it available internationally, by presenting it in new ways and in curated thematic approaches. The Memory of individual societies and of the world are brought to life in new ways that empower the legacies of the past to play their seminal role buttressed by unimaginably powerful resources, that not only open a window on the past, but also prefigure the future of how information will be preserved, organized and accessed.

But in prefiguring the future, the manner in which books contribute to forming the next generation is important, especially given the enormous revolution in Science and Technology. Today, learning societies are very concerned about the advancement of Science-Technology-Engineering and Math (STEM) or adding Arts (therefore STEAM), and even more about the relations between science and the public. Books, magazines and other means of communications (textual and visual) are central to better informed society with a scientific outlook to accepting and adopting evidence-based rational arguments. The science book is a primary tool in that duel between those who promote truth and those who promote lies, fake news and smears in the age of social connectivity and the internet. What should we do about that?

Indeed, there are many who value the immediacy of the modern chatrooms that allow participants at a distance to share in the closeness of an almost viva voce exchange with its immediacy, its openness and the give-and-take needed for building a consensus. But experience does not seem to support that view. Obtaining a consensual accord on complex topics can still be best achieved by the processes of criticism and debate through well thought out pieces properly published after the benefit of peer review and copy editing and then subjecting these pieces to thoughtful questioning, dissent and correction. With the original pieces published in books, or presented in seminars with the thoughtful reviews published in equally accessible forums. Tweets can bring a thought to the attention of many, but tweets and counter tweets which generally bring out more heat than light, are not likely to replace a society’s need for books.

And if we truly are in a global discussion, what about language as a barrier? Or will we trust to the coming marvels of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to bring us instant translation?

**Where do we go from here?**

There are indeed many topics that we have barely touched, and that we promise ourselves that they will be topics for another day… I hope that these themes of **language, translation and building inter-cultural bridges** **between peoples** will be addressed in the next International Summit of the Book, which Beirut Arab University has kindly offered to Host.

Let me say a few words about **Beirut** as the venue for the next International Summit of the Book.

Although my cousins in what is today Iraq may have been among the first to promote writing on tablets, it was the Egyptians who in the third millennium BC gave the ancient world the perfect medium for writing: Papyrus! A thick paper-like material made by woven stems of the papyrus plant which were pounded into sheets, and then glued together to form a scroll. Yes, a scroll. For millennia, the scroll would be the form in which books were kept!

My other cousins, in what is today Lebanon, ever the traders, were the ones who carried that great Egyptian invention to Europe. With that came some of the words we associate with the book today:

According to Herodotus (History 5:58), the Phoenicians brought writing and papyrus to Greece around the 10th or 9th century BC. The Greek word for papyrus as writing material (biblion) and book (biblos) come from the Phoenician port town Byblos, through which papyrus was exported to Greece. From Greek we also derive the word tome (Greek: τόμος), which originally meant a slice or piece and from there began to denote "a roll of papyrus". Tomus was used by the Latins with exactly the same meaning as volumen. And the word “book”, which is today associated with the format of the medieval codex, is that form which has leaves bound on one side we call the spine, usually protected by a heavier cover, allowing writing and reading on both sides of the page, and is easy and to carry and use. The original “biblion” coming from the Byblos of old, is still our primary vehicle for cultural exchange.

And Modern Lebanon has carried the torch of writing, publishing and translation in the Arab World. So, as you can see, the pedigree of Beirut to host the next International Summit of the Book is indeed impeccable. We hope that we shall see you all there.

May I call on my Colleague Dr. Amr El-Adawi, President of the Beirut Arab University, who has offered to host the 2019 International Summit of the Book, to take charge of the symbolic Trophy devoted to the International Summit of the Book, and to keep it safe till he hands it over to the next venue that will host the International Summit of the Book in 2020.

Dr. El-Adawi, has informed me that the 2019 International Summit of the Book, to be held in Beirut, will be devoted to the theme of “Language, Translation and Building Inter-Cultural Bridges Between Peoples” … I hope that we shall see you all there.

And now, it gives me great pleasure to thank you each and every one for your many contributions that have made this event a success, and I hereby declare the seventh International Summit of the Book closed.

May you all have safe trips home. Thank you and goodbye.

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