

## **Speech by Ms Sarangoo Radnaaragchaa, UN Resident Coordinator, Kazakhstan**

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Distinguished delegates, colleagues, and friends,

It is a privilege to address you today at the World Library and Information Congress here in Astana — a city that reflects the spirit of transformation and ambition that defines our shared mission. Today we gather not only to celebrate the enduring value of libraries, but to reaffirm their evolving role in shaping inclusive, informed, and resilient societies.

In doing so, we also recommit to the United Nations' 2030 Agenda and the Pact for the Future, underlining how libraries serve as critical enablers for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, from quality education to lifelong learning and global partnerships.

### **Unique role of libraries**

Libraries hold a unique and vital place in society precisely because they leave no one behind. As public institutions, they are open and accessible to all—regardless of age, income, background, or status. Whether a child discovering books for the first time, a student preparing for exams, or an adult seeking new skills, the library offers equal access to the accumulated knowledge of the world. In an age of growing inequality, libraries stand as democratic spaces where opportunity is not purchased but provided—freely, generously, and without discrimination. Their role in fostering inclusive, informed communities is not incidental; it is foundational. Libraries serve refugees, persons with disabilities, the elderly, and underserved communities. They offer inclusive programming, multilingual resources, and accessible formats that foster belonging and participation. In doing so, libraries strengthen the social fabric. They are not merely service providers—they are spaces of dignity, equity, and empowerment.

This universal reach directly contributes to Sustainable Development Goal 10 on reducing inequalities and SDG 16 on promoting peaceful, inclusive societies. By

ensuring no one is left behind, libraries embody the very essence of the Pact for the Future's commitment to people-centered development.

The United Nations has long recognized the essential role libraries play in advancing its global development agenda. Through UNESCO and other agencies, the UN supports libraries as key institutions for promoting literacy, cultural preservation, and access to information. Moreover, the UN's recently launched Pact for the Future explicitly highlights libraries as strategic partners in achieving SDG 4 on quality education, SDG 5 on gender equality, and SDG 17 on revitalizing global partnerships.

As United Nations, we also have our library. The United Nations Library, particularly the Dag Hammarskjöld Library at UN Headquarters, has evolved from a traditional repository of books into a dynamic hub for knowledge exchange and collaboration. Originally focused on archiving and cataloguing official UN documents, the library has embraced digital transformation through initiatives like the United Nations Digital Library System, offering global access to speeches, voting data, maps, and multimedia resources. Beyond its digital offerings, the library now serves as a vibrant meeting space for diplomats, researchers, and civil society, fostering dialogue and innovation around international policy and development. This shift reflects the UN's broader commitment to openness, accessibility, and the democratization of information in the digital age.

In line with the Pact for the Future, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library is also piloting sustainable practices—from energy-efficient infrastructure to green cataloguing policies—that align with SDG 7 on affordable and clean energy and SDG 12 on responsible consumption and production.

### **The Evolving Role of Libraries in Society**

Libraries today are undergoing a profound transformation. No longer confined to their traditional function as repositories of books, they have become dynamic civic institutions—spaces for learning, innovation, and community engagement. They serve as platforms for dialogue, digital empowerment, and lifelong education.

This evolution is not incidental. It is essential. Libraries are increasingly recognized as contributors to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals—advancing

quality education, reducing inequalities, promoting peace, and fostering sustainable communities.

Through partnerships with local governments, NGOs, and the private sector, libraries are also becoming incubators for social enterprise and civic-tech innovation, directly supporting SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth and SDG 17 on partnerships for the goals.

The UN Global Digital Compact that was adopted by the United Nations member states in 2024 envisions a future where digital technologies are inclusive, safe, and accessible to all—principles that align closely with the mission of libraries.

### **Digitalization and Equitable Access**

The digital age presents both unprecedented opportunities and complex challenges. Libraries are at the forefront of digital inclusion—providing access to technology, digital literacy training, and online resources that empower individuals to participate fully in the knowledge economy.

Yet digitalization must be equitable. We must ensure that rural populations, marginalized groups, and those with limited connectivity are not excluded. Libraries are uniquely positioned to bridge this divide, offering not only infrastructure but trusted guidance in navigating digital landscapes.

By rolling out community Wi-Fi hubs, makerspaces, and coding workshops, libraries directly advance SDG 9 on industry, innovation, and infrastructure while ensuring that no one is left behind in the digital revolution.

The Pact for the Future envisions a world where inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development is driven by empowered communities and informed citizens. Central to this vision is the universal right to access information—a cornerstone of transparency, accountability, and meaningful participation. Inclusion is not just a principle but a practice that ensures marginalized voices are heard and represented in shaping policies and solutions. Libraries, as trusted public institutions, play a pivotal role in this ecosystem: they democratize knowledge, bridge digital divides, and foster safe spaces for dialogue and learning. By offering free access to information, promoting media literacy, and supporting lifelong education, libraries

become engines of inclusion and resilience—helping communities not only navigate the present but actively shape the future.

In practical terms, libraries are launching “SDG Corners” where community members can explore data dashboards on local progress toward the Goals, propose micro-projects, and collaborate on solutions—bringing the Pact for the Future from global vision to grassroots action.

The UN Global Digital Compact envisions a future where digital technologies are inclusive, safe, and accessible to all—principles that align closely with the mission of libraries. As trusted public institutions, libraries are uniquely positioned to advance the Compact’s goals by bridging digital divides, promoting digital literacy, and ensuring equitable access to information.

### **Artificial Intelligence: Promise and Precaution**

Artificial Intelligence is reshaping how we access and interpret information. While AI offers powerful tools for discovery and personalization, it also raises critical concerns—around bias, misinformation, privacy, and the erosion of human agency.

Libraries must play a proactive role in this discourse. As institutions grounded in ethics and public service, they can help communities understand the implications of AI, advocate for transparency, and promote digital literacy that includes critical engagement with emerging technologies.

By hosting AI literacy bootcamps, ethical hackathons, and community dialogues on algorithmic fairness, libraries help implement SDG 16 on promoting just, peaceful, and inclusive societies, ensuring that AI serves humanity rather than undermines it.

### **Education and Public Engagement**

Libraries complement formal education systems by offering informal, community-based learning opportunities. They host lectures, exhibitions, workshops, and civic forums that encourage public engagement and critical thinking.

In an era of disinformation and polarization, libraries remain trusted institutions—places where citizens can access reliable information, engage in respectful dialogue, and develop informed perspectives.

Initiatives like “SDG Storytime” for children, youth debate leagues, and collaborative research incubators enable libraries to foster a culture of lifelong curiosity, directly supporting SDG 4 on quality education and SDG 5 on gender equality by ensuring equal access to knowledge for all genders.

### **Investing in Cultural Infrastructure**

Urban development strategies must include investment in cultural infrastructure. Libraries are not peripheral amenities—they are central to vibrant, inclusive cities. A well-resourced library can revitalize a neighborhood, support local economies, and foster civic pride.

We urge policymakers to recognize libraries as strategic assets in urban planning—worthy of sustained investment and integration into broader development frameworks.

Embedding libraries in smart-city planning helps achieve SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities, while library-based co-working spaces spur local entrepreneurship and job creation in line with SDG 8.

### **Heritage Protection and Cultural Memory**

Libraries are custodians of cultural heritage. They preserve manuscripts, oral histories, and archival materials that define our collective identity. In times of crisis—whether conflict, displacement, or climate disaster—libraries help communities safeguard their memory and rebuild their narratives.

Investing in heritage protection is not only about preservation—it is about resilience, continuity, and intergenerational dialogue.

Collaborative digitization projects, supported by the Pact for the Future’s funding mechanisms, enable libraries to protect endangered languages and local histories—contributing to SDG 11 on inclusive heritage and SDG 16 on justice and strong institutions.

### **Climate Education and SDG Awareness**

Libraries are increasingly active in climate education—hosting programs that raise awareness, share scientific knowledge, and promote sustainable practices. They

help local communities connect global goals to local action, making the SDGs tangible and relevant.

In this context, libraries have a vital role to play in supporting the ambitions of the forthcoming UN Pact for the Future—a global commitment to reinvigorate multilateral cooperation and accelerate progress toward the SDGs. As trusted institutions rooted in communities, libraries can help translate the Pact’s vision into everyday practice.

From “green reading clubs” focused on environmental literature to solar-powered community charging stations, libraries exemplify how cultural institutions can be low-carbon, high-impact community anchors in support of SDG 13 on climate action and SDG 7.

Kazakhstan is home to over 11,000 libraries, including national, regional, university, and public institutions. These libraries serve as vital community hubs, especially in rural and underserved areas, where access to information and technology may be limited.

By leveraging national partnerships and international cooperation under the Pact for the Future, Kazakhstan’s libraries can pilot innovative models—such as mobile e-library buses and pop-up digital labs—that can be scaled across Central Asia to achieve shared SDG targets.

### **Financing and Partnerships**

Mobilizing sustainable financing is critical to ensure libraries can fulfill their role in delivering the SDGs. We call on governments, development banks, and private foundations to establish dedicated funding lines for library infrastructure, digital resources, and capacity building. Public–private partnerships and south–south cooperation, encouraged by the Pact for the Future, can channel expertise and resources into libraries as engines of local and global progress (SDG 17).

### **Closing**

As we look ahead, let us continue to invest in libraries—not only as institutions of learning, but as pillars of sustainable development, guardians of cultural heritage, and catalysts for innovation.

Let us ensure that libraries remain accessible, relevant, and resilient—so that no one is left behind, and every individual has the opportunity to learn, grow, and contribute.

By aligning our strategies with the Pact for the Future and the Sustainable Development Goals, we can unleash the full potential of libraries to transform lives, strengthen communities, and accelerate humanity's journey toward a more just, equitable, and sustainable world.

Thank you and I wish you all fruitful dialogues during the Congress!