**Opening Remarks**

delivered by

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At

**The International Summit of the Book**

Baku, Azerbaijan – 18 March 2018

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The "International Summit of the Book" was started in 2012 by an initiative of the Library of Congress and UNESCO to emphasize the key position of the Book, and the role of Libraries in preserving national cultural identities and human civilization. Since then, it was organized in Washington, Singapore, Paris, Alexandria in Egypt, Limerick in Ireland, and last year in Romania, in 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017 respectively.

This year, the Nizami Ganjavi International Center (NGIC) is organizing this important cultural event in Baku, Azerbaijan. We already have a very high level of acceptance and no less than ten current and former presidents of countries have confirmed that they will participate in the event.

The Nizami Ganjavi International Center (NGIC) bears the name of the famous Azerbaijani poet and philosopher, who promoted social reforms and values of dialogue, tolerance and peace nine centuries ago. Today we are proud to be a regional center for learning and scholarship, as well as an acknowledged leader for the promotion of international tolerance, understanding and shared societies.

Therefore, we are honored to host the 7th International Summit of the Book, under the theme “Books, Reading & Technology,” which will take place on 18-19 March 2018 in Baku, Azerbaijan.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Why the Book?

If language is the greatest invention of humanity, then the written language is the perfection of that great instrument. Not only did it now transcend the immediacy of speech, it also preserved the ideas born of a place and a moment and allowed them to travel through space and time.

More importantly, cogent and profound realities could be recorded for deeper study, greater appreciation and reflective understanding…. Scientists and artists could deliver their insights into nature and the universe as well as their innermost thoughts about the very nature of our being, and put these onto the written page for generations yet unborn as much as for their contemporaries.

The endless stream of writing that humanity produced has given us a legacy that has plumbed the psychological depths of the inner self, demarcated new boundaries of personal choice, redefined the social contract and laid down the foundations of an evolving moral and intellectual life. The fact that today these past and present words are more likely to be read from the light of the digital screen rather than in the reflected glow of the printed page does not change the miracle of reading that begets writing generation after generation…. That is what this event is celebrating…

In a beautiful image, Edward Mendelson captured that evanescent reality, freezing forever the core truth in the scene by the power of his words, saying:

Two centuries after Gutenberg, Rembrandt painted an old woman reading, her face illuminated by light shining from the Bible in her hands. Substitute a screen for the book, and that symbolic image is now literally accurate. But in the twenty-first century, as in Rembrandt’s seventeenth, the illumination we receive depends on the words we choose to read and the ways we choose to read them.

Quote from: Edward Mendelson, “In the Depths of the Digital Age” in NYRB June 23, 2016 Issue (http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2016/06/23/) Accessed 08 06 2016.

So it is this book, that is a collection of word and sentences, conventionally assumed to be on the order of about 40,000 words, that we celebrate today. Long enough to allow for thoughtful exposition, meaningful narrative and joyful engagement. Yes, it can be much shorter than that, and possible considerably longer as well, but we mean that it is the words and not the manner in which they are made available from scrolls, manuscript codices or printed book or electronic device, the book remains our inspiration and today we celebrate it.

Let us now proceed with our first session…

xxxx END xxxx