**President Michael D Higgins’ Speech**

**at Young Adult BookFest 2020**

“May I say how delighted I am to send my best wishes to all those participating in this year’s virtual Young Adult Book Festival.

As we as a nation work to meet the challenges presented to us by the Coronavirus pandemic, I am aware that these months since March have constituted a particularly difficult time for many of our young people. You have been called on to demonstrate much solidarity, patience and selflessness and I thank you for the generous way in which you have responded to that call. For many of our older citizens you have been their source of contact and hope.

During times of difficulty we have so often received a sense of renewal and inspiration from a sharing of our arts and culture. Today, coming as you have from all corners of the country, you are joining together in a mutual cultural space for a shared literary experience.

Such an experience is a wonderful statement of the enriching power of the arts and their capacity to unite people across boundaries and barriers, creating as they will durable connections and a profound sense of hope during testing times.

The artistic space is, and has always been, a fruitful space for the offering and sharing of ideas and new possibilities, through words. The arts make such a space, where such ideas can be nurtured that faith in the future can be restored as our minds are opened to a world yet unknown, a future waiting to be born.

As enthusiastic readers, you will all understand the power of good writing to move and navigate the reader through time and space, to bring us deeply into the lives and thoughts of others and into their often complex emotions. You will also have experienced how our great artists can so sensitively and insightfully capture the moods and concerns of their own eras and generation, and how those moments in time inform that which is yet to come.

This moment, too, will inform the future, a future that will be shaped and fashioned by you and your peers. It is my great hope that your visions for that future will be true to the inclusive, loving and best fulfilling versions that have been already anticipated and suggested by our artists.

The construction of a society that can better address our shared existence, our shared vulnerability and our interdependence is yours to sculpt and craft. That is a wonderful gift and a great light of hope as we navigate our way safely towards that better world.

I wish you a most enjoyable Young Adult Book Festival.

Bain taitneamh as an bhféile, agus beir beannacht.”