

To: Swedish Arts Council – Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award Jury

Re: Lubuto Library Project nomination

February 16, 2010

Dear 2010 ALMA Committee members:

It has come to my attention that the Lubuto Library Project in Zambia has been nominated for the prestigious Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award. I fully support this nomination and believe that they are a most deserving nominee.

Lubuto first came to my attention when I attended the congress of the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) in Cape Town, South Africa, in 2004. At that event, Jane Meyers was showing an architectural model of the proposed Lubuto Library for street children. The thoughtfulness of the project was evident even at this early stage; the design is a beautiful variation on a traditional Zambian homestead and provides a refuge for children who may have no home or private space of their own.

The first Lubuto Library was opened in 2007 in Lusaka, Zambia. Two additional libraries in Zambia are in the process of planning and construction, and it is hoped that a hundred Lubuto Libraries will be built across Africa over the next ten years. The prestige and financial benefit of ALMA would put the Lubuto Library Project on a sound financial footing to meet that goal and to continue expanding quality services to children.

The particular emphasis of the Lubuto Library Project is to serve children who would otherwise have no access to literacy opportunities, children who may be orphaned, homeless, or who are unable to attend a formal school. The comprehensive collections of materials that are used to start the libraries are created using a policy that ensures that the materials are relevant, timely, and of good quality. The libraries provide a space of refuge and learning - a place where a child can be exposed to and immersed in reading, the arts, and technology and can thereby gain the confidence and skills necessary to leading a productive life.

The Lubuto Library Project emphasizes community ownership and has carefully partnered with local organizations, drawing on the support of local professionals for leadership in each community and training librarians from within. In a quest to be a sustainable institution it epitomizes professionalism, innovation, accountability, and transparency in the organization. It was instrumental in founding the new Zambian Board on Books for Young People, a national section of IBBY, which will strengthen national support for bilingual and local language materials.

As a public librarian in the United States, I have been able to donate quality review books to the project and have encouraged teen volunteers in my library to support the Lubuto effort by raising funds in order to ship these materials. These American teens are thus exposed to the world outside their small rural community. Others around this country have engaged their communities in similar ways and find that the Lubuto guidelines for donations and ways to assist provide a valuable means of respecting the real needs of people. I have had the privilege to hear Jane Meyers, president, speak about the project several times and am impressed with both her personal dedication to excellence and with the broad foundation of support that has been built to ensure continued focus and quality as the project expands. Without a doubt, the Lubuto Library Project would be a most deserving recipient of the 2010 Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award.

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