

ORGANISERS



**Minister,  
Partners and supporters,  
Literature lovers,  
Friends,**

On behalf of the Nordic Council of Ministers' Office in Estonia it's my pleasure, for the second year running, to welcome you all to the Nordic-Baltic Literature Forum. This year the forum's focussing on children's literature. We're asking: who cares who reads?

Last year's theme – national literature – attracted a large audience. As the organisers we're very happy to see that the focus of this year's event has likewise piqued the interest of so many of you.

The forum's taking place at a time when we're hearing more and more often that children's interest in reading is on the wane; that their skills in reading and understanding text and expressing themselves are deteriorating.

Anne Cath Vestly, a well-known Norwegian author, once said: "I remember the day I learnt to read. I was sitting by the book shelf, on the floor, and suddenly I could read. Which meant I could now choose for myself."

And that's the nub of it. It's also why the Nordic Council of Ministers considered it so important to organise a literature forum on children's literature, particularly in light of recent events in Europe. We want children in the Nordic countries and Baltic States to be able to read, to be able to understand and thus to comprehend the concept of freedom and the value of being human. Which is to say the values on which our free society is based – today, tomorrow, always. It might seem like something we can take for granted, but again – given the tensions in Europe and around the world of late, we should realise that it's not.

The skill to be able to read also means the skill to be able to understand the world. It enriches your language, trains your mind, enhances your concentration, teaches you empathy and gives you the opportunity to open up a dialogue with yourself.

**How can we generate and maintain an interest in books and literature in young people?**

What kind of books do teenagers read these days? How are they different from the books that were being written 10 or 20 years ago? Just like last year, this year's guest speakers come from all of the Nordic countries, as well as Latvia and Lithuania.

At this year's forum it's our pleasure to introduce the team behind the award-winning novel *Karikko* ('Reef') and the first ever winners of the Nordic Council of Ministers children's literature award, author **Seita Vuorela** and illustrator **Jani Ikonen**, and last year's Icelandic nominee **Áslaug Jónsdóttir**, who is one of three authors who will be presenting their work at this year's Nordic Library Week in November, entitled 'Trolls in the North'.

Our forum today has been made possible thanks to close cooperation with the Estonian Children's Literature Centre. We value their partnership highly.

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We also place high value on the support we have received in organising the forum from our partners in the Nordic embassies here in Estonia.

We'd like to thank the Estonian Ministry of Culture and the Tallinn Book Fair for their support also, and our gratitude goes out to the Estonian National Library and the Estonian Librarians Association for their input and organisational help.

So, once again, welcome one and all! I'm sure the forum will provide you with some inspiring presentations, interest new angles and ideas on where to go from here.

And as always, try to network as much as you can – because it's only with strong partnerships that cross borders that we can establish and maintain ourselves as a single, unified region.

**Berth Sundström**

*Director of the Nordic Council of Ministers' Office in Estonia*

*Opening address at the Nordic-Baltic Literature Forum held as part of the Tallinn Book Fair at the Estonian National Library*

*3 April 2014*

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