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■■■ screenwriters

World Conference of Screenwriters
WARSAW 1-2 OCTOBER 2014 ■

Closing Remarks by Chris Keyser **President of the Writers Guild of America, West** **Chair of the Policy Review Group, International Affiliation of Writers Guilds**

Thank you, Sveinbjorn and Maciej – the FSE and the IAWG -- our hosts here in Warsaw -- and all of you who have gathered here for the past two days. In five minutes or so, when I conclude my remarks (in case anyone is counting down), we will all turn to each other and say goodbye and head home. Across town, or a continent or an ocean. We will go back to writing alone. That is how most of us work – in rooms, by ourselves.

But whenever I speak to members of my own Guild, I remind them that we write alone, together. Within our own countries or across cultures, we are engaged in an extended written conversation – an endless typewritten braid – that, taken together, is a record of what it means to be human and alive in the 21st century. We read, and now more frequently, we watch each other's work. We steal – in the best possible sense of the word – what we love – and our own writing is change by it.

And every once in a while, we get together in one room, to complain about how hard it is to do what we do – or to marvel at how much power we have to move the world.

The resolution proposed by this conference – and that we adopt today – is an acknowledgement of that power. That scripted television, as it has evolved in form and content -- and as it is now delivered on many platforms to virtually every inch of every corner of the world – is as excellent as it has ever been. It is as pervasive and influential as it has ever been.

Great television is the work of great writers. And great writer are at their best when they are unhindered, when their work is unfiltered and undiluted. Yes, television is a collaborative project – but no one who ever printed a book, or bound a book, or drove it by truck to market, could ever make that book worth reading or turn a good story great. Only we -- writers – can do that.

Here is the complicated truth though: television is an expensive proposition. And when you ask for enough paint to paint the Sistine Chapel, someone is going to give you a note. Probably the guy who paid for the paint or who owns the ceiling.

What we ask from those who fund our work is that they develop the wisdom to control their own fear and to acknowledge the power of the singular creative vision. In my own country, we know that no movie written by committee was ever nominated for an Academy Award and that now, in television, the meddling broadcast networks can no longer compete with more trusting and hands-off cable and online providers when it comes to the quality of content. What is good for writers is also good for those who pay for our work. We – and our singular vision – are the very best return on their investment.

When we are left to do our jobs, that thing we begin, alone in our rooms, ends up bringing more people together in shared experience and conversation – teaches us more about ourselves and about each other -- than any other creative product in history.

Alone. And then together. That is our theme.

Here, in Warsaw, together – we are the largest gathering of representatives of all the world's screen, television and digital media writers.

What we claim for ourselves and for those who are not here, but whom we represent, is free expression and fair compensation.

What we acknowledge by being here is that what is good for writers anywhere is good for writers everywhere. And though we often compete in the global marketplace, we have each other's backs.

We what know, is that though what we claim to do is entertain – and that matters – what we also do is hold ourselves, our governments, and each other, accountable for our behavior on this planet that we share. And that matters even more.

If you will permit me a personal note: it is so moving to me that we should do this here, in Warsaw, in Poland. This is my first visit. But a branch of my family left here for America well over a century ago. And a branch of my wife's died here during the war. Being in this place gives me a very intense feeling of connectedness. I can feel the struggle. Against so many different kinds of evil. And the perseverance. And the triumph. And the powerful works of art – of film and fiction and poetry – written as a response, and as source of hope and as a hedge against mortality.

I am encouraged by the commitment, skill, honesty and strength in this room. Together – within each of our countries and together throughout the world, we can preserve both the creative and economic vitality of our work.

I – and I know all of us from the Writers Guilds of America, West and East – will return home with a renewed commitment to our own fights, knowing that, at the same time, you are fighting yours -- and that, when we can, whenever we can, we will help each other.

In the end, of course, there will be silence, but in the beginning there is only the word.

I ask you to return home, yourselves, empowered by your own possibilities.

And in that vein, I leave you with these few lines from *The Joy of Writing*, by Wislawa Szymborska, a national treasure here, but one that belongs to all of us:

“The twinkling of an eye will take as long as I say,
and will, if I wish, divide into tiny eternities,
full of bullets stopped in mid-flight.
Not a thing will ever happen unless I say so.
Without my blessing, not a leaf will fall,
not a blade of grass will bend beneath that little hoof's full stop.
Is there then a world where I rule absolutely on fate?
A time I bind with chains of signs?
An existence become endless at my bidding?
The joy of writing.
The power of preserving.
Revenge of a mortal hand.

Thank you all, and good afternoon.