

Draft Minutes of the online 40th AITA/IATA asbl General Assembly, 15 June 2024

1. Official opening at 13:05 and welcome to online 40th AITA/IATA General Assembly -

2. Introduction and welcome from the President of AITA/IATA, Aled Rhys-Jones – President Aled Rhys-Jones welcomed delegates and observers to the third AITA/IATA online General Assembly (GA) and was pleased to offer a particular welcome to former AITA/IATA Presidents Rob Van Genechten and Béatrice Cellario and former Treasurer Villy Dall. He noted it was a full agenda to get through and asked the AITA/IATA Council to briefly introduced themselves to delegates. He recorded apologies received from Councillor Kelli McCloud-Schingen and Honorary President Jacques Lemaire.

3. Appointment of the Presiding Chair of the 40th General Assembly – The President briefly outlined the experienced background of Dirk De Corte, Flanders (SGT) and, on behalf of Council, proposed him as the Presiding Chair of the GA.

By a show of hands, the GA unanimously agreed the appointment of Dirk De Corte as Presiding Chair.

4. Roll call of Members represented – the Presiding Chair asked all those present online to confirm their presence. Delegates from the following **17** Members (National Centres), which included Iceland who had asked Finland to carry their proxy, had registered to vote and the following responded to the roll call:

Catalonia – 6 votes; Faroes (SGT) – 6 votes; Finland – 6 votes (carrying the proxy of Iceland – 6 votes;); Flanders (SGT) – 6 votes; France – 6 votes; Germany (BAG & BDAT) – 6 votes; Great Britain (SGT) – 6 votes; Hungary – 6 votes; Israel – 6 votes; Japan – 6 votes; Latvia – 6 votes; Lithuania – 6 votes; Monaco – 6 votes; Spain – 6 votes; Sud-Tyrol – 6 votes; Sweden (ATR) – 6 votes.

a. The Presiding Chair then invited the Associate Members who were present online to confirm their presence. Delegates from **13** Associate Members had registered to vote but not all were present at the start of the GA. The following **11** Associate Members responded to the roll call:

Kingdom Theatre (Canada) - 1 vote; Villy Dall (Denmark) – 1 vote; Rob Van Genechten, (Flanders) – 1 vote; De WAANzin (Flanders) – 1 vote; Théâtre de la Roëlle (France) – 1 vote; The Questors Theatre (Great Britain) – 1 vote; Mary Pears (Ireland) – 1 vote; Theatre New Zealand (New Zealand) – 1 vote; Teatro de Balugas (Portugal) – 1 vote; Federació de Teatre Amateur de la Comunitat Valenciana (Spain) – 1 vote; Theaterpädagogisches Zentrum Brixen (Sud-Tyrol) – 1 vote.

5. Agree the agenda of the General Assembly

The Agenda of the GA was agreed by a show of hands.

6. Acceptance of new Members (National Centre and Associate) The Presiding Chair explained that two new National Centres and seven new Associate Members would be voted on. The two National Centres did not appear in the Forum Book because they had paid the fee after its publication and they were Slovakia and the Netherlands. Matej Moško from Národné osvetové centrum, Slovakia briefly outlined his organisation. He noted the longstanding close links between Slovakia and AITA/IATA and that changes within Slovakia meant they would now take on the National Centre role. Leanne Heuwerkemeijer from the Netherlands also referred to the longstanding relationship with AITA/IATA and noted that budget cuts within the Netherlands had resulted in the former National Centre closing. The lack of theatre activities during COVID and the recognition of the importance of amateur theatre had resulted in a reallocation of funds and a new organisation was in the process of being set up. The Presiding Chair outlined the voting procedures and asked for the patience of all delegates as the process would take time. The outcome was as follows:

a. To accept Stichting Visie AmateurTheater, Netherlands as a National Centre Member of AITA/IATA asbl

Using the online poll, Stichting Visie AmateurTheater, Netherlands, was approved unanimously as a National Centre Member

b. To accept Národné osvetové centrum, Slovakia as a National Centre Member of AITA/IATA asbl

Using the online poll, Národné osvetové centrum, Slovakia, was approved unanimously as a National Centre Member

c. Following their approval as National Centres by the GA, these two new National Centres, each with 6 votes, were entitled to vote giving a total of **19** National Centre Members represented and entitled to vote.

d. To accept Blackflame Theatre, Bangladesh as an Associate Member of AITA/IATA asbl

Using the online poll, Blackflame Theatre, Bangladesh, was approved unanimously as an Associate Member

e. To accept Theater am Olgaeck e.V, Germany as an Associate Member of AITA/IATA asbl

Using the online poll, Theater am Olgaeck e.V, Germany, was approved unanimously as an Associate Member

f. To accept Theater School-Studio „Berikebi“, Georgia as an Associate Member of AITA/IATA asbl

Using the online poll, Theater School-Studio „Berikebi“, Georgia, was approved unanimously as an Associate Member

g. To accept Chow Drama Theatre, Malaysia as an Associate Member of AITA/IATA asbl

Using the online poll, Chow Drama Theatre, Malaysia, was approved unanimously as an Associate Member

h. To accept Monterrey Performing Arts Academy, Mexico as an Associate Member of AITA/IATA asbl

Using the online poll, Monterrey Performing Arts Academy, Mexico, was approved unanimously as an Associate Member

i. To accept Melike Ersoy, Turkey as an Associate Member of AITA/IATA asbl

Using the online poll, Melike Ersoy, Turkey, was approved unanimously as an Associate Member

j. To accept Georgian Youth Theatre, USA as an Associate Member of AITA/IATA asbl

Using the online poll, Georgian Youth Theatre, USA, was approved unanimously as an Associate Member

k. Following their approval as Associates by the GA, the three new Associates present at the online General Assembly were entitled to vote giving a total of **16** Associate Members represented and entitled to vote. They were Melike Ersoy (Turkey) – 1 vote; Blackflame Theatre (Bangladesh) – 1 vote; Chow Drama Theatre (Malaysia) – 1 vote.

7. Approval of the Minutes of the 39th General Assembly, Debrecen

The Presiding Chair noted that the minutes of the 39th GA were in the Forum Book on pages 8 – 20. Delegates were asked to approve the minutes by a show of hands.

The minutes of the 39th AITA/IATA General Assembly were agreed by a show of hands.

8. AITA/IATA asbl Reviews 2023 – 2024

a. *Council's Review by the President Aled Rhys-Jones* – President Aled Rhys Jones welcomed the new Members and in particular the National Centres of Netherlands and Slovakia. He noted that the Netherlands had once hosted the AITA/IATA Secretariat and that Slovakia hosts Europe's oldest National Theatre Festival (Scenic Harvest Festival) which he had visited in 2002 for its 100th edition. He turned to the comprehensive Council Report in the Forum Book and proposed to review the highlights in more depth and to look to the future.

b. When he took over the Presidency from Béatrice Cellario, she had warned him that it was a busy job and indeed he had found it so. There had been difficulties with the Belfius Bank Account but the recent meeting in their Antwerp office had been very productive and the difficult and outstanding issues had mostly been resolved.

c. All Council members took responsibility for different areas of work, which were itemised in the report. Council is now working on arrangements for four festivals: the AITA/IATA World Festival of Children's Theatre Lingen, Germany, June – July 2025; the

Mondial du Théâtre, Monaco, August 2025; the proposed AITA/IATA World Festival of Children's and Youth Theatre in 2026 organised by Opendoek in cooperation with the City of Antwerp; and the proposed AITA/IATA International Amateur Theatre Festival in the early Spring of 2027 organised by Theatre New Zealand.

d. AITA/IATA had started a series of Masterclasses; the first had been an excellent English Language event on Intimacy in Theatre with Elodie Foray: a topic that was becoming ever more important in amateur theatre. The workshop had been so good it was hoped to repeat it and, because Elodie is fluent in French, offer it in that language. Masterclasses in French and Spanish will be held later in the year.

e. The President noted that, thanks to the Secretariat Anne Gilmour, AITA/IATA had been able to share an excellent message from the world-renowned actor Sir Ian McKellen on World Theatre Day, 27 March. His message had been very personal and directed to the amateur theatre world and to AITA/IATA. He hoped that other theatre luminaries might be willing to do the same for future World Theatre Days.

f. It had been agreed in Debrecen to offer two bursaries to attend the Drama in Education Congress (DIE) in Austria in March 2024. Eleven applications had been received which had been narrowed down to two: one was a new person from Uganda and the second was a member of the Sri Lankan theatre company which had taken part in the Debrecen festival in 2023. Sadly, the Ugandan applicant could not get a visa to enter Austria. The denial of visas remains an issue for AITA/IATA and for other cultural organisations and Councillor Kelli McCloud-Schingen is gathering information on this aspect.

g. The President noted the success of the DIE Congress and that the recipient of the bursary reported having a fantastic time. He has already run a forum back in his home university in Jaffna, Sri Lanka and AITA/IATA hopes to run an online session with him in the autumn. He handed over to Vice President Sofia Wegelius to talk about Digital matters and Children and Youth projects.

h. Sofia Wegelius noted that the next two Masterclasses would be in French & Spanish respectively and asked delegates to suggest topics that they would find helpful or, if they had a contact with noted individuals with exceptional theatre related expertise in an area who would be willing to lead a Masterclass to let her know. It was important to highlight to Members the benefits of being part of AITA/IATA.

i. She also wanted to highlight a second conference in the *Curtain Up!* series to be held on 26 October 2024. Over one day, four or five workshops would be offered on related topics and AITA/IATA was in the process of finding partners. The event will consider the benefits of amateur theatre both to those who participate in amateur theatre and the benefits and achievements for the wider community. Simultaneous translation will be offered. One aim is to provide members with the arguments to make when they apply for funding for their own activities.

j. The Vice President noted that AITA/IATA continues to develop a new approach to digital matters. The front page of the AITA/IATA website now hosts a map where any amateur theatre can pin their theatre to show the global spread of amateur theatres around the world. AITA/IATA also has an Instagram account [weareamateurthertheatre](https://www.instagram.com/weareamateurthertheatre), on the website front page, which members can take over for a week to share information about one of their theatre events. AITA/IATA will also send occasional Newsletters to non-members who have agreed to receive it, about AITA/IATA events.

k. AITA/IATA has also started a Youth Think Tank to enable Council to hear the views of young people from around the world. For the first 'pilot' event the young people were hand-picked and AITA/IATA had a most interesting dialogue with them. It is planned to expand this network and Sofia asked if any AITA/IATA Members had interested young people to let her know for future online events. The aim is to help develop a new strategy for the Children and Youth (C&Y) committee. The key message from this first event was that young people wanted live events where people come together, not digital events.

l. The President thanked Vice President Sofia Wegelius for her work. He had been heartened by the engagement and views of the young people taking part in the Think Tank. They had understood the benefits of online events but sought and recognised the importance of interaction. He was clear, world events will not change if we stay within our own borders and look inward, we must look outward.

m. The President noted the 2025 GA in Monaco would include elections: for a new President and four Councillors. Also, that the AITA/IATA Secretariat was looking to retire and there was a need to consider succession planning during the coming year.

n. One joy of his role was to be able to talk to people when visiting festivals. He had recently visited the Lingua Festival in Barcelos, Portugal for the second time and had been encouraged by how the festival had developed and found new life and become quite special. While at the festival he and the new President of ESCENAMATEUR Alejandro Cavadas, held especially useful discussions which resulted in an invitation for him to attend a meeting in November in Spain which will explore new ways to work with amateur theatre in Latin America. AITA/IATA's contact with former Latin American Associate CLT - Corridor Latinoamericano - had ended since the main contacts had moved on and he hoped that the November meeting would enable AITA/IATA and ESCENAMATEUR to find ways to work with organisations in Latin America and build new links.

o. The President moved on to the issue of Membership Fees and their potential increase which was always a difficult issue. The fees were reduced quite considerably in 2017 and raised in 2019 but had not increased since. Because of COVID's impact on Members no fee increase had been sought because it was clear that members were struggling. But AITA/IATA was now running at an operational loss and the fee level had to be addressed. Any increase agreed at this GA would not be implemented until 2025 and in that time AITA/IATA had, in effect, lost ground by approximately 29%. Council had held long

discussions on the subject and, as Members were aware, AITA/IATA fees link to the UN HDI Index where those in poorer countries pay less.

p. If an increase were agreed and implemented in 2025 – 2026, this change would not impact on the 2024 – 2025 budget in the Forum Book. The President wanted to give Members a picture of AITA/IATA's current position and a fuller discussion would take place during the financial report.

q. The President concluded by noting how busy AITA/IATA was and that it was a different organisation to the one he had joined in 1999: the world was different and the pace of life was so different. He noted that the next President would need to take these changes into consideration as they looked to the future. AITA/IATA was now a more flexible organisation and he thanked Rob Van Genechten for his work to restructure the organisation. His general message was positive and he was happy to report that Council was engaged and was working hard to move forward.

Council's review was agreed by a show of hands.

9. Financial Review by the Treasurer Patrick Schoenstein

a. *Review of finance and approval of the Financial Report 2023 – 2024* – The Presiding Chair Dirk De Corte referred delegates to pages 29 and 30 of the Forum Book. He noted that Treasurer Patrick Schoenstein would speak first in French and his colleague would then speak in English.

b. Patrick noted that the operating costs of the Association amounted to € 25,493.33 and the operating revenues to € 19,768.41 giving an operational deficit of € 5,724.92 Euros. The deficit was due to lower revenues from membership and an increase in operational expenses, including the agreed increase in the fee to the Secretariat and the employment expenses of a new bookkeeper. As of 31 March 2024, the Current bank account totalled € 14,167,90 and the Savings account: € 65,759.81. He noted the statutory auditors' report on page 31 of the Forum Book.

c. There were no questions and Dirk began the voting process.

Using the online poll, the Finance Report was unanimously accepted.

d. President Aled Rhys-Jones turned to Council's proposal to increase Membership Fees. He noted this had not been a popular move five years ago when the GA had asked Council to be more prudent in its expenditure. Although savings had been made during COVID, since then AITA/IATA had taken on new expenses such as the Zoom package, an accounting package, and a bookkeeper. He was confident that these expenses were entirely justified but AITA/IATA was running at a deficit and there was a gap between income and expenditure. In the financial year 2022 -2023 funding had been found from the Goethe Institute, Germany for the *Curtain Up!* event which had almost covered its running expenses. AITA/IATA had also received a facilitation fee from the online festival

held by Associate Member Saint John Theatre Company for the assistance given by AITA/IATA. But in the Financial Year just ended it had not proved possible to find funding and AITA/IATA had operated at a loss. The proposed increase on page 32 of the Forum Book showed that the UN HDI Category 1 increase has been kept below € 600 with a proposed rate of €595, which remained lower than in the past. No questions were raised and the Presiding Chair began the poll.

Using the online poll, the proposal to increase the Membership Fees was voted upon: Yes 102 (94%), No 7 (6%). The proposal was agreed.

10. Discharge to Councillors – The Presiding Chair explained to delegates that this was a legal requirement. Discharge relates to contractual liability and responsibility of Councillors. As a member of an association, you have elected Councillors to carry responsibility of the association's operations. Logically, you may expect the Councillors to behave with due diligence. In other words, that they do not perform actions that a normal, right-thinking person would not perform. If this does happen, the association can address the Councillors about this. Since it is the association that must address the directors, the initiative for this lies with the highest legal body of the association, the General Assembly.

a. Granting discharge means that the Councillors can no longer be held liable for malpractices during the period for which they are granted discharge. The period under discussion was from 1 April 23 – 31 March 2024 for all Councillors apart from Anna-Karin Waldemarson who resigned on 13 June 2023. The current Councillors asked for discharge with the exception of Anna-Karin Waldemarson.

Using the online poll, the discharge to Councillors, with the exception of Anna-Karin Waldemarson, was unanimously accepted.

11. Budget for 2024 – 2025 – Treasurer Patrick Schoenstein spoke in French and then in English and referred delegates to the final page 33 of the Forum Book which detailed the one-year budget which was based on the expenditure patterns of the last two years. Income was anticipated at € 25,000 and expenditure at € 28,905 giving a deficit of € 3,905 which could be controlled if the number of members increased.

a. Leanne Heuwerkemeijer, Netherland National Centre, asked about the modest income and what strategy there would be to improve this. Patrick noted that the membership increase would come into effect in the next Financial Year. The new members, accepted into AITA/IATA were not reflected in the budget so there would be an increase in income. The President noted that until 2021, AITA/IATA income relied entirely on Membership Fees but since then Council had sought to find new ways to generate income and find new funds and it was a new and developing area. Councillor Stephen Tobias will lead a sub-group to develop a fund-raising strategy. The President noted it was not easy for a global organisation to attract funding. He also noted that AITA/IATA had charged attendees to take part in the online Workshops and Masterclass with AITA/IATA Members receiving a discount.

Former Treasurer Villy Dall noted that the accounts showed funds in the Bank although the Membership fee was not being raised to previous high levels when AITA/IATA had reserves of €130,000 in the bank: there was now only half that amount. He noted it had always been difficult to get sponsorship.

Using the online poll, the Budget for 2024 – 2025 was unanimously accepted.

12. Other proposals submitted for consideration by the General Assembly – none were submitted.

13. Announcement of host venue for 41st GA in 2025 in Monaco - Béatrice Cellario noted the dates of the 2025 GA and Mondial du Théâtre had been announced in Debrecen: the Festival was 20 – 27 August 2025 and the GA would be on Saturday 23 August and if necessary also on 24 August. Regional Committees could hold their meetings on 22 August. She reminded Members that 10 Oct 2024 was the final date for groups to submit their applications to perform in Monaco.

14. Antwerp, Belgium World Festival of Children's Theatre 2026 - This project is being led by Opendoek Director Joke Quaghebeur who had had to leave the meeting, but Opendoek President Reginald Wietendaele noted that they were preparing for the event and no doubt delegates would hear more in Monaco. The President noted that procedurally AITA/IATA needed to approve this event and would do so in Monaco.

15. Written questions from Members – none had been received by the deadline of 18:00 UK time on 10 June 2024.

16. Closing of the 40th General Assembly of AITA/IATA asbl - the formal meeting ended at 12:23 and the Presiding Chair Dirk de Corte thanked everyone for their attention. He handed over to President Aled Rhys-Jones who asked Paul Percy, President of New Zealand Associate, Theatre New Zealand to speak about the possibility of holding the AITA/IATA International Festival in the early Spring of 2027.

17. New Zealand 2027 - Paul Percy confirmed they were looking forward to the opportunity to host the event in Wellington in February / March during their summer. President Aled Rhys-Jones noted this would be the first time AITA/IATA had held an event in the Southern Hemisphere and while there were some matters that required further discussion, Council had agreed unanimously to accept this outline proposal. The timing meant it would not be possible to hold an AITA/IATA GA at the festival because the financial year would not have ended. While New Zealand was a long way from Europe, the event would attract groups not usually seen at an AITA/IATA Festival and the President thought it a great opportunity to meet new people and make new contacts. Paul Percy hoped to be in Monaco in 2025 where he would put forward a fully-fledged proposal.

18. In closing, the President noted that AITA/IATA was looking for international host venues after 2028 and stressed the festival could be of any type. He thanked Dirk de Corte for his hard work and thanked delegates for their confidence in the direction that Council

was taking. He thanked for all their hard work: Council Members; Secretariat Anne Gilmour; Sue Pound the new bookkeeper; and he looked forward to seeing everyone in Lingen and Monaco in 2025.

DRAFT