

Your Royal Highness, Mayor, distinguished guests - archivists from around the world: Welcome to Norway, to Oslo and to the international CITRA conference.

The role of archives in society is not always apparent. And it is probably one of the areas of cultural heritage which gets the least attention from the media. Despite this, we can even see traces of the importance of archives reflected in great literature. In Ibsen's play Brand, in the fifth act, when a fire breaks out and his wife fears for his life, the Mayor cries: "My soul, O, that can go to hell, - just help me get these archives clear!"

A historian myself, I understand the role of archives as preservers of our society's history. As minister of culture, I am therefore pleased that archives are defined as "my" area.

I have spent far more time in archives in Norway, Denmark, Italy and Britain, than I have in any other cultural institution. I know that without archives it is difficult to learn or write about our history. We cannot understand our own time without understanding the past. We cannot see today what will be of importance in the future. It is therefore important to preserve archives so that they last for centuries.

As archivists you do not get near as much positive attention as you deserve. I wish to thank you, for filling an incredibly important task in society. Your role is extremely valuable. My personal experience has also taught me that you are a lot more fun than commonly believed!

A few weeks ago I visited the royal castle and the royal collections. The Crown Prince is here today, and his great grandfather, King Haakon, was our first king after we gained independence in 1905. The king was also an incredible collector and archivist himself. Shelf upon shelf of newspaper clippings has been preserved.

These clippings document world events the king saw as important, in a time of enormous importance to our country. Your great grandfather wanted to ensure that this information would be preserved for the future, so he could use it. I am certain, dear Crown Prince, that your great grandfather would be deeply fascinated by the digitization happening in our archives today.

The theme for this year's conference is "Digital Archives". This is one of our main priorities over the last years, both with regards to our National Archive and our National Library. We want to ensure the preservation and availability of paper-based archives. Our archives must be made available to future generations.

There are many advantages to the digitization of archives. Access to archival material is simplified. It makes it easier to locate interesting material and to identify relevant pieces.

The program for this conference is exciting. It clearly reflects the challenges the archive sector is facing in the years to come. I wish you good luck with the conference and hope it leads to valuable results. These will be of great importance to the development of archival policies all over the world over the next decades.