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For Immediate Release

‘We Need New Stories’ Resonates with Audiences At The Edinburgh International Book Festival

With a debut Palestinian author topping the best-selling books list, and with eight of the top ten best-selling books having been written by women, the Edinburgh International Book Festival’s most diverse public programme comes to a close today after 17 days of extraordinary debate, discussion and public engagement with authors and audiences from around the world and across the political and cultural spectrum. Writers including Arundhati Roy, Elif Shafak, Malorie Blackman, Poet Laureate Simon Armitage, Children’s Laureate Cressida Cowell, Black Lives Matter activist DeRay Mckesson, Australian authors Tim Winton and Thomas Keneally and former Irish President Mary Robinson joined others from 65 countries to address the overarching theme of We Need New Stories in events for adults and children with discussions ranging from climate change, the fashion industry, racism, homelessness and Brexit to classical music, indigenous languages and food. *The Sea Cloak*, the debut short story collection from Palestinian writer, Nayrouz Qarmout, who returned to Edinburgh this year for her second ever trip out of Gaza, was the bestselling book.

Nick Barley, Director of the Edinburgh International Book Festival, said “Numbers simply don’t do justice to the overwhelmingly positive feedback we’re getting from audiences this year. The theme, We Need New Stories, struck a resonant chord: our theatres and our cafes and bookshop have been alive with discussion about climate crisis, populist politics and the demise of the American Dream. At the same time we’ve enjoyed music, performance and laughter as well as impassioned conversations. What’s clear is that people are thirsty for public, face-to-face encounters with experts and visionaries - new voices, with new stories, from new places. The Book Festival is unquestionably answering a deep public need for grassroots democratic discussion.”

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The Edinburgh International Book Festival Ltd is a Scottish charity (SC010120) and a limited company (registered in Scotland no 79939) and has its registered office at 5A Charlotte Square, Edinburgh, EH2 4DR.

Nine authors long-listed for the 2019 Booker Prize enthralled audiences at the Festival, as did Jokha Alharti - the winner of the 2019 Man Booker International Prize. The winners of the University of Edinburgh's James Tait Black prizes were announced in Charlotte Square Gardens. Salman Rushdie, Lemn Sissay, Ann Cleeves and comedian James Acaster all launched brand new books. Scotland International rugby player Doddie Weir discussed his career and MND in an emotional event ending with a standing ovation. Ruth Davidson shared her story with Olympian Katherine Grainger, activist Gina Martin and former BBC China Editor Carrie Gracie talked about their campaigns for equality and Sofie Hagen spoke out against Fat Shaming.

Families and children have enjoyed over 200 events across the Baillie Gifford Children's programme including exuberant appearances from Francesca Simon, Horrible Histories illustrator Martin Brown, Harry Hill, Patrice Lawrence and Laura Bates. The new Baillie Gifford children's area was a huge success and also enjoyed visits from the Gruffalo, the Very Hungry Caterpillar and Elmer the Patchwork Elephant. The Baillie Gifford Schools programme has welcomed 11,742 pupils and teachers from across Scotland and closes tomorrow with over 2,800 primary school pupils enjoying a special Space themed Schools Gala Day.

Festival Organisers said that changes this year, which included an expanded bookshop in Charlotte Square Gardens and improvements to the inclusivity and accessibility of the site, had been well received. The Festival offered more BSL interpreted and screen captioned events than ever before and dedicated staff to assist visitors with access needs. A number of events were designated Pay What You Can. Funded with the support of players of People's Postcode Lottery and House of Hearing these changes resulted in the Book Festival being awarded the Euan's Guide Award for Most Accessible Pop-up Venue for the fourth consecutive year.

The Book Festival enjoyed a footfall in Charlotte Square Gardens of around 265,000 and the two expanded Festival bookshops on George Street and in Charlotte Square Gardens have contributed to an

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overall increase in booksales of around 5% with two days to go. Overall ticket sales have increased by 3%.

The winner of the Festival's First Book Award, which is voted for by audiences and readers, will be announced in October. The Book Festival's Citizen programme will continue over the winter months in collaboration with North Edinburgh Arts and Brunton Theatre in Musselburgh with events being announced later in the autumn. The Edinburgh International Book Festival will return from Saturday 15 to Monday 31 August 2020 and the programme will be announced in June.

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