



## **Ross Shimmon**

### **Selected Writings 1999-2004**



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## **Preface**

During his five years as IFLA's Secretary General, Ross Shimmon has written a lot: letters, notes, minutes, reports and - not to forget - emails, emails, emails !

With all due respect, not all these writings deserve eternal preservation. Many are ephemeral; some were draft versions; some will be archived and retrieved for future reference. And a selection of these writings will live on as they stand.

This booklet contains ten selected papers Ross composed during his years at IFLA (1999 - 2004). They cover a broad variety of subjects, giving a special insight into the issues that inspired him during his tenure of this IFLA office.

The writings brought together here also provide a nice overview of the subjects that were close to his heart during his period of leadership.

IFLA/HQ Staff, The Hague, March 2004

## **Public Libraries: their role in terms of social inclusion, lifelong learning, cultural policy and economic growth.**

### **Address to the PubliCa Conference, Copenhagen 14/15 October 1999.**

I want to begin with a quotation:

*My life had begun on Park Avenue, uptown Park Avenue where the railroad tracks are. It had begun in the invincible and indescribable squalor of Harlem. Here in this ghetto I was born . And here it was intended by my countrymen that I should live and perish.*

*And in that ghetto I was tormented. I felt caged like an animal. I wanted to escape. I felt if I did not get out I would slowly strangle.*

*I wanted school to save me from Harlem... I knew I was black, of course, but I also knew I was smart. I didn 't know how I would use my mind or even if I could . But that was the only thing I had to use. And I was going to get whatever I wanted that way and I was going to get my revenge that way. So I watched the school the way I watched the streets, because part of the answer was there.*

*Part of the answer was in Dickens and Dostoyevsky, too. I went to the 135th Street library at least three or four times a week, and I read everything there. I read every single book in that library. I read books like they were some weird kind of food. I was looking in books for a bigger world than the world in which I lived.. In some blind and instinctive way I knew what was happening in those books was also happening all around me. And I was trying to make a connection between the books and the life I saw and the life I lived.*

*You think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read. It was books that taught me that the things that tormented me the most were the very things that connected me with all the people who were ever alive, or who had ever been alive.” (1)*

That was James Baldwin speaking in a TV Programme in 1981.

That author and that library encapsulate for me, and I hope for you, the subject I have been given to explore today. To quote the American Library Association slogan of a few years ago: “Libraries change lives”. Baldwin was socially excluded from the mainstream. But the Public Library included him. He was clearly motivated to learn and the public library facilitated him to do so on a life-long basis. He became a world-class author - accessible to millions of other people in libraries around the world. Isn't that what cultural policies drive towards? The public library enabled his own personal economic growth. They do that for whole communities as well as for individuals.

Baldwin's perception of the public library is one that I can relate to strongly. One or two of you know that, although I was born in England, my family roots are in Ireland from each of the two main traditions in that Island. I was brought up mainly in one of those traditions. It was only as I gained access to books through libraries, and through reading newspapers other than those read by my family, that I came to realise that there was quite another interpretation of not only history, but also current reality.

Now that I live in The Hague, I don't read British newspapers as much as I used to. I now realise the truth in the allegation that the contents of a typical TV News broadcast can easily be contained on one sheet of a broadsheet newspaper. This becomes more frightening when you read surveys that suggest that many people now rely on television for their main source of news. Even more so when you realise that many channels these days do not have news bulletins at all! Do you find that your eye, with better than cruise missile accuracy holds in on the whole "Library" on the page in a newspapers or magazine? It happened to me the other day. There was an article on a public library being transferred to a "pub" - yes, the traditional English public house, somewhere in the south of England. Not far from here I started my career in a public library nearly 40 years ago. Apparently - if the story is accurate (note the slight tone of scepticism) - a small branch library was to be closed by the local council. They had decided that they could not afford the money for repairs to the roof. It was not heavily used. Other libraries were nearby. You know the story. You've seen it all before - some of you will have experienced it yourselves. Some of the readers (bear with me, I am an unreconstructed librarian - I still cannot use the term "customer" when it comes to libraries) thought it would be a good idea if the local pub took over the lending of books to the local community. The local council agreed. Some money "saved" by closing the library was made available to buy some new books. Council workers put in the shelves and transferred the books. It is to run on a system of trust with borrowers signing their names in a ledger. No overdue charges will be made. "Brilliant" said one pub customer. "Now I can borrow a book when I come in for my pint of beer".

I think that this story, whether it fairly represents the truth or not, summarises rather neatly the public library paradox.

On the one hand the perceived value of the local library to its community is clearly demonstrated. No community will allow "their" library to be closed without a fight. Elsewhere there have been many such examples. All nights sit-ins, occupations, petitions, court cases, plans for voluntary staffing and fund-raising have all have been employed to keep libraries open. Not only existing libraries threatened with closure but for new libraries too. Colleagues in IFLA's office, Freedom of Access to information and Freedom of Expression her in Copenhagen were telling me of embryonic libraries starting in Cambodia. Voluntary libraries are also springing up in Cuba, despite official intimidation and harassment. I have witnessed similar developments when I worked in Papua New Guinea. Such is the demand for access to information, ideas and works of imagination. And such is the strength of the concept of the public library.

On the other hand, that same library-in-a-pub story demonstrates the extreme poverty of perception of what a high quality modern library is or can be. The article does not reveal (among many other things):

- What happens to the children who presumably used the old library?
- What about people who don't frequent pubs (yes, there are some)?
- What about a reader who wants a book not on the shelf?
- Who arranges the books — in what order?
- What about access to information not in books?
- A quiet read is presumably also a thing of the past?

There was a throwaway line about plans to place the computer catalogue of the stock of the public library system in the local branch of a bank.

In the business pages of the same newspaper there was a story about a hostile take over by

that same national bank by another bank. The journalist was speculating that the bidder would reduce costs by a series of branch closures. So how long will that plan last? This story also serves to illustrate how difficult it is in a democracy to achieve coherence between national policies and local decision making. At the same time as this is going on the culture minister is talking about the vital role of public libraries as street corner universities.

The imperfect perception of public libraries is encountered frequently. Quite often by people who are our friends and supporters. Celebrities who join in our campaigns often have a sepia-tinted view of what an ideal public library might have been like in 1953. Formed to defend a library against closure, friends of library groups often have a similarly limited view.

We can do much more. Surely our vision of an all-singing, all-dancing public library to our natural supporters can be conveyed to a wider audience. After all, there are many good examples in existence - represented by any of you here today.

A few years ago a research consultancy in the UK carried out a study of a number of town centres, because concern was being expressed that, after 5 or 6 o'clock in the evening, there was a decreasing range of facilities available, making them unattractive places in the evenings. That served to encourage crime, vandalism and violence. To their surprise, they found that in each town the one institution which was usually open "after hours" and which people frequented regardless of age, gender, ethnic origin, employment status and wealth, was the public library.

Other places which were open had largely been "colonised" by specific groups. These included, bars and pubs, café's, take aways, leisure centres, churches and community centres. Yet in the public library a reasonable cross-section of the community was present, at ease with each other, making use of the variety of facilities and services available; not only, of course, borrowing books.

The public library is socially inclusive by its very nature. However, in order to remain so, it needs to be (even in the electronic era) physically present in local communities, open long hours and to provide stocks and services relevant to everyone in its community.

These conditions are, of course, not easy to meet. Let's take opening hours. A few years ago, I was invited to give a talk to some librarians at a meeting held in a new central library in a sizeable town in the west of England. Later that month, there was a national public holiday. (They are usually on Mondays in the UK). Walking into the library I saw a big notice: "This library will be closed on Saturday, Monday and Tuesday! No mention of Sunday. Presumably it was always closed on Sundays. The library was located in a very prominent position in a shopping centre right next door to a well-known supermarket, which would be open all day and late into the evening on that Saturday, Monday and Tuesday and much of Sunday too - while the library was dark. Since then a significant number of public libraries have started to open on Sunday. In some cases it rapidly became one of the busiest days of the week. Meanwhile, many shops and supermarkets have started opening for 24 hours a day. In the town in which I live in England the branch library has very complicated opening hours which I can never remember. It is very frustrating to have six books to exchange, only to find the place shut! The two supermarkets are open seven days a week for long hours. I don't need to remember when they are open.

By an interesting contrast, in The Hague where I now live, the Central Library has started

opening on Sundays - however the shops open on Sunday only once a month - you need to calculate which Sunday it is. The Library is a blaze of light (an enlightenment) when the shops are dark!

Then there's the question of physical presence. There is a move in some countries towards a consolidation of public libraries to achieve a smaller number of "centres of excellence". The argument goes that it is more efficient and effective to provide a full range of stock and services in a small number of larger facilities. People are, in general, more mobile and they are demanding greater ranges of stock and services and longer hours. We can see the same trend in the retail sector (bookshops are an example). The problem is that the people who suffer in such a set up are those who are unable to travel far - young children, the elderly and infirm, the poor and, to some extent, ethnic minorities. In short, such a policy tends to be socially exclusive.

In some ways the physical presence of a public library is more important than ever, despite increased mobility and despite the arrival of information and communications technology - partly because it helps to define a community. So many facilities are disappearing from the village centre or the high street. Local schools, post offices, banks, council offices are all being consolidated in many countries. Many of them have moved to out-of-town shopping centres. The presence of a functioning public library is rapidly being recognised as a valuable community asset, acting as a gateway to a range of services and facilities well beyond those of a traditional public library.

So I leave you with an unanswered question:

What's the best policy?

A large number of small libraries presence in most communities, or

A smaller number of larger libraries, each providing a greater range of stock and services?

Which is more socially inclusive? Which would encourage lifelong learning more effectively? Which stimulates economic growth? Which better supports the cultural life of a community?

No doubt the answer will vary from place to place and from time to time.

The mid-to-late Victorian public library in the North American, northern European and British traditions was often promoted on the basis of which we now call lifelong learning. They were often called - in the language of the day - "working men's universities". That concept was fully recognised by their opponents and there are many examples in the archives of establishment figures at national and local level warning against the dire results of working people getting and spreading dangerous ideas through reading radical books at the public library.

Today, in some countries, at least, governments and decision-makers are noticing that there is an established network of resource centres already available which people will use, if and when they are properly equipped, for learning new skills.

A recent American survey showed that 46 % of people, who didn't have access to the Internet at school, work or home, turned to their public library - by far the most popular source. Public Libraries are neutral spaces without the real or psychological barriers presented by schools and colleges to many people. They are staffed by people who have a commitment to service to their communities and to the free flow of information and ideas. In short, they are capable of helping to deliver a key policy area for many governments and for many communities.

And yet, in many countries they have tended to be ignored - new services and centres are being set up. Wheels are being re-invented and limited resources wasted. Is this because so many people have limited ideas of nature and value of public libraries? We can surely do more to persuade politicians, civil servants and local communities that a modest investment in their public libraries can help achieve their aims of equitable access to lifelong learning.

The public library is, I suppose for many people, essentially a cultural institution. It enables an individual, with little or no financial risk, to make adventurous choices in books to read. Not only novels, but also books on other art forms such as architecture, the visual and performing art. And not only among the arts, but other subjects which help to define a culture such as language, history, biography and indeed geography. And not only in books of course, but also other media, including sound and video recording and electronic sources. But I wonder whether the full contribution that a public library can make to the cultural life of a community is always fully recognized? The potential synergy between the library and other cultural institutions such as galleries, museums and theatres in the electronic age needs to be explored. There are, in a given area, usually more public library buildings than there are museums, theatres or galleries. This means that the public library can surely act as an electronic gateway to the artifacts, performances and experiences offered by those sister cultural institutions and help to make them more socially inclusive.

Perhaps the most underestimated role of the public library is its ability to stimulate economic growth, including urban and rural regeneration. Of course, it is well understood that they employ staff, buy books and other goods and services, and so on. But they can stimulate economic growth in a number of other ways. I have argued how their very presence adds to the quality of life of a community. The “foot fall” (the number of people walking into the library past other businesses) they create benefits local business. By making available, either in the library itself or by electronic networking, a variety of information of value to businesses, including annual reports, statistics, standards, government regulations, sources of grant-aid and specialist advice, training facilities (whether branded as a business information service or not), the library is supporting local business growth. I know of no one who borrows books from a public library, but does not buy any books. I know of no one who has a video recorder/player who relies entirely on borrowing videos from the public library. Similarly with audio recordings. It’s back to the adventurous choice again.

There is one vital area I wasn’t asked to cover, which I feel I must mention. That is the contribution of the public library to a healthy democracy. In an age of so much political debate is reduced to a “sound-bite” or a slogan. When so much of the media is concentrated in the hands of a few multi-national conglomerates, it is all the more essential to defend our rights of access to information, ideas and works of imagination. We need to be able to read behind the headlines and to make up our own minds. A healthy democracy is dependent upon an informed population.

As IFLA’s statement on Libraries and Intellectual Freedom says: “A commitment to intellectual freedom is a core responsibility for the library and information profession”.

Of course much of what I have talked about is familiar ground. A high quality public library service is dependent on:

- reasonable level of funding

- a committed central government
- similarly committed local politicians and administrators

The gap between the ideals we aspire to and the reality sometimes appears daunting.

However, the cost of providing the kind of service outlined in the IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto, and the proposed Copenhagen Declaration to be discussed later in this conference, probably amounts to less than the cost of a small candy bar per person per week.

In Europe we can do it.

Let's just do it!

Reference:

- (1) James Baldwin speaking in a television programme "My childhood", quoted in: Usherwood, Bob The public library as public knowledge. London: The Library Association, 1989 p. 147-148.

## **Home Thoughts from Abroad.**

### **Address to the Public Library Authorities Conference, Torquay, 22 October 1999.**

Next year we celebrate 150 years of publicly funded public libraries in the United Kingdom, because the first Public Libraries Act was passed in 1850. Actually, the history books suggest that Salford Public Library was established a few years earlier, probably illegally, by using a very liberal interpretation of a slightly earlier museums act.

One way the anniversary is being celebrated, is by the minting of a special 50p coin. This is, as far as I know, the very first time libraries are being commemorated on a coin of the realm. Strangely enough, fifty pence is more than twice the actual weekly cost per person of providing the public library service in Britain! Or it was the last time I looked.

So this is as good a time as any to reflect on the current state of the art of public libraries in Britain. They are widespread. Any community of any size has a public library, despite high-profile stories of closures and purposed closures. They are popular - even now, when you tell a journalist or a business leader that more than 300 million visits are made to public libraries every year in the UK they are amazed. Celebrities and ordinary people are prepared to speak up for them. Public libraries don't cost much, as we have seen.

The public library is one of the very few institutions, professions or features of our lives which has not suffered from deserved or undeserved antagonism and adverse publicity in the recent past. You have only to think of teachers, farmers, supermarkets, churches, unions, banks, car manufacturers, social services departments, railway companies, Bill Gates. Need I go on? In other words the public library is a highly respected "brand". Except that we do not exploit that to any extent.

In fact, a much greater danger is that public libraries are taken for granted at best, or regarded as rather old-fashioned and overtaken by new technology. You know the kind of simplistic remark: 'Why do you need libraries when Encyclopaedia Britannica is free on the Internet?'

But never before have public libraries been so close to the heart of the political agenda of this country.

Of course, we have always known that they were described, in the language of midVictorian England, as the working men's universities, but now ministers speak of street corner universities. We know that, today, among the heaviest users are unemployed people seeking work. We know their value in supporting literacy campaigns. Those of us who have worked in the front line have seen how libraries changed people's lives - usually for the better.

Many of us in the recent past have come close to despair when we seemed quite unable to get that message across. Many of you will remember the frisson of anger which swept this very room a few years ago when a previous minister shook his finger at us asking: "What is so special about reading that it should be subsidised from public funds?" Whatever your own political persuasion, I am sure you will agree that there is, not just a window, but a barn door of opportunity at the moment for all of us who believe in the public libraries.

Public libraries are by definition for the many and not the few. They should be at the heart of

any programme of social inclusion. It was the very first Comedia report which found that, in a study of town centres, the one institution which was open after normal business hours and frequented by all sections of the community regardless of age, gender, wealth, ethnic origin or employment status was the public library. All other institutions were closed or colonised by specific sections of the community.

Public libraries, as previous speakers have demonstrated, can help small and medium sized enterprises, are neutral places where people can develop new skills and find the information they need in an increasingly complex world. Not only that, the government realises all of this and is moving from the rhetoric to action, especially in investing in the infrastructure, content and training for the People's Network.

So, can we all go home from this conference and await developments with bated breath? Well, not quite I think. We have some work to do. We need to do more to ensure that public libraries are positioned to support council-wide and countrywide initiatives in life long learning, e-business and re-skilling, without losing their all-embracing popularity.

Let's take opening hours. Britain is fast becoming, if not a 24-hour society, an 18-hour society; both in terms of increased physical opening of premises and because of the availability of telephone and email based services. Yet, for very obvious, reasons many public libraries have quite restricted opening hours.

Let's take physical presence. Most communities of any size in Britain have a public library. But, if the stories in the London papers are anything to go by, there is increasing tension between those who favour rationalisation which would result in a smaller number of large centres of excellence with a large range of stock and services and long opening hours, in preference to the traditional urban pattern of a large number of small libraries. The trouble is that concentrating on larger libraries disadvantages those people who are less mobile; the young, the elderly and the infirm. So where does that leave the policy on social inclusion? And where are the street corner universities?

If we are to have a brave new world of all-singing, all-dancing libraries, we need not only to convince those with the purse strings, but we need to carry our public with us. I believe that we need to do much more to explain to the people who use our libraries - and those who don't - our vision of the 21st century hybrid library and how it will contribute to their quality of life - and what good value it will be. Is it beyond us, for example, to devise a national newsletter (yes electronic as well as on paper) for library users, giving news of national developments, examples from Britain and abroad of new services, etc? It would help raise expectations. My guess is that, at the moment, most library users have not had the opportunity to read, for example: ministers' speeches on the importance of the public library, about the plans for the People's Network, or to see pictures of the award winning new libraries celebrated earlier this week. This in stark contrast to what they know about developments in their supermarkets, schools or building societies. We need to engage our audience and to draw upon that huge pool of goodwill for the public library.

Coming back from The Hague to the town in England where I had lived for the previous 15 years, I noticed that they have put up on the main road a rash of those brown signs aimed at tourists. A cluster of symbols indicates the availability of a museum, a swimming pool, hotels, tourist information and toilets. But nothing to indicate the library. That's because we still do not have a nationally recognised library symbol. We have one. It is still valiantly promoted by

the Public Libraries. But despite many efforts it has never achieved approval by the transport department. Perhaps the time is ripe to try again - or to design a new symbol?

The dominant chain of supermarkets in The Hague displays permanently on the outside a number between 1 and 6. This was puzzling at first. But this appears to be a kind of grading system. Number 1 is a small local store with relatively short opening hours and range of stock. Number 6 is the biggest. So before you go in you have some idea of what you can expect from the store. It is a kind of self-declared league-table or set of standards. That's an interesting idea. Would it not be good if you could determine from the outside of the library, exactly what services you could expect inside? Perhaps we need not just one, but several symbols?

Standards of public library provision, despite the statutory basis, vary enormously throughout the UK. Here we run into a conflict between the democratic right of local councils to determine their spending priorities and the illogicality that the standard of service you receive depends on where you happen to live. The new LA/LGA/DCMS initiative to develop national standards which Peter Beauchamp talked about last night is a very welcome development, especially in the context of annual library plans. I hope that that work may also feed into IFLA's current revision of its own public library guidelines to help stimulate development around the world.

Indeed, I would like to see much greater promotion on the world stage of the developments of public libraries in the UK, especially the People's Network. The idea of the public library needs nurturing in many parts of the world. Many people argue that the development of electronic networks will overcome the need for public libraries in many countries, that a kind of leapfrog technology will make them obsolete. I don't agree with that. There is a lot of evidence that, without positive intervention, the danger is that a digital divide between the information-rich and the information-poor will open up. A recent US survey, for example, showed that 46% of those without Internet access turned first to the public library - by far the most popular source. But that can only be true in countries where there are public libraries and where those public libraries are connected.

We should not forget either, the power and convenience of the printed word. Some of you will know that Roderick Mabomba received the International Librarian of the year award recently. He is director of the Malawi National Library Service, which has established 400 library centres across Malawi. Last year, the MNLS received donations from Book Aid International of 50,000 books, which represented 60 % of all the books received by the service for those 400 centres in that year. By comparison with many library services in Africa, and elsewhere in the developing world, that is riches indeed.

Last week I was at a conference on public libraries and the information society organised as a part of the EC's concerted action for public libraries: PubliCA. It ended up with a grandiose Copenhagen Declaration. Among the elements in that Declaration was a call on governments to:

“Implement a development programme for public libraries that ensures minimum standards for access to every citizen including appropriate information and communication technology and suitable levels of investment to meet their standards.”

Wouldn't it be great if governments around the world responded positively to such a call?

Perhaps I could leave you with a wish list, to be completed by April 2004:

- All libraries in the UK connected
- Associated staff training in place and digital content available
- Minimum standards adopted.
- A national symbol for public libraries in widespread use
- A lively free national newsletter for library users
- A leadership programme for senior library staff to train the next generation of public library directors
- A programme to recruit and train staff truly representative of the communities public libraries serve, including cultural minorities
- Public libraries higher up the committee and staff hierarchies in local authorities
- A substantial injection of funds for books, remembering that people need access not only information, but ideas and works of imagination
- A national friends of libraries organisation
- A sustainable programme to maintain the impetus, once the People's Network is in place.

I look forward to all of this being in place by April 2004. Why April 2004? Because that's when I am due to retire and return to the UK - as a regular user of my local library.

This, surely, is our chance.

Let's grasp the moment and fling open that barn door of opportunity!

## Public Libraries: Inventing the Future

### Address at “Public Libraries: Inventing the Future, an international conference held in Lisbon, 11/13 May 2000

People everywhere need easy access to information, ideas and works of information, which they can turn into knowledge, understanding, wisdom and informed decisions. To quote from the title of the information system of the National Library Board of Singapore, “Timely information, Accurate, Relevant and Affordable –TiARA”.

As I understand it, that is the historic mission of the public library. That is what attracted me when I began working in a public library in 1960. That is what continues to make me passionate about public libraries in the year 2000.

Of course, that ideal has only been imperfectly realised over the years and across the globe. But I believe that today we have an opportunity to discover new worlds for the public library just as those explorers in earlier centuries “discovered” new worlds full of spices, treasures, cultures and languages previously only dreamt of in the West.

Today, people are overloaded with information. In an increasingly complex world, we need that timely access to accurate information merely to survive, let alone thrive in the modern world. Worlds in which increasingly people have to change jobs, change their patterns of work, learn new skills, and move location, in order to acquire the means to exist. The sources of that vital commodity, information, are increasing all the time. The media by which it is transmitted are also multiplying at a bewildering speed. To take just one example, just consider how fast the mobile telephone has been accepted as a fact of life in many parts of the world.

I was reading recently the report of the American Library Association President, Sarah Long, on her recent activities. She said:

*“I sense both concern and excitement in the library community. Concern that change is too rapid, that we won’t be able to keep up, that new technology will make libraries, as we know them, obsolete. At the same time I sense excitement that technology offers so many more options and possibilities that we are poised for a new day in librarianship”.*

Her comments reflect very well my own responses to my recent travels in many different parts of the world.

It seems to me that people in positions of influence around the globe now understand what we librarians have been urging for what seems like centuries: people, groups, communities, organisations all need access to relevant information. We hear government ministers talk about the knowledge economies, e-commerce, and the need for their workforces to upgrade their skills in order to be competitive in the global market place. We see private sector companies appoint Knowledge Directors. We hear them talk of knowledge as an asset and the resource they have in the knowledge held by their staff. We see a mushrooming of community organisations whose main resource is information as a tool for self-development and self-government and which are unwilling to allow traditional organisations decide what is best for

them. The World Bank is promoting a huge new programme under the title Global Knowledge.

There is also evidence that, in some places at least, politicians, decision makers, people of influence, people with funds are recognizing that libraries, including public libraries can help deliver that vital need. In Britain, we hear ministers talk of public libraries as “street corner universities”. In the same country, a very significant investment is being made to connect every library in the country to the Internet. In Namibia, I recently witnessed the opening of a new national library and archives building with capacity for another 30 years; a truly stunning investment by the government of a developing country. It will act as a public library as well as a national library. In Singapore, the government is also investing heavily in the National Library Service, which again also provides the public library service. The Carnegie Corporation of New York is, as we meet today, considering a plan to invest significantly in the reinvigoration of public libraries in Africa. No doubt you can provide many other examples from your own experience.

The basis of this development of public libraries is from our point of view entirely logical. In many countries there is a network of public library buildings in existence, staffed by librarians who know the importance of information and experienced in dealing with people and stocked with at least the basis of a useful collection. Such a network can, with sensible investment, be modernised to meet the demands, which are being readily recognised. Indeed, in many places where there has been a combination of innovative librarians, enlightened local or regional government, available funding and a demanding community, such developments have already taken place. They can and do act as models to show and hopefully convince those who doubt our ability to deliver.

And we surely do need to convince. I suppose most of us have had to put up with the throwaway comment to the effect that “*we don't need libraries now that we have the Internet*”. Just recently that very same concept was being discussed at UNESCO headquarters.

Russell Bowden represented IFLA at the World Bank's Global Knowledge II conference in Kuala Lumpur recently. The stated background to the conference was:

*"There is broad consensus within the international community that gaps in information and knowledge, both within and between countries, are increasing. The new information and communications technologies, which are being deployed throughout the world, are important factors in both creating and addressing these gaps. At a time when these critical tools hold the promise of allowing the local and global information sharing needed for sustainable development in the 21st century, there is broad concern that gaps in access to these tools and resources are increasing, and that the information revolution could paradoxically become a cause of even greater inequality and worsening poverty. There is an urgent need for the international community including public, private and not-for-profit agencies, to work together to promote universal access to information and communication technologies".*

Participants at the conference were people working with the information-deprived whose primary motivations were social and developmental and who came at information via their requirements and through the realisation that Internet provided the means of access. In other words their abilities to access and disseminate information were of secondary importance - although the majority had taught themselves information-handling competencies and Internet-surfing skills.

Almost from nowhere and in a relatively short space of time and with minimum publicity has emerged a dynamic worldwide new organisation with future possibilities for great influences because of the excitement and energies generated at Global Knowledge II by the participants from 120 countries.

- Because of its excellent and minimum organisation, because of its use of Internet for speedy communication and decision-making,
- because it is backed by influential bodies with substantial resources that, also, support its growth,
- because its eruption onto the world scene is in response to a globally-felt need,
- because its priorities appear to be close to those aid priorities set by donor governments and agencies, and
- because at the heart of what the Global Knowledge Partnership will be about is access to information,

we cannot afford **not** to take significant notice of it and act accordingly. IFLA Is currently applying for membership of the Global Knowledge partnership with a view to taking an active part in its work.

The digital divide between those who have access to electronic information and those who do not - both within countries and between regions of the world - is increasingly attracting concern. Even amongst the growing number of people who have access to the Internet, how many are able to use it effectively rising above the constraints of cost, time and know-how? And then there is the huge proportion of the world's population, which has no access at all. Referring back to my c earlier comment about the rapid spread of mobile phones, it is a sobering thought that 80% of the world's population has never made a phone call. Kelly McNamara of the World Bank Institute speaking at a recent conference in London on national information policies said:

*“If we don't give people the tools and strategies to access information that lets them lead better lives, the Internet economy is just a distraction. Don't forget about poverty and inequality; technology does not care about them.”*

The public library surely has a crucial role here - to ensure that poverty does not disenfranchise people in the knowledge economy and to strike a blow for equality.

But just as the early mapmakers marked unknown territories with the frightening warning “Here be Dragons”, we should beware other dangers lurking in these new worlds.

I am thinking of, for example, attempts at censorship and to filtering out things which other people think we should not see. Recent demonstrations in several parts of the world have given authorities in some countries the reason, or the excuse, to propose what many see as quite draconian laws and regulations. These would allow for the interception of email messages relating to “serious crimes”. But of course, what is regarded as a serious crime in one country may simply be democratic dissent in another. These and other developments seem to betray a worrying tendency to regard the electronic infrastructure as indistinguishable from the content. Much as once in history the publishing of books, regardless of content, was regarded as potential insurrection and had to be at best licensed and at worst suppressed. I suppose that it is possible to take heart by realising that if we are bewildered at the pace of change and at the potential of the digital age then so are the powers that be. We must be

vigilant and speak up for the ordinary people who are the users of libraries and who are often not heard in these debates. We must seek alliances with organisations whose interests we share.

Attempts to restrict access to information come from many directions and in many guises. One especially sensitive area is that of intellectual property. We librarians have taken the stance that we respect the concept of copyright, that is to say the right of authors to a fair return on their creation and of publishers to a fair return on their investment. We have argued firmly for the need to strike a fair balance between those rights and the need for people to have access to information, ideas and works of imagination. We have also pointed out that so much new intellectual property is only created with the help of such access through libraries. In doing so, we are once again not only promoting our own proper professional concerns, but we are speaking up for our users. In many parts of the world we have made significant progress in establishing agreement for such an equitable balance between creator and user. We have also received a degree of recognition that libraries provide an environment in which that balance can be maintained.

However, it seems to be a different story in the electronic environment. Creators and producers are understandably afraid of the facility with which material can be copied, distributed and changed, not to say mutilated. The recent example of the success of hackers to distribute pirated copies of Stephen King's electronically published novella "Riding the Bullet", served to heighten their anxieties. As a result, publishers' organisations everywhere are very reluctant to recognise concepts such as fair dealing or fair use by libraries or their users for electronic publications. If this becomes widespread, the ability of libraries to make information available could become severely restricted as a greater proportion of accurate, up-to-date information is made available in electronic form, but not on the Internet. Two States in the USA have now passed the controversial Uniform Computer Transactions Act. According to James Neal, of Johns Hopkins University the provisions of the act could have a

*"major impact on the work libraries do by allowing vendors tighter control over licensing terms in contracts for software and information products, and could allow non-negotiable contract terms to be embedded within "shrink-wrap" or "click-on" mass-market licenses".*

But while proponents of the Bill contend that universities and libraries can continue to protect their interests through the negotiation of individual agreements, that suggestion should be met with appropriate scepticism, according to concerned librarians.

IFLA is just about to publish a statement on copyright in the digital environment and we shall of course continue robustly to argue our corner and to work with others with similar interests. Although, the global nature of the technology means that these are international issues, it is clear that different countries and even individual jurisdictions within countries are taking separate initiatives. Which means that we all have to be vigilant rather than leaving it to someone else to worry about.

We need to continue to engage in dialogue with publishers and producers to identify those interests in common, but to stand firm on those issues which determine our ability to serve our users.

You may have read that IFLA was represented at the notorious ministerial conference of the World Trade Organisation held in Seattle last year. It is notorious because of the

demonstrations, originally peaceful but which turned violent. Much of the protest was incidentally organised by making use of - yes, you've guessed it - the Internet. You may have wondered why we were represented. Well, we are indebted to our colleagues in the Canadian Library Association who alerted us to some proposals to be discussed there. They could have had the effect of greatly restricting the ability of individual governments to invest in public services such as public libraries on the grounds that such investment would represent unfair competition with private sector companies wishing to provide such services. In the event, those proposals were not progressed on that occasion. But they may well come back to threaten us in the future. Again, we must be vigilant. Meanwhile we can brief ourselves and relevant ministries of the potential adverse impact of any such proposals.

Where does all this leave us? I think that it is a time of unparalleled opportunity and of unparalleled danger for public libraries. At one end of the spectrum it could be that the advance of technology could make public libraries as obsolete as those Corsairs, the sailing ships of the adventurers and explorers of past centuries. Or as one opponent I once argued with on the radio would have it, as redundant as Victorian Steam Laundries. But at the other end of the spectrum, public libraries could be re-engineered as the hub of local communities in the digital age.

There is evidence of both possibilities.

In a report resulting from desk research on public libraries in 10 African countries, entitled *Public Libraries in Africa*, published this year by the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications, we find the following statement:

*“the public library movement in Africa is very weak, with numerous problems regarding financial constraints, lack of human resources, outdated materials and poor use. The only sector of the African population that uses public libraries is school children ...[they] do not use the materials held in the library. but as places for study, because they are quieter and more spacious than their homes. The consensus seems to that African librarians need to rethink what a library is all about in terms of what is needed, what will be used and what is sustainable in Africa.”*

On the other hand, the Government of Singapore set up a Library 2000 review Committee to in effect rethink the library system for Singapore. The committee's vision of the library of the future was

*“ to continuously expand the nation's capacity to learn through a national network of libraries and information resource centres providing services and learning opportunities to support the advancement of Singapore.”*

This vision is being realised through a series of initiatives ranging from the relatively mundane such as self-check issues systems and 24 hour book drops for returns, using a radio frequency device so that books returned at any library can be credited almost immediately on the borrower's account, to more sophisticated concepts such the introduction of a call-centre to deal with telephone, fax and email enquiries, leaving the front-line staff to deal with personal callers, the development of niche-market service points aimed at specific client groups and a network of “borderless libraries”.

The difference between the two is not just to do with level of prosperity, although clearly that is a critical element. It is also to do with a commitment on the part of the people with purse strings that libraries have a role to play in preparing people for the digital age.

Another straw in the wind blows in from what you may regard as an improbable direction: Kosovo. The IFLA office for Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression was recently invited by the Council of Europe to undertake a mission to Kosovo, partly funded by UNESCO, to provide a general assessment of the libraries in Kosovo and make recommendations for their development. The report makes sombre reading. But the very fact that the report was commissioned, that a department of culture has just been established and that a number of funding agencies, led by the Open Society Institute, has expressed interest in assisting with the reconstruction of the library system there, is surely a very positive sign of recognition.

I believe that, on the evidence of people and places I have visited and on the documents, paper and electronic, I have read, that the historic mission of the public library lives on and will continue to do so in the electronic age.

But it will only do so if we collectively and individually grasp the opportunities presented to us by the growing recognition of the critical value of access to knowledge in a multitude of forms.

This will require us to hold firm, gain new skills especially technological skills, use all our powers of persuasion and advocacy, strike alliances with like minded people and organisations, speak out on behalf of our users, and, of course, secure the commitment, including the money we need to bring the vision to reality.

What is my vision of the public library of the future? Well first of all, it will be a Hybrid Library, that is to say that it will have collections of books and magazines as well as facilities to access and use other media. It will be staffed professionally. It will be open long hours and accessible electronically for even longer hours. It will be the hub of its community to which people turn naturally for information, inspiration and sheer enjoyment. It will be networked to the resources of many other libraries and other institutions such as museums and galleries. A gateway to the world of knowledge. Not unlike the best libraries of today or indeed yesterday, but using the advantages of new technologies as they roll out.

Ever since Maria Jose Moura asked me to make this address I have been searching unsuccessfully for a quotation to end on. Reading a recent article by Joe Hendry, who some of you will know, entitled "*Here comes the sun*", I see he has already found the perfect text which I hope he won't mind me using:

It's from Samuel Beckett:

*"Let us not waste our time in idle discourse, let us rather do something while we have the chance. It is not every day that we are needed ... But at this place, at this time, all mankind is us, whether we like it or not. **Let us make the most of it before it is too late.**"*

## **From Digital Divide to Digital Opportunity**

### **Address to the Online Conference London December 2000**

It may not always feel so, but we are the lucky ones in the digital revolution. As a prelude to considering the digital divide, I want to explore some characteristics of the world we inhabit.

We believe that it is changing fast. Those of us in our fifties can certainly look back on our childhood - and realize that it took place in an impossibly different, post-war world. Those black and white clips from British Movietone News we sometimes see on television serve to confirm that.

We believe that we live in an information society. It is a world of multi-channel television, mobile phones, and the world-wide web with unimaginably large amounts of information instantly accessible. Many of us yearn, however, for that information to be organised, retrievable, authenticated and reduced to assimilable proportions. We would also like it to be converted into knowledge and wisdom, so that sensible decisions could be made about the world we live in.

We believe that advancing Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) are revolutionising our lives, our ways of working, our interaction with government and other authorities and our leisure.

We believe that a key to survival in such a world is lifelong learning; that education in school, college and university is no longer enough. Similarly, skills learned in professions and trades need updating or radically changing frequently. In Britain and other industrialised countries, we observe long-established industries like shipbuilding, coal-mining, steel-making contract, decline or even disappear altogether. We have witnessed completely new employment opportunities such as call-centres and e-businesses develop rapidly - and in some cases collapse just as rapidly. Even if we are not directly affected by these developments ourselves, friends and family members may well have been.

It is certainly clear that people inhabiting the world I have described at the beginning need to practise lifelong learning if they are to survive and thrive amidst all the change happening around them.

Lifelong learning is not a new idea. Indeed it has been argued that it has always been present since humans occupied the planet. Those who learned how to exploit the environment, grow crops, understand the weather, explore more favourable locations and so on, survived. Those who did not practise lifelong learning did not.

One institution, which can greatly assist the lifelong learner, is, of course, the library.

As Beverly Sheppard, Acting Director of the (US) Institute of Museum and Library Services has said: "The profound changes of the 21st century are transforming America into what must become a learning society. We enter this century in the midst of a bewildering mix of opportunity, uncertainty, challenge and change, all moving at unprecedented speed. Fuelled by dazzling new technologies, increasing social diversity and divide, and radical shifts in industry and labour markets, accelerating change has become a way of life. To navigate the

changes, minimise the risks and participate in shaping a new order, all Americans need access to learning throughout their lifetimes." (1)

You can substitute almost any country for America in that quote, of course.

Sheppard interprets this situation as an opportunity for what some people have begun to call the memory institutions (archives, libraries and museums), although I believe it implies an unnecessarily limited function at least for libraries. She argues that: "Never before have museums, libraries and the whole of the non-formal sector of educational institutions faced such challenges and opportunities. As the market place moves to exploit the commercial opportunities of new information technologies, the nation's vital public needs for education and lifelong learning can easily be ignored. The demand is great for fresh and innovative thinking to construct a bold, new learning network. Such a network must empower all citizens to participate. Access to learning across a lifetime may become among the essential civil rights of the 21st century." (1)

Maurice Line, writing in the *New Review of Libraries and Lifelong Learning* (2) provides a kind of shopping list for an ideal library for the lifelong learning. Some of the items on the list are fairly obvious, such as: an attractive and welcoming building, a friendly atmosphere, suitable opening hours and so on. Others on the list are a little more demanding:

- copying machines on every floor
- electronic service points in post offices and superstores, with direct links to the library
- a wide range of current physical media; print, video, audio, cd-roms (by 'current' that means current, not three months after publication)
- 70 % of his needs immediately available, not on loan or otherwise unavailable
- remote speedy access to resources not in the library, wherever in the world they are held
- sufficient numbers of computer terminals to make a wait of over 5 minutes a rare event
- access to all search engines through a single portal
- access to all electronic material on line with minimal hassle
- access to images of objects in museum and galleries
- to pay as little as possible

He admits that he is an exceptionally demanding user. But he says that most of his requirements (except those not yet technically possible) should be attainable by "any self-respecting library" (his words).

I don't know what your experience is. But my local library falls far short of his list. I wonder how his local library fares?

But, if that is a reasonable set of desiderata for a library for a demanding lifelong learner in the West, it is also a reasonable set for an library for a similarly demanding person in the developing world. The needs are the same (and arguably even more urgent), although the content may well be different.

And that thought provides us with a useful measure of the scale of the digital divide. Because, although Maurice Line may not have all those things he would like in his local library. He has the knowledge, skills and wherewithal to have access to most of the components (or substitutes) he lists. What are the chances of a lifelong learner (or someone who needs to be a lifelong learner) in Pakistan, Papua New Guinea or Peru? Chile we will come to later.

Closer to home, it may be worth in this context, reflecting on the difficulties of obtaining vital information in our own communities. I wonder, for example, how easy it has been in Yalding, and York and the other flooded areas of England, for people to get current, accurate information about their insurance status, the need for evacuation, and any assistance or compensation that might be available. To what extent has our profession been able to help, I wonder? To what extent were the Environment Agency, the local authorities and the emergency services using the local libraries to make available information? It is easy to think of other recent examples where people have been in urgent need of up-to-date, current information on, for example emergency railway timetables, flooded roads, and safe food. The most common complaint in such circumstances is: "why did nobody tell us?".

It is also easy to see the effect of absence of clear, accurate and above all, trusted, information. Rumours, slogans and sensational headlines hold sway. Advice to ring hot lines are often discounted because people's experience suggest that such lines are continuously engaged when they really need them.

Apart from that, within all industrialised countries, there are significant proportions of the population for whom the digital divide is just as real as it is between the countries of the North and the South. And, even in a country like Britain where almost every household has television and radio, a huge majority has a fixed telephone and recent surveys show that a majority of the population has a mobile phone, and conventional literacy is high, many people, I suggest, do not know how to find the information they need.

What I am coming round to suggesting is that we are experiencing information illiteracy on a large scale, worldwide.

Information literacy has never been taught systematically in Britain, although I believe that it is included in the new school curriculum in South Africa. Presumably, it is assumed that it is a natural skill, picked up by everyone as they go along. Or it is expected that comes as a natural by product of modern learning methods in schools, colleges and universities; methods such as group learning, project work and learning by discovery. When the (UK) Library Association proposed that information literacy should be a compulsory subject in the National Curriculum, which was being debated in parliament, it was turned down on the grounds of that it was not a 'proper subject' like mathematics or English.

Perhaps we should now be arguing for an 'Information Literacy Hour' to be introduced for all children to follow the 'Literacy Hour' and the 'Numeracy Hour'.

But until both the providers of information and the seekers of information themselves become information literate, the problem will remain, however.

What I do mean by Information literacy? Well Samuel Johnson described it well in the Eighteenth Century:

*"Knowledge is of two kinds. We know a subject ourselves, or we know where we can find information on it"(3)*

Today, I suppose, we might be less confident that we know a subject ourselves. But the distinction is useful.

A more recent working definition of information literacy is:

*"Knowing how to find information, evaluate it and use it effectively... When you are information literate you know where to find the information you need for greater knowledge and understanding of any subject you choose."*(4)

To that I would add greater recognition of the need for the information. It sounds easy and you can quickly imagine civil servants and politicians dismissing it as 'not a proper subject'.

But I leave you to consider how often in your own lives it has not quite worked out so simply.

Now let's turn to the global digital divide.

According to the U.S. Internet Council's State of the Internet Report 2000:

*"the monthly connection cost for the Internet in Africa exceeds the monthly income of a significant proportion of the population."*(5)

Other problems cited by the same report are:

*"low computer availability, illiteracy, lack of trained personnel, disinterest and failure to understand the benefits of Internet access."*(5)

Anyone who has lived in the developing world could add a few more factors, such as a lack of assured electricity supply and the sheer need to concentrate on survival. As a recent newspaper headline said: *"Poor need Penicillin before Pentiums."* (6) In the article, an incident in Uganda was recounted. For years a hospital there had tried to get a telephone connection without success. Eventually it obtained a satellite connection. But a call costs US\$ 2.50 per minute (30 times the rate in the West):

*"A nurse once held on for 10 minutes trying to find out the date and duration of her next training course, before giving up. Instead she got into a minibus and, six bumpy hours later, was in Kampala where she was able to get the information she needed. The cost of her round trip? The same as a five minute phone call."* (6)

That's information literacy. That's also motivation on a scale difficult to imagine in the West.

To turn from anecdote to statistics, I would now like to quote from the Unesco Courier:

*"The absolute number of people living on less than one dollar a day in developing countries has remained practically unchanged (slightly fewer than 1.2 billion) over the past decade. The income gap between the richest and the poorest 20 % of world population has more than doubled over the past 40 years and nearly tripled if we look at the world's five richest and five poorest countries. The poorest 20 % only account for 0.2 % of the world's Internet users, whilst the richest 80 % make up 93.3 % of users".* (7)

That's the digital divide in a nutshell.

Where's the digital opportunity you may be asking. Well, we know that despite the problems I have just touched upon, information, knowledge and works of imagination are increasingly

available throughout the world. Electronic transmission and delivery is faster than we could have imagined even a few years ago. It can also be significantly cheaper than traditional methods.

The signs of hope are discernible. Just as governments in the West have begun to realise the need for public access, as well as private and corporate access, in order to bridge the digital divide in their own countries, so the G8 leaders have realised their needs to be similar initiatives to tackle the digital divide between the North and the South

And remarkably, just as some governments have, belatedly, realised that libraries can play an important role in this area in their own countries, so libraries may help in the rest of the world. Is it too much to hope that reinventing the wheel may be prevented?

I quote from the Okinawa charter on the Global Information Society:

*"The policies for the advancement of the Information Society must be underpinned by the development of human resources capable of responding to the demands of the information age. We are committed to provide all our citizens with an opportunity to nurture IT literacy skills through education, lifelong learning and training. We will continue to work toward this ambitious goal by getting schools, classrooms and libraries...."* (8)

The charter continues by committing the G8 leaders to establish a digital opportunity Taskforce (dotforce) to help bridge the global digital divide with a similar approach.

I believe that this is a unique opportunity to demonstrate to governments that we have a key role to play in this daunting task.

For our part, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) is setting up a 'shadow G8', with representatives from our regional sections. The idea is that the shadow G8 will prepare position statements and working documents with practical proposals for the G8 dotforce.

It seems to me that we need to press upon the leaders both the urgency and the scale of the challenges. A challenge which seems at least as great as that discussed at the regrettably inconclusive climate change conference in The Hague.

We have to ensure that information and communications technologies (ICT) become part of the solution rather than part of the problem. And of course we cannot and should not leave the problem to be tackled only by governments.

It is heartening to note recent announcements in this area by the Carnegie Corporation of New York on revitalising African Libraries (9) and by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to fund the provision of Internet access in 300 libraries in Chile. (10)

These are highly significant steps in the right direction.

But the scale of the challenges is so huge maybe we should consider the need for a kind of information literacy equivalent of *Medicins sans Frontières* to tackle this desperate situation?

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## **IFLA means damn-all to UK librarylanders and even less to those in poor countries**

### **Debate at the UmbrellA Conference, Birmingham July 2001**

I intend to speak against the motion.

Because I believe that IFLA means a great deal to many librarians around the world, including those in poor countries. As I was working on this intro, an email from a colleague in Tanzania flashed up on my screen. He finished by saying: “... *we are extremely grateful for your various communications and publications. It means a lot being an IFLA family member.*”

I am also against this motion because it SHOULD mean a lot to librarylanders in the UK.

Let me give you some examples. The *IFLA School Library Manifesto* argues the case for good school libraries to enable children to become critical thinkers and effective users of information in all media. This is a message equally important in Harare, Harrow or Honolulu. A volunteer team of school librarians from many different parts of the world, including one from England drafted the manifesto. The General Council of UNESCO adopted it. Thanks to the National Library of Canada, it is already available in attractive formats in four languages. It is currently being translated into many others. UNESCO has provided the money to organise a practical workshop in Rabat, to explore the best ways of implementing the ideals in the manifesto, in the realities of schools in a large number of African countries. The workshop will also deal with ways of implementing the IFLA Public Library Manifesto, also adopted by UNESCO and available in at least 25 languages.

The Public Libraries section of IFLA has been working on new Public Library Guidelines, to be published later this month, and launched at our conference in Boston. Again, a multinational team has drafted these guidelines, headed by a well-known British librarian, Philip Gill. There is keen demand for this book, which has already been translated into Dutch, and several other editions are already in the pipeline. Examples of good practice in these Guidelines come from a huge variety of countries, including Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia, South Africa, Armenia, Finland, Estonia, Russia, the Czech republic and – yes - the UK!

We at TFLA are keenly aware that our members need practical solutions to problems. Many of our 36 professional Sections (roughly equivalent to the LA's Groups) seek to find such solutions. Some of them work closely with our seven core activities to this end. For example, the IFLA Office for International Interlending based at Boston Spa and headed by Graham Cornish, last year's LA president, has among many other things developed the International Interlending Voucher Scheme. This enables libraries to borrow from one another across the world, without the bother of small cash transactions. The scheme, which began as an experiment in 1964 now has 635 libraries in 61 countries participating. 44,000 vouchers have been distributed. This is an initiative, which directly helps library users in many different countries, which certainly would not have existed without IFLA. Work is well advanced on an electronic version of the scheme. The same office has carried out 11 document delivery workshops in many different parts of the world to assist in the training of librarians working in this field.

Freedom of Access to Information is at the heart of our profession, or it should be. Thanks to the generosity of the Danish library community, the city of Copenhagen and several Nordic aid agencies, we were able to establish our Freedom of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (FAIFE) office in Copenhagen. In the short time since its establishment, it has helped secure the release of a librarian in China, protested against violations against the principle of free access to information in various countries, including France, Australia and Zimbabwe, and compiled a World Report on the state of access to information, to be published shortly. Perhaps its most interesting initiative was a study of the library network of Kosovo, following the war. This was partly funded by UNESCO and the Council of Europe. It discovered that at least 65 libraries had been destroyed or severely damaged. The report has led to greater awareness on the part of the UN Interim Administration of the potential role of libraries in the desperate situation of the province. With the support of the Soros Foundation and libraries in Norway, some new internet-connected mobile libraries are being introduced and refurbishment of a number of key regional libraries is being undertaken. A Kosovo Libraries Consortium has been established, a new legal framework for libraries is being drafted and there are plans for a substantial training programme.

Copyright is an important issue for all of us. A great deal of resources was spent in the UK and through EBLIDA to deal with the threats to access to information as the draft directive on copyright went through the European Parliament. IFLA crucially joined in that campaign and, through our contacts in Spain and Austria particularly, helped get potentially harmful amendments dropped. We represent the library community at the World Intellectual Property Organisation meetings in Geneva. We went to the notorious World Trade Organisation meeting in Seattle (inside the meeting hall, rather than demonstrating on the streets) and we intend to be at the next WTO Ministerial meeting in Qatar in November. Why? To defend the concept of nationally-based, publicly-funded library and information services as globalisation gallops ahead. We have formed a Shadow G8 to press the case for the vital role of libraries in attempting to bridge the growing digital divide.

Who would speak up for libraries, their staff and most important of all their users if there were no IFLA? Damn all; that's who.

As for IFLA itself, our membership is growing significantly. In 1997 we had 1450 members. We now have 1775 members in 155 countries. Three students from Uruguay recently joined in our new student category. In the recent elections, Kay Raseroka, chief librarian of the University of Botswana was elected President-elect. Our newly-elected Governing Board comprises representatives from every continent, including members from Argentina, China and South Africa. Incidentally, the response in the elections (our first postal ballot) was 58%, which compares very favourably to the 16% or so usually achieved in LA elections and the recent ALA elections, where the President-elect received just over 4,000 votes out of a potential 60,000.

We have a small headquarters in The Hague, tiny regional offices in Dakar, Sao Paolo and Bangkok and core activities centered in Ottawa, Paris, Frankfurt, Boston Spa and Copenhagen. We have a tiny core budget funded almost entirely by our members. But most of all, we have about a thousand committed librarians beavering away on drafts, working parties, guidelines, bibliographic standards, training sessions and so on. IFLA could not work without them; IFLA means a lot to them.

As I hope I have demonstrated, IFLA is more than just a conference. But many of our activists

come together annually at our conference. Altogether between two and three thousand usually come from 60-70 countries. They experience a kaleidoscope of plenary sessions, workshops, business meetings, social events, a great exhibition, satellite meetings and events, and something of the flavour of the host country. It's a kind of global version of UmbrelLA in fact! If you haven't had the IFLA experience, next year is your big chance, because we come to Glasgow to celebrate our 75th birthday. But beware - coming to "IFLA" can be addictive. I know many people, not just Brits, whose first IFLA conference was in Brighton in 1987 and they've been to every one since.

To give you an idea of just how popular the IFLA conference is, the organisers of this year's conference to take place in Boston next month, raised money for scholarships to enable people from the developing world to attend. They raised enough for 100. They received applications from well over a thousand. As you know, the LA provides assistance to members active in IFLA to attend the conference and recently it has begun funding three first-timers to attend. One of the first-timers after last year's conference in Jerusalem reported: "*... a fantastic experience. I feel I have gained personally and professionally and hope that what I learnt can be fed into the service to make UK libraries amongst the best in the world!*" Another expressed "*sincere appreciation for this invaluable opportunity. The conference gave me the chance to share experiences and make contacts with people from all over the world.*"

Of course, as Mr. Blair would say, we have much more to do. But we can only do it with the enthusiastic support of librarylanders in the UK as well as elsewhere.

Colleagues a vote **for** this motion as supported by Mr. Dudley is a vote for little Britain, isolationism, and 'we know best' cynicism.

A vote **against** the motion is for development, librarianship and information science as a global profession without boundaries, and for what an Iranian colleague memorably described as the 'Mother of all libraries'.

## Can we bridge the digital divide? What can the international library community do about the growing gap between those with access to ICT and those without?

In: LA Record, October 2001

The digital divide is one of the biggest issues facing the world today. It is surely up there with the environment and the future of the planet and, after the terrible events in the USA, international security. By a whole range of measures, most of us in the West live incomparably more comfortable lives than the majority of people in the developing world. Rapidly advancing information and telecommunications technologies (ICTs) potentially have the power to help improve living conditions in the countries of the South. But they also threaten to increase the gap in living standards. Can libraries help to bridge the growing digital divide? I believe they can, if we seize the opportunity.

What is the digital divide?

Put simply the digital divide is the growing gap between those parts of the world which have easy access to knowledge, information, ideas and works of imagination through technology, and those which do not. The OECD report *Understanding the Digital Divide* describes it in these terms: “...*the gap between individuals, households, businesses and geographic areas at different socio-economic levels with regard both to their opportunities to access information and communications technologies and to their use of the internet for a wide variety of activities*”. (1)

Can the digital divide be measured?

A number of measures have been developed, although national statistics are often not comparable. The same OECD report suggests that, within households, the digital divide appears to depend primarily on two variables: income and education. But other variables, such as household size and type, age, gender, racial and linguistic backgrounds, and location, also play an important role. These measures are valuable to those tackling the digital divide, especially in the developed world, exemplified by the People's Network in the UK and the programmes of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in the USA. But what about the divide between countries in the developed and developing world? The OECD report argues that telecommunication access paths are the basic symptom of the digital divide.

In OECD countries in 1998 there were 72.1 access paths per 100 inhabitants, whereas in non-OECD countries the figure was a mere 7.8. In countries with the lowest Gross Domestic Product there were only 1.6 lines per 100 inhabitants. (2).

Another measure used by the OECD is the number of internet hosts. In October 2000 there were 81.5 internet hosts per 1,000 population in OECD countries, but only 0.85 per 1,000 in other countries. Measured by internet hosts, the international digital divide is growing rapidly. In October 1997, the divide in internet host penetration between Africa and North America was a multiple of 267; by October 2000, this had grown to a multiple of 540. (3)

Costs are also often prohibitive. According to the US Internet Council's State of the Internet Report 2000 : “*The monthly connection cost for the internet in Africa exceeds the [total]*

*monthly income of a significant proportion of the population.*” (4). Other problems cited by the same report are *“low computer availability, illiteracy, lack of trained personnel, disinterest and failure to understand the benefits of internet access”*. (5).

Anyone who has lived in the developing world could add a few more factors, such as a lack of assured electricity supply and the sheer need to concentrate on survival. A recent newspaper headline claimed *“Poor need Penicillin before Pentiums”* (6). An incident in Uganda was recounted. For years a hospital there had tried to get a telephone connection without success. Eventually it obtained a satellite connection. But a call cost US\$ 2.50 per minute (30 times the rate in the West): *“A nurse once held on for 10 minutes trying to find out the date and duration of her next training course, before giving up. Instead she got into a minibus and, six bumpy hours later, was in Kampala where she was able to get the information she needed. The cost of her round trip? The same as a five minute phone call.”* (7). That's motivation on a scale difficult to imagine in our relatively comfortable world.

But isn't the digital divide just a function of the apparently insoluble economic gap between the developed and developing world?

Yes and no. Clearly income levels are crucial. The argument that people in poor countries need clean water, access to health services and education before they need computers is often voiced. But surely these are not 'either/or', competitive scenarios? Access to accurate, timely information, making use of technology which eliminates the tyranny of distance, can facilitate the provision of clean water, health services and education. The task is daunting when you consider that estimates suggest that between a third and a half of the world's population have never made a single telephone call. Or that the number of people existing on less than one US dollar a day has remained resolutely at 1.2 billion for the last decade.

What is being done to tackle the digital divide?

One of the current initiatives most relevant to us sprang from the Okinawa Charter on the Global Information Society (8) signed by the leaders of the G8 countries when they met in Japan in July 2000. To implement the charter, the G8 leaders established a Digital Opportunity Task Force (DOT Force). The DOT Force consists of representatives of the G8 countries, the EU, eight developing countries and various international, private sector and non-profit sector organisations. It presented its report, *Digital Opportunities for All: meeting the challenge* (9) at the G8 summit held in Genoa. The report concluded that *“...when wisely applied, ICTs offer enormous opportunities to narrow social and economic inequalities and support sustainable local wealth creation, and thus help to achieve the broader development goals that the international community has set. ICTs cannot of course act as a panacea for all development problems but, by dramatically improving communication and exchange of information, they can create powerful social and economic networks, which in turn provide the basis for major advances in development.”* (10). There are nine action points in the report and, although libraries are sadly not specifically mentioned, there are many proposals within these action points which are directly relevant. A few examples include:

- support the establishment of public and community ICT access points in developing countries as a key means to facilitate timely, broad, affordable and sustainable access to ICT;
- place emphasis on providing both access and training;
- identify effective measures to enhance the use of the internet to improve the performance of staff, teachers, pupils and students in schools and universities, and for distance learning programmes;

- encourage governments to provide widely-available free-of-charge access to state-owned information and local content;
- encourage local content development, translation and/or adaptation in developing countries;
- support programmes for digitising and putting public content online, focusing on multi-language applications and local heritage;
- encourage networking of bodies which acquire, adapt and distribute content on a non-commercial basis; and
- encourage publishers to explore possible business models to enhance greater accessibility for poor people to relevant content.

The G8 leaders adopted the report and we await details of how it will be implemented.

What's the international library community doing?

When we learned about the Okinawa Charter I wrote on behalf of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) to all the G8 leaders. I expressed support for the principles in the charter, reminded them of the potential role of libraries, and indicated that IFLA was ready to participate in the work of the DOT Force in any appropriate way. I received positive replies from most.

We established a 'Shadow G8', consisting of representatives of the library associations of the G8 countries to keep watch and submit documents. I attended a meeting at UNESCO, as part of the consultation process, and followed it up with a contribution to UNESCO's submission to the DOT Force. Following the Genoa meeting, we shall be urging our member library associations to make representations to their governments to ensure widespread adoption of its recommendations. We hope that they will be reminding their governments of the potentially vital role of libraries in the development process. After all, in many countries, there exists a network of libraries, which, with relatively modest investment, could act as the 'community ICT access points' promoted in the report.

At a meeting of the Shadow G8, held during the recent IFLA conference in Boston, USA, we agreed to develop a manifesto on libraries and the digital divide, to complement the IFLA/Unesco Public Library Manifesto (11) and School Library Manifesto (12). Such a manifesto could be used as an advocacy tool with politicians, influencers and holders of purse strings, when they consider 'e-strategies' in their countries, as recommended in the DOT Force report. We plan to issue the manifesto in many different languages.

In 2000, IFLA established a joint steering group with the International Publishers' Association (IPA). The idea was to create a joint forum, which could discuss areas of mutual interest, such as freedom to publish/freedom of access to information, legal and voluntary deposit, archiving of electronic publications, etc. The group has now had four meetings and has issued a press release on progress so far (13). Among the issues discussed has been differential pricing for libraries in developing countries unable to afford rapidly increasing prices for print journals or licences for electronic journals. IFLA members of the group were therefore especially pleased to learn of the announcement by the World Health Organisation and others of moves to provide reduced-charge or free subscriptions to selected journals (14). We hope that this is the beginning of a trend, which would help to fulfil another of the recommendations of the DOT Force report.

There is growing evidence that decisions of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) may adversely affect the operations and future development of library and information services in the not-for-profit sector, in both the developed and developing worlds. IFLA was represented at the WTO Ministerial conference in Seattle, and will be represented at the forthcoming conference in Doha, Qatar, next month.

WTO oversees a number of treaties governing international trade. There are two specific treaties, which have implications for library and information services: the General Agreement on Trade in Services (Gats); and the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (Trips). The Gats agreement has the potential to open up all aspects of a national economy to foreign competition, including public sector services such as libraries. In their submissions to the Gats negotiations, individual countries make commitments on service sectors they wish to open to competition. At the beginning of the second round of Gats negotiations in 2001, 13 countries, including eight developing nations, had made a commitment to open negotiations on libraries, archives, museums and other cultural services. It is probable that many more countries will be entering Gats negotiations, which could directly affect their library services, even if they have not listed them in their commitments. The IFLA Governing Board has therefore approved a statement, 15 prepared by the Copyright and other Legal Matters Committee (CLM). The statement urges national association members of IFLA to do all they can to ensure that government support for public sector library and information services is not exposed to a Gats challenge.

The danger in the Trips agreement is that it could negate hard-won achievements in recent negotiations on copyright law. A WTO dispute panel has, for example, recently found that a permitted use in a national copyright law was in violation of international trade treaty commitments. So we are alerting our national association members, and urging them to work to ensure that the interests of libraries and library users are not marginalised through the application of the WTO regime to domestic copyright legislation.

All this is easier said than done. It will be hard enough for well-funded associations such as those in the UK and the USA, with long experience of advocacy and lobbying, to resist these harmful developments. What chance has an association in a developing country, depending entirely on voluntary effort? We must work hard in the international library community to provide whatever support we can. One way is to speak up for libraries and their users on the world stage.

Libraries can help bridge the digital divide. But we have much to do to persuade world leaders, international organisations and national governments that we are key players.

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## LIBRARIES

### Introduction during a meeting at the World Trade Organisation (WTO), Geneva December 2002

*“Even the most misfitting child  
Who's chanced upon the library's worth,  
Sits with the genius of the Earth  
And turns the key to the whole world.”* Ted Hughes, 1997.

#### WHAT IS A LIBRARY?

A library is a collection of materials, containing information, ideas and works of imagination, organised for use, and staffed by people trained to make them available.

Libraries take many physical forms, ranging from large purpose-built buildings, to rooms in parent institutions, and small temporary structures. Mobile examples include road vehicles, boats, trains, trams and even donkeys and camels.

Their collections range from a few thousand in for example a school library, to several millions. The library experience can range from an evening at the Metropolitan Opera to half an hour at Sesame Street, to the key to an understanding metaphysics.

The term ‘library’ is often taken to equate to ‘public library’. However, there is a huge variety of other kinds of libraries, fulfilling different purposes and serving different client groups.

Most countries have a ‘national library,’ which often has the role of coordinating the network of other kinds of libraries throughout that country, in addition to collecting materials and making them available.

Most countries also have a large network of public libraries. The American Library Association, for example, boasts that the public library network in that country has many times more outlets than McDonalds. The UK network consists of around 5,000 service points.

Educational Institutions, such as universities, colleges and schools all have libraries, serving the educational objectives of their parent bodies. In some countries, it is common for them to be open to the general public. Indeed, in Norway, university libraries have to be open to the public by law. In a small number of countries, notably in Eastern Europe, a large university library also acts as the national library.

Libraries also provide vital services in government departments, research institutes, museums, and in many different environments in the private sector.

Libraries are needed more than ever in an age in which people and communities desperately need to consider alternative points of view and information, to challenge the spin doctors and the mass media, to take control of their own destinies and make up their own minds.

## **HOW MANY LIBRARIES ARE THERE?**

This is difficult to say but it is estimated that in the area of the current member states of the European Union there are 90,000 libraries. On that basis there must be well over 250,000 around the world. They exist throughout the world even in the least developed countries.

## **WHAT DO LIBRARIES MAKE AVAILABLE?**

Traditionally libraries have acquired print-based materials, including newspapers, maps, pamphlets, illustrations and many other items as well as books. Despite the popular misconception, they have never confined themselves to books. Indeed, libraries pre-dated the invention of the book, collecting papyrus scrolls (the original Alexandria library was a good example) and manuscripts (the mediaeval monastery libraries, for instance). It was therefore no great leap forward to collect every new medium that contained information as it emerged. All forms of sound and visual recording (for example, gramophone records, cassettes, CDs, videos, and DVDs) quickly joined the collections in many kinds of libraries as they became available. Computer based sources of information were quickly added to the portfolios and there are now many libraries around the world which have very substantial collections of CD ROMs and electronic journals. Many publications are now 'born digital' and a good proportion never appear in print form. Where they do, the digital and print versions are increasingly different in content. As a result, there are some libraries which, to the first-time visitor, do not look like the conventional idea of a "library" at all.

It should be noted that there has been a long-term trend towards the creation of global media corporations embracing publications in many different media, created in different countries. Content is much more important than the medium which contains the content. On the other hand for many kinds of media, especially those in the Scientific, Technical and Medical (STM) fields, libraries are a hugely important market segment. An advantage of the application of new technologies recently emerging is the ability to introduce differential pricing in favour of libraries in the developing world. However, there remains substantial cause for concern in the growing concentration of media ownership into fewer, larger corporations. It is increasingly important that libraries collect and make available the output of smaller, more local and specialist publishers.

## **WHAT SERVICES DO THEY PROVIDE?**

This depends very much on the kind of library and the client group or groups it serves. National libraries, for example, usually are required to collect and preserve the national publishing output of the country it serves, making sure that it is available not only for current users, but also for future generations. Typically they also compile the national bibliography of publications, and act as the library of last resort for items, which other libraries in the national library network cannot provide. They are usually assisted in their task of collecting by a legal deposit system, whereby publishers have to make copies of their publications available to them free of charge. They frequently have sophisticated preservation and conservation programmes. Electronic publishing provides many challenges to this aspect of their role. National libraries also often take on the role of making available material published in other countries, especially scientific and technical publications.

Public libraries typically provide services free of charge to anyone who wishes to use them, although lending is often restricted to residents of the locality. Many provide literacy

programmes, reader development promotions and act as an information point for the availability of local public services. Typically they collect and preserve a wide range of materials relating to the history and development of the locality. Special services have been developed to serve the needs of particular groups such as children (including story-telling programmes), housebound people, and the visually impaired.

Libraries in education institutions have developed a wide range of services to meet the educational objectives of their parent institutions. School libraries clearly need to support the curriculum, but they also collect books and other materials to encourage reading and spirit of enquiry, as well as to meet the needs of the teachers and administrative staff.

Universities are among the most advanced in terms of developing electronic based services. Many have large collections of electronic journals, as well as sophisticated searching tools available both to students and faculty. Teaching hospitals are often attached to universities. They require sophisticated library services to make available the latest medical research published in a variety of media.

Libraries in the corporate sector have been in the forefront of developing services tailored to meet the needs of individuals or small groups of clients. They profile their users (the employees of the firm) and package information and provide alerting systems to ensure they are aware of the latest information relating to their current research or project. Increasingly they are involved in knowledge management, harnessing the totality of the knowledge available in their company.

### **HOW ARE LIBRARIES FUNDED?**

National Libraries are typically funded by the government from taxes. But in common with most public services around the world, they need to supplement these funds with money raised from a range of sources, including sponsorship, charging for some services, sales of publications, etc. A recent free exhibition put on at the National Library of Australia of library treasures from around the world raised over a million Australian dollars in sales of publications and related merchandise.

Public libraries typically rely on a combination of national and local government funding, increasingly supplemented by charges for some services and sponsorship or project money.

Educational libraries rely primarily on income from their parent institution. But they too are usually encouraged to raise income from a variety of sources. Those in the corporate sector are usually regarded as cost centres contributing to company objectives.

### **DO LIBRARIES WORK TOGETHER?**

Yes. Libraries have a long tradition of networking both within countries and across national boundaries. Most countries have inter-library lending systems whereby books and other documents not in stock may be borrowed to satisfy the needs of a local user. These systems expanded into document delivery systems once photocopying became generally available and electronic document delivery is becoming the norm in some subject areas.

Libraries also collaborate in such areas as collection development to avoid the duplication of expensive works and to ensure comprehensive collections in a region, and in staff training.

Consortia of libraries, either of a particular type or in a particular region are developing primarily to negotiate licences for the purchase and use of electronic publications.

Libraries have grasped the opportunities presented by the application of new technologies to revolutionise the technical processes required to deliver services. Examples include shared cataloguing, whereby many libraries share the task of preparing catalogue records so that duplication of effort is avoided. Other examples include self-issue and return systems, and security measures.

A recent trend is the convergence of the so-called memory institutions, including some kinds of libraries, archives and museums. One objective is to take advantage of new technologies to make available the collection of all three types of institutions to users in one of them, or indeed remotely from all of them

### **HOW ARE LIBRARIANS TRAINED?**

In most countries librarians are educated in universities in what used to be called 'library schools' at undergraduate, masters and doctorate level, depending largely on the overall educational tradition in the country or region. This is supplemented by periods of practical training and experience. In some countries this leads to a licence to practise. In others, the courses themselves are accredited by the professional body. The curriculum includes studies of information science, computer based information systems, electronic publishing, legal considerations, including intellectual property laws and understanding user needs, as well as the more traditional subjects such as reference sources, cataloguing, indexing and classification. Specialist, optional programmes treat serving user groups such as children, the visually impaired, those with learning disabilities, and specific industries, etc.

### **DO WE NEED LIBRARIES NOW THAT WE HAVE THE INTERNET?**

Yes. Although a great deal of information is available on the desk top of anyone with a computer linked to the Internet, much of it is spurious and disorganized. Some of it is of course dangerous. Much of the information that is authoritative is available only in return for payment. Thus users need to access materials through libraries which have skilled staff to search efficiently, are able to identify authentic sites and can obtain access to paid-for sources through site licences.

### **WHAT ARE THE CONCERNS UNDER GATS?**

We are concerned that, under some interpretations of GATS, publicly-funded libraries, or at least some services provided by them may be threatened by the rulings that require national governments to give the same treatment to commercial enterprises from other countries as they do to publicly-funded services. The fear is that this could result in the withdrawal of public funding to such services on the grounds that they are unfair subsidies. In the case of library services the result could be that only those who are willing and able to pay for such services at commercial rates would have access to the information they need. This would be in complete contrast to aspirations to bridge the digital divide both within nations and between nations. It would defeat the aims behind organising the World Summit on the Information Society in Geneva next year and Tunis in 2005.

**And finally .....**

*“The information superhighway should not just benefit the affluent or the metropolitan. Just as in the past books were a chance for ordinary people to better themselves, in the future online education will be a route to better prospects. But just as books are available from public libraries, the benefits of the superhighway must be there for everyone. This is a real chance for equality of opportunity...”*

**Tony Blair, New Britain: My Vision of a Young Country (1996)**

Quotations are taken from *New library; the people's network*. London: Library and Information Commission, 1998.

## **IFLA: the Global Voice of Librarians**

### **An address given to the RSL-Mellon Foundation conference, Culture: from Information to Knowledge, the role of culture in the knowledge based society, Moscow, 7<sup>th</sup> –9<sup>th</sup> April 2003**

Good morning!

It is a great pleasure to be here to participate in this exciting conference. This is only my second visit to Moscow. The first was for the IFLA conference in August 1991 when the momentous political events completely overshadowed the conference. I trust that the atmosphere outside the conference halls this week will continue to be peaceful and calm on this occasion.

The title of my talk makes a big claim “IFLA: the Global Voice of Librarians”. But I believe that it is true. Who else can speak up for the interests of librarians, libraries and the users of libraries on the world stage?

Our voice needs to be heard. Our profession should have no fears about the concept of globalisation. We have understood, at least since the Middle Ages, that information; ideas, knowledge and indeed culture crossed national and regional boundaries. The monks and scholars of those times defeated even the language barriers. Today support the free flow of information as embodied in Article XIX of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: *“Everyone has the right to freedom of expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”* (1). In many ways the increasing availability of modern technology is making that ideal come closer to reality.

However, we should have greater concerns about some aspects of the impact of globalisation. The aftermath of the terrorist attacks of the 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001 are still being felt around the world. In many countries legislation has been passed which restricts the very freedoms for which we have fought for over the years. In some, for example, the authorities are able to demand the reading records of library users and the purchase records of booksellers. Some legislation is alleged to prevent librarians or booksellers telling their clients that such investigations are taking place. There have been examples of library users being reported to the police because staff or other users have thought that they were accessing material of use to a terrorist. The use of crude Internet filtering software is increasing in libraries around the world. There is also evidence of increasing self-censorship, or at least over caution, in materials selection. And that is not all, as more money is spent on such things as ‘homeland security’, armed forces, not to mention the war in Iraq, as tensions and oil prices rise, inevitably there is less public money available for libraries and other cultural services.

So our voice needs to be heard.

We need to ensure that politicians, diplomats, civil servants and business leaders who make the decisions that affect our lives understand that libraries can help make a real difference. Libraries can help bridge the digital divide. Libraries have a key role in tackling illiteracy. Libraries and other cultural institutions can help rebuild communities in post-war Afghanistan and post-war Iraq.

How does IFLA make sure that our voice is heard? We can and do ensure that we are represented at key international agencies when they discuss matters where we have an interest or a role to play.

We have Formal Associate Relations status with UNESCO (that is the highest consultative status accorded to NGOs by that body). That recognition has enabled us to obtain the UNESCO stamp of approval for our Public Library and School Library manifestos. I hope that UNESCO will adopt our Internet manifesto later this month. Our good relationship with UNESCO has also enabled us to publish our public library guidelines with its seal of approval in several languages and run workshops in different parts of the world to encourage implementation of the recommendations.

In the area of copyright and intellectual property we aim to ensure that an equitable balance is struck between the rights of the creators and distributors on the one hand and the needs of users on the other. This is, ironically, increasingly difficult in the electronic arena where licences and technical provisions can be used to restrict, rather than increase, access. We seek to ensure representation at appropriate meetings of the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) in Geneva and to submit comments on consultation documents issued by them and by such bodies as UNESCO. The length and frequency of such meetings and the depth of knowledge required, not to mention the necessary lobbying skills and sheer stamina present us with a major challenge.

There is a worldwide trend towards the privatisation of public services and towards opening up new areas for international competition. The World Trade Organisation is at the forefront of these developments. A current concern is that the general Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) may seriously affect library services that are publicly funded. We are especially concerned that in, certain circumstances, some specialist services offered by libraries, such as Internet access, or document delivery services, may be challenged by private companies. We have conducted talks on these matters with WTO and EU officials. We were represented at the WTO ministerial conference in Seattle. We submitted evidence to the conference in Doha, Qatar, and we intend to be represented at the next event in Cancún, Mexico.

The biggest opportunity for our voice to be heard on the world stage is the World Summit on the Information Society to be held in Geneva in December 2003 and Tunis 2005. We must convince those attending that libraries have the potential to help the main aim of this summit which is to agree steps to bridge the digital divide. The problem needs to be tackled both within countries and between countries.

- We know what libraries can do. We know that “they” do not have to re-invent the wheel.
- We know that with a relatively modest investment in an infrastructure that already exists in most countries, libraries can provide access to information, ideas and knowledge through a variety of formats and materials.
- We need to find ways of getting the message across to the decision-makers.

So far, we have attending many preparatory meetings at UNESCO in Paris, regional meetings, and the second Preparatory Committee meeting in Geneva. Still to come are another meeting in Paris, PrepCom3 in Geneva and the World Summit itself in December. We have prepared a number of documents, intervened in meetings and encouraged others to do so. We have invited Mr. Adama Samassékou, the President of the Preparatory Committee to speak at our congress in Berlin. I am delighted to say that he has agreed. I recommend that you attend this

session. He is a lively speaker and an influential personality. We are organising, with the energetic help of our Swiss members, a pre-summit briefing conference at which librarians from around the world will be able to brief national delegates to the World Summit about the key role that libraries can play in developing an equitable information society. We are preparing an advocacy tool kit for our members and others to use to brief politicians, civil servants, the media and anyone who will listen. We are also planning a few publicity stunts to take place at the time of the Summit.

Naturally, it is more effective if you can forge alliances with other organisations with similar views or objectives. A great deal of our effort takes place in such a context. For example, for three years now we have had a joint steering group with the International Publishers Association (IPA). There are of course a number of areas in which we have different points of view, especially in matters such as copyright and intellectual property, though even here we have managed to find some common ground. But there are others, such as the need to promote literacy, the principles of freedom to publish and freedom of information where our views coincide closely. We worked together in Geneva at the World Summit Preparatory Committee, for example, to maximise our impact on access to information. IPA is, with our help, formulating a resolution to their congress on the need for adequate funding of libraries.

An excellent example of a strategic alliance is the International Committee of the Blue Shield. This aims to be the cultural equivalent of the Red Cross. It has four founding members; IFLA, the International Council on Archives (ICA), the International Council of Museums (ICOM) and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS). UNESCO and the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) are observers at our meetings. I am the current President. We encourage the establishment of national Blue Shield committees. France, the UK & Ireland, Macedonia, Italy have for example established national committees. We aim to improve disaster preparedness and to coordinate action after natural disasters or armed conflict. We are recognised in the Second Protocol to The Hague Convention of the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. The Blue Shield is the symbol of this Convention. We have recently issued statements on the impact of the war in Iraq and the continuing conflict in Israel and Palestine as well as the need for more work in Afghanistan. Our statement on Iraq has gained widespread media coverage. We have written to the presidents of Iraq and the USA, the prime minister of the UK and the heads of the UN and UNESCO.

However there is a strict limit to what IFLA can do. We have a tiny headquarters staff and all our board and committee members have many other commitments to their employers.

Our work at the international level needs to be complemented by work at the national level.

For example, our attempts to persuade the national delegations in Geneva at the World Summit on the Information Society would be much more effective if they were reinforced by effective lobbying by IFLA members (national and institutional members) through appropriate channels. These might be national UNESCO commissions, a ministry of culture, or the ambassador to the UN in Geneva. Contact with your national media on these issues is also essential. One message we need to get across is that, whilst the technical infrastructure is important, the content is equally important. At the PrepCom2 meetings people seemed much more concerned about the pipes than what was going to be delivered through those pipes. I would like to encourage you to keep checking IFLANET for the latest developments on the

World Summit. You will see there some of the documents we have submitted and you will find links to the WSIS site itself.

This combination of our work at the international level and your work at the national level can be replicated in other areas, such as the World Trade Organisation, where you need to contact your government's trade representatives and the Blue Shield, where it would be very helpful to have many more national Blue Shield committees.

I hope that we can all agree to leave this conference with a clear resolution to ensure that our collective voice will be heard, and listened to, so that the role of libraries in bridging the digital divide is better understood.

## The Blue Shield: the Cultural Red Cross?

**Paper presented to the IFLA Preservation and Conservation Section  
Satellite Meeting 'Preparing for the Worst, Planning for the Best:  
Protecting our Cultural Heritage from Disaster' 30<sup>th</sup> July – 1<sup>st</sup>  
August, 2003, Berlin**



Those terrible images of the looting, destruction and torching of the National Museum, National Library and Archives and other cultural institutions in Baghdad reminded us all (if indeed we needed reminding so soon after the rocket-propelled destruction of the Buddha statues in Afghanistan) of just how vulnerable our cultural heritage is.

The records of human civilisations; archives, books, manuscripts, tablets, monuments, artefacts of all kinds, historic sites, and the structures which house them, are more than the cultural property of those particular civilisations they record, and their successors. They individually help to define a people and a culture. They confer an identity to individuals and groups. But together, they are the common inheritance of all humanity.

We need them to survive down the centuries so that we can anchor ourselves both in the past and in the present. So they need protection from disasters – those brought on by people (war, conflict, terrorism), by nature (floods, earthquake and the local environment), and accident (fire and other disasters). They also need protection from neglect, such as lack of investment in staff, equipment and maintenance.

One form of protection is the Blue Shield. The Blue Shield is the official symbol of The Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict of 1954. It makes provision for the safeguarding of cultural property paralleling the humanitarian provisions in the much better known Geneva Conventions.

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The Hague convention requires states to:

- prepare in time of peace for the safeguarding of cultural property against the effects of armed conflict
- refrain from any act of hostility against such property
- respect cultural property by refraining from any use of the property likely to expose it to damage or destruction in the event of armed conflict
- prohibit, prevent and put a stop to theft, pillage, or misappropriation of. And any acts of vandalism directed against, cultural property
- refrain from any reprisals against cultural property
- introduce military regulations to ensure observance of the Convention and foster respect for the culture and cultural property of all peoples

- establish services and personnel within their armed forces to secure such respect and to co-operate with civilian authorities.

However, the provisions for enforcement and for sanctions in the event of non-compliance are “*remarkably weak and rather vague*” according to expert Patrick Boylan. (1).

In 1999, a Second Protocol to The Hague Convention was adopted. It greatly limited the circumstances in which an attack on cultural property could be mounted on the grounds of “*military necessity*”. It also made provision for “*exceptional protection*” for the most important sites and institutions.

Perhaps most important of all, it introduced the concept of a “*cultural war crime*”. For the first time, once the Protocol comes into effect, there will be permanent institutional arrangements to oversee the application of the Convention. The ‘States Parties’ (that is the member states which have signed and ratified the Convention and its Protocol) will meet every two years. There will also be a 12-member committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, which will meet at least once a year.

The International Committee of the Blue Shield is formally recognised in the Protocol as an advisory body to the Committee and to the States Parties.

When will the Protocol come into effect? When a minimum of 20 states have signed and ratified the Protocol. Fifteen have done so at present. We know that several (including the United Kingdom) have announced their intention to do so shortly. We hope that sufficient will do so in time for it to come into effect in the year of the fiftieth anniversary of The Hague Convention - 2004.

Why is it important? Apart from the enhanced protection it will give to designated sites, the concept of a war crime is important. It will mean that those responsible for the deliberate damage to and destruction of cultural institutions (and collections) can be prosecuted. This should act as a stronger deterrent compared with the current sanctions.

What is the International Committee of the Blue Shield? It is a small body with large ambitions. It was founded in 1996 by the four international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) representing the interests of archives, libraries, monuments and sites, and museums; The International Council on Archives (ICA), the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), the International Council of Museums (ICOM) and IFLA. It works closely with UNESCO, whose representatives attend its meetings, and a representative of the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) is an observer. We have also recently decided to invite a representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross. Our remit is to:

- to facilitate international responses to threats or emergencies threatening cultural property
- to encourage safeguarding and respect for cultural property, especially by promoting risk preparedness

- to train experts at national and regional level to prevent, control and recover from disasters
- to act in an advisory capacity for the protection of endangered heritage
- to consult and co-operate with other bodies including UNESCO, ICCROM and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

I think that you will agree that, for an organisation without a penny to its name, it is demanding list.

What do we do? Perhaps I can best answer this by a case study. Each of the four founding organisations is represented by one, or sometimes two, people. One representative is usually the Secretary General of the organisation. We meet three or four times a year. Each of the four NGOs takes it in turns to host the meetings – usually in Paris. When it is IFLA’s turn Marie-Thérèse Varlamoff (who is one of IFLA’s regular representatives) arranges for us to meet in the Bibliothèque nationale de France. We discuss current issues. Recent examples have included the floods in Eastern Europe, the war in Afghanistan, the conflict in Israel and Palestine and, of course, the war in Iraq.

At our meeting in February this year, we decided to issue statements, raising our concerns about:

- the lack of progress in restoring cultural institutions in Afghanistan
- the impact of the continuing conflict in Israel and Palestine, and
- the potential damage to cultural property in Iraq, if war broke out.

We issued these as press releases. As the current President of ICBS, I wrote to Presidents George Bush and Saddam Hussein and Prime Minister Tony Blair urging them to “take all necessary steps to protect cultural property in the event of war breaking out”. I sent copies of these letters to the ambassadors of the three countries in The Hague and their representatives at UNESCO. I wrote a letter to the London *Guardian* newspaper raising the same concerns, which they published.

In the immediate aftermath of the war, we issued a further statement expressing our horror at the reports of looting, destruction and loss of material at the archives, libraries and museums. We urged the coalition forces to protect the collections, institutions and sites. We also urged the governments of the USA and the UK to ratify the Second Protocol. I wrote again to George Bush and Tony Blair along the same lines.

UNESCO called an emergency meeting in Paris on 17<sup>th</sup> April. We were fully represented. We fought hard to ensure that archives and libraries were included in the report of the meeting and that one of the recommendations should be that a multi-disciplinary mission would be sent to Iraq to investigate the situation and make recommendations. This was agreed. We were also represented at a meeting in early May called by INTERPOL in Lyon to discuss measures to be taken to prevent illicit trade in cultural goods illegally exported from Iraq.

A mission was sent in June. Although a librarian had been identified by UNESCO to take part – Jean-Marie Arnoult (the predecessor of Marie-Therese Varlamoff as

Director of IFLA/PAC) – he was prevented from going. The official reason was that the size of the mission had to be reduced on security grounds. We protested strongly about this and gained a great deal of publicity.

We posted on the Blue Shield pages on IFLANET reports of the situation in Iraq as we received them.

UNESCO sent a second mission on 30 June returning on 6 July. Jean-Marie Arnoult was a member of this mission. At the time of preparing this paper we anxiously await the report and its recommendations. A preliminary report from M. Arnoult makes sober reading:

- *“The area of the archives [in the National Library building] was probably looted before being totally destroyed by fire.”*
- *“A number of plastic bags (about 40-50) are stored in a mosque in Revolution City (formerly Saddam City) with books of the National Library.... The content was mostly archival documents from the mandate period up to 1958.”*
- *“Conditions are very bad (high temperature and humidity, dust, insects and rodents).”*
- *“The structure of the building [National Library] is destroyed: it cannot be restored and must be pulled down.”*
- *“The restoration unit of the Centre for Manuscripts has been completely looted.”*
- *“The [Basra Central Public Library] has been totally looted and burnt. Nothing remaining except walls weakened by fire. It is not possible to restore the building.”*

Clearly a huge effort is required, not only to retrieve, restore, protect and re-house the historic materials, but also to build a modern archives, library and information infrastructure as part of the process of rebuilding the state of Iraq.

Until now that is as much as we have been able to do – urge, exhort governments and agencies, issue statements, gain publicity, encourage greater awareness via the media among the public of the irreversible damage being done to our cultural heritage.

We also encourage the establishment of national Blue Shield committees. So far, committees have been established in: Belgium, Benin, the Czech Republic, France, Italy, Macedonia, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland and the United Kingdom & Ireland. National Committees are also being established in Australia, Canada and Peru.

They can sometimes carry out positive action, for example by sending experts and equipment to other countries, in response to emergencies. In some cases they can raise funds to support local response teams. Typically, national Blue Shield committees bring together representatives of the four professional disciplines and the military authorities and the emergency services. Apart from responses to emergencies, they can encourage institutions to prepare disaster plans and train military and emergency services personnel in the steps to be taken to protect cultural institutions and collections. They can also work with customs and police to identify cultural property illegally imported or exported.

Very soon we hope that ICBS will be able to undertake positive action in response to emergencies. Up to now we have had no resources of our own, and no direct access to

any external funds. Very shortly we hope to be able to announce that an emergency rescue fund will be set up in partnership with a respected foundation in the Netherlands. The intention is that, with the minimum of red tape, we will be able to mount a rescue mission, send some equipment or essential materials to make a real difference on the ground. Success in modest actions like this, we hope, will enable us to draw down funds from other foundations, so that we can intervene in a larger number of situations.

When the Second Protocol comes into force, ICBS will gain official recognition. We will act as advisers when an application is made to designate a cultural institution or collection as needing enhanced protection. My hope is that this recognition will, of itself, enable us to attract greater financial resources. Meanwhile, in cooperation with ICOM and ICOMOS, we hope to establish a small office in Paris.

What can you do to help make the Blue Shield to be more effective?

You could urge your government to ratify the Second Protocol of The Hague Convention, if it has not already done so. A full list of the countries that have ratified the Protocol is available on the Blue Shield pages of IFLANET. The sooner 20 countries ratify, the sooner it will come into effect.

You could get into contact with your national Blue Shield committee. They almost certainly will welcome your support. A full list of the national committees and those in the process of being established, together with contact details are on the Blue Shield pages on IFLANET.

If your country does not have a committee, take steps to set one up. The criteria for a national committee to be recognised by ICBS are listed on the Blue Shield pages on IFLANET.

You could publicise the activities of ICBS and the national committees and the need to protect cultural heritage by writing to the professional and national press.

If you are interested in learning more about the situation of archives and libraries in Iraq, please come to the special session on Iraq at 8:30 in the morning on Tuesday 5th August in Hall 4 during the World Library and Information Congress next week.

The protection, rescue and restoration of our cultural heritage are vital tasks. To do the job properly we need the energy, commitment and resources – and recognition - available to the Red Cross.

My hope is that, one day the term ‘Blue Shield’ will have the same resonance as the ‘Red Cross’ and that we shall have the resources to establish the cultural equivalent of *Medicins sans Frontières*.

#### Reference

- (1) Boylan, Patrick. The 1954 Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its 1954 and 1999 Protocols. In: A Blue Shield for the protection of our endangered cultural heritage: proceedings of the open session co-organized by PAC core activity and the Section on

National Libraries. Edited by Corine Koch. International Preservation Issues number four. Paris: IFLA Core Activity on Preservation and Conservation, 2003. pp 4-15.  
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Further information about the International Committee of the Blue Shield is provided in:

MacKenzie, George. The Blue Shield: symbol of cultural heritage protection. In: op.cit pp16-18.

More information, including a link to The Hague Convention is provided in the Blue Shield pages on IFLANET at: <http://www.ifla.org/blueshield.htm>

## The Situation in Iraq

### Guest Editorial in Alexandria 15 (2003) Nr. 2 (November)

The American and British-led war in Iraq was played out continuously on our TV screens, on the radio, in the print media and on the Internet. It was possibly the most public war of all time, with something of the qualities of obsessive sports coverage, a characteristic enhanced by the 'embedded journalists'. Yet, although the war was pronounced to be over ten weeks ago at the time of writing, we continue to be singularly uninformed about many aspects - including whether the stated reasons for the war in the first place were based on reliable information.

How is it that, in a period frequently described as the 'information age', with all the technology available, at least in industrialized nations, we still do not know what really happened to the major libraries of Iraq and their collections immediately before the war, during the war or in the aftermath of the conflict?

The vivid and alarming reports of the looting and torching of the National Library and Archives in Baghdad by Robert Fisk in the *Independent* alerted all of us in the heritage world to the tragedy that was unfolding. Our worst fears seemed to be on the way to fulfilment. As president of the International Committee of the Blue Shield (a group of non-government organizations with the aim of becoming the cultural equivalent of the Red Cross)\*, I had written before the war to Presidents George Bush and Saddam Hussein, and Prime Minister Tony Blair, urging them to uphold the principles of the Hague Convention on the protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict. Since Iraq has large numbers of cultural sites and collections of universal significance, extra care should have been taken, we argued, to both protect them and to ensure that they were not used as shields for military institutions. Evidence suggests that no notice was taken of our concerns, also voiced by many other groups.

Towards the end of the conflict, images of the burnt and looted buildings were accompanied by claims and counter claims. The looting had been pre-meditated and done to order of international art thieves. The buildings had been used as defensive military positions. Many valuable items had been removed by staff to safe havens before war broke out. Some institutions had been attacked as representatives of a hated regime. They had been looted by local people in order to acquire furniture or equipment to use themselves or to sell on. Looted items were subsequently handed in at mosques in response to appeals by religious leaders. The losses were much less than at first feared. The National Library was three stories of 'book ash'.

What is the truth? The truth is that nobody outside of Iraq knows. Why not? Because UNESCO, the international agency most able to carry out a thorough and impartial investigation, has not yet been able to carry out a multidisciplinary mission to discover what has happened and what needs to be done. The reasons are partly the continuing lack of security in Iraq (indeed the war seems hardly to be really over) and partly the consequence of the disagreements in the UN Security Council before the war. As I write a mission is just about to depart. Let us hope it can find out the truth and bring back some practical suggestions.

An optimist can perhaps discern several silver linings in this very dark cloud. One is the increased pressure on the governments of the USA and the UK to ratify the Second Protocol to the Hague Convention. This would give enhanced protection to selected sites and collections in the future. It would also make it a war crime deliberately to destroy or damage protected cultural heritage. Another is the prominence given to the value of our common cultural heritage to society at large. What is the point in going to war to protect the values we hold dear, if in doing so we not only kill innocent people, but also destroy the historic records of the very civilization we uphold?

But my hope is that in doing our very best to protect what has not been destroyed and to reconstruct the Iraqi library and information system, we embrace two principles, that:

- initiatives should be based on what Iraqi librarians and their users determine is needed, and
- our efforts to preserve and restore the cultural heritage of Iraq are matched by an equal effort to reconstruct a modern library and information system, essential for any state in the twenty-first century.

Iraqi citizens deserve nothing less.

*\*For more information on Blue Shield see <http://www.ifla.org/blueshield.htm>*

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