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President's Report to Council

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Dear Colleagues.

I am pleased to report to this Council meeting that our Federation is in good shape. We do of course continue to face the challenges which are faced by all associations. They include aspirations to do more than our resources can support and the ongoing need to attract more members, more corporate supporters and more resources. But with 1700 members in 150 nations indirectly representing many hundreds of thousands of information professionals, and the interests of several billion users of our services, we are a large and influential professional association.

This influence has been seen in our sustained, large scale intervention in the World Summit on the Information Society which concluded with the Summit meeting in Tunis last November. That campaign, which extended from the beginning of 2002 to the end of 2005, achieved very significant recognition by the governments of the world to the important role played by libraries and information services in the global information society. The importance of our role and the positive contribution that we made to the Summit were recognised when I was invited, on behalf of all IFLA members and those we represent, to give a plenary address at the Tunis Summit. That invitation represented very significant recognition because few outside governments and intergovernmental organisations were allowed to address the plenary sessions.

Conscious that I would be speaking to representatives of governments and organisations with limited knowledge of libraries, I said:

We are concerned with the young child who opens his first book or clicks on her first website, with the student who researches a topic, with the professional building a career, with the farmer trying to be more competitive, with the researcher using e-journals to investigate a new material or prevention of a disease and with all the people whose lives are changed through ready access to relevant and reliable information in any format.

... libraries and information services are essential to the roll out of the inclusive Information Society. Their impartial operation helps to safeguard universal civil rights and intellectual freedom. The unique feature of libraries and information services is that they respond to the particular questions and needs of individuals, complementing the general transmission of knowledge by the mass media. They build capacity and provide support and training for effective use of digital and other information resources. Libraries are critical to the development agenda and help to realise the Millennium Development Goals, including reduction of poverty.

To enable access to information by all peoples, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions is committed to the fundamental human rights to know, learn and communicate without restriction. It opposes censorship and supports balance and fairness in intellectual property regulation. IFLA is also vitally concerned to promote multilingual content, cultural diversity and the special needs of Indigenous peoples, minorities and those with disabilities.

And I concluded by urging national, regional and local governments as well as international organisations to

- *invest in library and information services as vital elements of Information Society strategies, policies and budgets*
- *promote open access to information and recognise the importance of information literacy and vigorously support for strategies to create a literate and skilled populace which can advance and benefit from the global Information Society.*

It was not inevitable that our role would be recognised because, as I have reported previously, the Summit was originally focused on ICTs. It took the advocacy of IFLA in partnership with many other organisations to shift the emphasis to the social, cultural and economic issues of the developing information society. That we succeeded to such an extent is a tribute to the commitment of many colleagues and especially many of our library associations. I cannot acknowledge the contributions of everyone in the time available today but I would like to single out our colleagues in the host nations of the Summit, Switzerland and Tunisia, who assisted our efforts most significantly. I must also thank the Bibliotheca Alexandrina in Egypt for hosting our pre Summit meeting last November in which we demonstrated that libraries **are** “the information society in action”. Those important contributions were matched by the efforts of many and the financial support of some including, especially, OCLC.

The formal Summit process has now finished but the work continues. We – each of us individually in our practice and through each of our associations – must continue to advocate the role of libraries and information services in the information society. We must use the declaration of the Summit and our own statements and declarations, including the *Alexandria Manifesto on libraries, the Information Society in Action*, to influence the governments of our nations and regional groupings to invest in libraries and information services because that ultimately means that they are investing in the development of human capital, as the economists put it.

A vital element of developing human capital is the promotion of the full spectrum of literacies as our past President, Kay Raseroka, has forcefully reminded us. Just before our pre Summit meeting last November, IFLA joined with partner organisations to hold another meeting at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, the High Level Colloquium on Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning. It issued a most important statement, *Beacons of the Information Society: the Alexandria Proclamation on Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning*, which emphasises the critical importance of information literacy in enabling people to navigate the information society. Our IFLA Section on Information Literacy has vigorously taken up the challenge to advance that agenda in partnership with UNESCO.

And partnership, which is my presidential theme, is fundamental to all we do. We could not possibly have achieved so much in the World Summit process or in so many other areas of activity without strong partners including those I have mentioned and many others. Among the most important to IFLA is the Royal Library of the Netherlands which has generously hosted our headquarters for many years. I like to think that the relationship with the Royal Library is of mutual benefit but know that IFLA could not be so effective without that strong support.

We also value our partnerships with many other organisations including several national libraries and other organisations which support our core activities financially and by providing resources including staff and accommodation. The Bibliothèque National de France, for example, continues to host the central office of our Preservation and Conservation program with a renewed relationship following the retirement of the long term director, Mme Marie-Thérèse Varlamoff, late last year. These partnerships enable us to pursue the agendas of our profession and society pillars. They enable us to advance our profession through improvement of techniques, standards and other key elements of our professional work. In doing so, they enable us to take up the big challenges I mentioned in my conference opening address for the betterment of society.

The Secretary-General will inform you of the many projects which have been undertaken by our small staff at IFLA Headquarters in The Hague and in our other offices. I would like you to join me in commending our staff for achieving so much with limited resources and should note that it has been particularly challenging to do so in the last twelve months because of the illness of several staff members and the disruption caused by major building works adjacent to our Headquarters. I am very grateful to all for their dedication, forbearance and willingness to work together to help us achieve our important goals. I am especially grateful to IFLA Secretary General Dr Peter Lor for his leadership which has enabled us to do so much over the past year, and to lay the foundations for even more over the coming period.

I must also commend my colleagues on the Governing Board. They, together with some former members and other colleagues, have given much time and intellectual application to the work of IFLA. Together we are achieving much including a process to review the operation of the new Statutes five years after they came into force, review of the Sections, repositioning of our publications, development of a strategic plan and strategies to enhance our finances. We have worked closely with the Secretary General to review the business processes employed at Headquarters and to seek to identify resources which can be devoted to the important area of advocacy.

While we continue to do so much to promote the role of libraries and information services and to raise issues of concern to our members and the profession through the dedicated work of volunteers – at the World Summit, through CLM and FAIFE and in many other ways – we need more full time paid staff to support our efforts and provide professional expertise in advocacy. And those staff members need to be resourced with office support and space, as well as travel, printing and all of the other investments required to press our case.

At the beginning of this report, I said that IFLA is in good shape. It is – as is amply demonstrated by our achievements over the past year, our balanced budget, our dedicated staff and our committed membership, including all of you. But that is not enough. As I also noted at the outset, we aspire to do more than our resources can support. If we are to achieve all that we believe to be necessary – that is, all that you our members are telling us is important – then we must build our capacity by attracting more members, more corporate supporters and more financial and other resources.

Our membership numbers have been static for some years after a marked increase in the early 1990s and our capacity to represent the global library and information community has declined a little from a peak of 157 nations to 147. We should be able to say that we represent all, or as close as possible to all, of the 192 members of the United Nations as well as all sectors of library and information practice. That would significantly enhance our authority when we speak to governments and intergovernmental organisations but would also mean that we would be better placed to address the library and information needs of people throughout the world. We need to build the membership pillar, to bring in more members to build IFLA's strength. But that is not just a job for the Secretary General or the Membership Manager alone, it is a job for each and every one of us who values IFLA and is proud of its achievements. Each of us should go away from this Council meeting resolving to persuade at least one other institution or association to join IFLA, to tell them how important IFLA is, how much good work it does, and how they would enjoy participation. The 'other associations' category offers a particular opportunity for sub-national – state or provincial – and specialist associations to come into IFLA. Similarly, the GLAD – Global Library Association Development, managed by the Management of Library Associations Section – program enables stronger associations to partner with weaker so that the weaker can both come into IFLA and also become stronger and more professional in their operations. Let's get more members in every category and let's hear their voices in our Council next year!

As has been acknowledged, we are over-dependent on membership fees and have consequently been working to diversify our funding sources through such means as the changed arrangements for managing our conferences and the creation of an IFLA Fund. But that over-dependence on membership fees should not inhibit us from bringing in additional members because members are not just a source of revenue. Members are the life-blood of the Federation, as they are in all associations. They – we – set the agenda, provide human and other resources and, ultimately, make IFLA worthwhile. We need more members so that we will have more to do our important work in all of the Sections, Discussion Groups and Core Activities – to strengthen our members pillar.

But we should also attract other partners including corporate partners. We are fortunate to have longstanding strong corporate partners which we value very much. They help make the World Library and Information Congress possible and work with us in other ways. But we need more and we need to engage more with them in activities of mutual benefit. I encourage you to work with the corporate partners and to make your own partnerships with them but also to urge other supplier organisations with which you work closely to become IFLA corporate partners.

We also have close partnerships with cognate organisations including our sister organisations in the International Committee of the Blue Shield – with which we have recently issued a statement of concern regarding the tragic conflict in Lebanon, Israel and Palestine – and with those who assist the vital and demanding work of CLM and FAIFE. Those partnerships and many others are crucial to the achievement of our aspirations. They need to be fostered not only by IFLA HQ but by each of us at national and organisational levels.

Our extensive membership and networks of partnerships enable IFLA to be effective as the global voice for libraries and information services, those who work in them and those whom they serve. But IFLA cannot do everything. It is not only a question of resources but also recognition that many issues are better tackled at national or regional levels, often in the context of regional groupings such as MERCOSUR, ASEAN or the EU. To acknowledge the importance of intervention at that level and to encourage the work of our regional library and information organisations, I have in the past year attended meetings of the Arab Federation for Libraries and Information (AFLI), the Standing Committee of East, Central and Southern African Library Associations (SCECSAL), the Congress of Southeast Asian Libraries (CONSAL) and the ASEAN University Libraries Network (AUN). I am very grateful to my generous hosts for their welcome and the opportunity to learn something of what they do and of the challenges they face. I was most impressed to see the levels of enthusiasm and dedication and to hear of so many achievements, often in the face of great difficulties. I encourage those and the other regional organisations to see themselves as partners with IFLA so that we can work together in a complementary fashion, as IFLA does with our member associations.

Of course a vital precondition to working together is that we are able to communicate and that is where the regional groupings are especially valuable because they come together around specific geographic, professional or other factors and often use a common language. IFLA too faces challenges in communication and, recognising the need to better reflect the linguistic diversity of the world, the Governing Board has

extended our working languages to include Modern Standard Chinese and Arabic with Chinese introduced this year and Arabic next year in Durban. We are also considering the establishment of additional IFLA Regional Offices which will extend our reach both geographically and linguistically. Our important declarations and other documents continue to be translated into many other languages. For example, this year a team of colleagues in India led by Dr Karisidappa has nearly completed the translation of the Public Library Guidelines into sixteen Indian languages – a major achievement – and the *Alexandria Proclamation* I mentioned before has been translated into six languages in just a few months. These are good examples of IFLA in action, working together in partnership across national, cultural and linguistic barriers.

Together we are doing great things for library and information services and those who use them, the peoples of the world. I congratulate you all, here in the Council meeting and elsewhere in our global family and thank you for all you are doing. But I don't expect you to rest; we must all redouble our efforts because the challenges continue to be immense. We have the world's attention, through our interventions in the World Summit on the Information Society and elsewhere, we must now use it to achieve even more. Let us join together to attract more members, to do more for the profession and to benefit society more – to continue to build IFLA's three pillars.

Thank you.

Alex Byrne
IFLA President

Seoul, August 2006