



Libraries@the Heart of the Information Society
IFLA Issues from World Summit 10-12 December 2003
Nr. 4

The Declaration of Principles -- www.itu.int/wsis/documents/doc_single-en-1161.asp -- and Action Plan -- www.itu.int/wsis/documents/doc_single-en-1160.asp -- were finally adopted on Friday evening after many hours of statements about the Information Society. Particularly strong statements were made about gender issues and the needs of people with disabilities.

Adoption was the culmination of eighteen months of consultations and negotiations and represented a major achievement for IFLA and its partners in lobbying the negotiators. The final versions were agreed at the eleventh hour, late on Tuesday 9 December, just before the opening of the Summit.

Unqualified acceptance of the fundamental importance of human rights, and especially of freedom of expression and information was obtained but two issues could not be resolved. The first was Internet governance which some nations wish to keep under the control of ICANN, supervised by the US Department of Commerce and with the involvement of major ICT operators, while others would prefer supervision by an INGO such as the ITU. The second was funding mechanisms to address the digital divide on which a split emerged between developed and developing nations. The Government of Senegal had proposed a Digital Solidarity Fund while the EU and other developed nations argued that existing funding mechanisms should be used. To secure endorsement of the documents, it was agreed to study both between the Geneva and Tunis phases of the Summit. Striking a positive note, the Mayors of Lyons in France and Geneva in Switzerland announced on Friday that they had added to the Senegal Government's contribution taking the fund to over €1 million.

As the civil society organisations have noted, the Declaration and Action Plan fall short of providing the means to implement fully a vision for an equitable and inclusive information society. They make a start but there is much to do.

IFLA has signed the Civil Society Declaration -- www.geneva2003.org/wsis/documents/summit/WSIS-CS-Decl-08-12-03-en.pdf -- and will be working with our partners in civil society to advance a shared vision.

Nevertheless, most of our concerns are included in the Declaration and Action Plan which offer a framework for action over the next 23 months to Tunis and beyond. It is now up to us to demonstrate to governments that we can turn the statements into reality, that the global library network provides the foundation for the information society.

This has been the most sustained and widespread advocacy campaign ever undertaken by IFLA. It has demonstrated that we can be successful but has taught us many lessons, including the need for the strong core support, provided this time by our Swiss colleagues. We need to learn for the

experience as we engage with the Tunis phase of the Summit and for advocacy in other areas.

Many colleagues from national library associations, national libraries and other related organisations participated, presenting an alliance to promote the role of libraries in the information society. Right up to the end, IFLA representatives met with key players including government delegates and ministers, civil society members and HE Adama Samassakou, President of the preparatory process who spoke at WLIC 2003 in Berlin. Contacts made during the summit included funders and organisers of Telecentres in the developing world. IFLA considers this as a valuable contact and we are preparing a joint workshop during the World Library and Information Congress in Buenos Aires in August 2004.

The assistance of students and lecturers from the School of Library and Information Science in Geneva was particularly valuable because they willingly staffed our booth, which we shared with ICA, and distributed information while we met with the key players.

A commentary on the Declaration and Action Plan will be distributed shortly. It will show how IFLA, library associations and libraries are turning the ideas and actions into practice and how, with a little support, we can extend our work so that we will have many stories to tell in Tunis.

We will also work to strengthen the outcomes in those areas in which the Declaration and Action Plan could be improved including the deficiencies identified in the Civil Society Declaration.

The effectiveness of our advocacy campaign was demonstrated when an IFLA representative was told by a government delegate: *"I am sick of hearing about libraries and from you librarians"*

As IFLA President Kay Raseroka noted. *"This experience reminds us of the need to partner but also to remember our core values"*.

Marian Koren (Member of IFLA Governing Board, Netherlands Public Library Association)

Winnie Vitzansky (Standing Committee Member of the IFLA Section on Management of Library Associations, Director of the Danish Library Association)

Alex Byrne (IFLA President-elect, University of Technology, Sydney)

Video coverage:

- Sally Burch-Alai: "Launch of Civil Society Declaration" -- <rtsp://ibs.itu.ch/archives/wsis/summit/pc-20031211-1600-en.rm>
[<rtsp://ibs.itu.ch/archives/wsis/summit/pc-20031211-1600-fr.rm> -- French]

Read more:

- www.itu.int/wsis/geneva/newsroom/summaries/12roundup.html -- The final official press release on the outcome of the Summit
- www.itu.int/wsis/geneva/newsroom/summaries/12.html -- Plenary Meetings Summaries: 12 December 2003
- www.itu.int/wsis/geneva/newsroom/press_releases/wsisclosing.html -- Press Release: Global Information Society Summit Spurs Solidarity, Alliances But Hard Work, Action Ahead
- www.itu.int/wsis/documents/doc_single-en-1164.asp -- Arrangments for the Tunis Phase of the Summit

