

IFLA has been heavily involved in the preparations for the World Summit on the Information Society, the first phase of which was held in Geneva, December 2003 and the second phase in Tunis, 16-18 November 2005.

IFLA in action at WSIS

**Report
by**

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In the second week of November, no fewer than five past, present and future presidents of IFLA met in the Bibliotheca Alexandrina in Alexandria, Egypt: Robert Wedgeworth, Christine Deschamps, Kay Raseroka, Alex Byrne and Claudia Lux. In addition, there were more than 120 librarians and friends of librarians. Why was that? There were two consecutive events organised by IFLA in co-operation with the Biblioteca Alexandrina and other organisers, ensuring a high profile library contribution to the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). From Alexandria, many of the delegates travelled to Tunis, where they were met by many other librarians and information workers gathering for the second phase of the Summit. (The first phase of the Summit had taken place in Geneva in 2003.)

Alexandria 1: Colloquium on Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning

The first event, held from 6 to 9 November, was the Alexandria High Level Colloquium on Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning, organised in collaboration with UNESCO and the (US) National Forum on Information Literacy (NFIL). In several days of intensive interaction, the delegates were able to realise the planned outcomes of the Colloquium:

- A statement, named The Alexandria Proclamation on Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning: Beacons of the Information Society, was drawn up and agreed. It is to be promulgated and disseminated by UNESCO. The text of the declaration can be found at <http://www.ifla.org/publications/beacons-of-the-information-society-the-alexandria-proclamation-on-information-literacy>. It is also available in Spanish.
- A contribution to the World Summit on the Information Society, second stage meeting to be held the following week in Tunis, Tunisia
- Outcomes from the Colloquium which team members took take back to their regions in order to:

- Assess the usefulness and, as needed, adapt outcomes to the regions and facilitate dissemination of same;
- Allow sector experts to assess the usefulness of outcomes to their sectors and facilitate dissemination of same;
- Further educate team members on information literacy and prepare them for the full meeting in mid-to-late 2006; and
- Identify any existing gaps in representation which should be addressed.

For more information on the Colloquium:

www.infolit.org/International_Colloquium/index.htm and
www.bibalex.org/infolit2005.

Alexandria 2: Libraries - the Information Society in Action

The second event, held on 10 and 11 November, was the pre-Summit Conference "Libraries - the Information Society in Action". This was one of three official side events of the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, held in Tunis on 16-18 November. This was a high-profile meeting, honoured with an address by Ms. Suzanne Mubarak, the First Lady of Egypt. Ms. Mubarak is a long time friend of libraries and reading, and this was reflected in her speech. It was particularly gratifying that she spoke clearly for freedom of expression and on the importance of free access to information.

The aims of the WSIS Declaration of Principles and Action Plan, issued at the first Summit in Geneva in 2003, take into account the place of libraries in society today. However, in order to ensure that the actions described become a lasting reality they must become better known so that the funding agencies for the information society, whether they be government or private enterprise, will become more aware of libraries' achievements and the services they provide in making knowledge and information available, and therefore be encouraged to fund future activities. The idea of the pre-Summit conference was to present the concrete role libraries already have in building the Information Society. It showcased some of the best practices from libraries around the world on the areas of health, education and training, media literacy, preserving of cultural heritage and disaster preparedness.

At the pre-Summit, IFLA launched its Library Success Stories Database, which is available **online** -- <http://www.tribalpixel.ch/ifla> -- and on a CD-ROM. The easily searchable database gives examples of library contributions to society in the following categories:

- Libraries as access point
- Libraries as ICT learning centres
- Libraries for continuing education
- Libraries for specific needs

- Libraries for cultural heritage

These were also the topics of papers presented at the Conference, intended to show that libraries and information services provide societies with a ready tool to further the Information Society and achieve the Millennium Development Goals of the UN. The documents of the pre-Summit can be found at www.bibalex.org/wsisaalex/agenda.htm. World-wide, libraries are the most widespread agencies providing the general population with gratis or affordable access to both conventional information media and networked digital resources. A quite modest investment in upgrading libraries will enable countries to take big steps towards the Information Society.

At the Conference IFLA's Alexandria Manifesto on Libraries, the Information Society in Action was launched. It can be found at <http://www.ifla.org/publications/alexandria-manifesto-on-libraries-the-information-society-in-action>.

Tunis 2, 2005!

The second phase of the WSIS itself was held in Tunis on 16-18 November. Participating in this Summit was one of the main thrusts of IFLA during last year. In this WSIS phase, IFLA's first target was to raise awareness of the role of libraries as an existing component of the Information Society. Here we were able to build on the excellent work of the international library community during the first Summit in Geneva in 2003, where librarians managed to include access to information and libraries in the political document and action plan. The political document of the Tunis Summit, also mentions libraries. (See www.itu.int/wsis/docs2/tunis/off/6rev1.html, article 90k, cited at the end of this report.)

The three main themes of this Summit were:

- Internet governance
- financing of Internet
- follow-up of the Summit

The results of the deliberations on these matters can be read in the final WSIS document referred to above. During the preparatory process, IFLA had given a statement on the Internet governance (www.ifla.org/node/8477, available also in French, Polish and Spanish). This was disseminated at PrepCom3 and in Tunis. In Tunis, negotiations on Internet governance got bogged down and the official negotiators managed at the last moment only to produce a fairly bland compromise. As a result, the existing state of affairs is left largely unchanged, but a new Internet Governance Forum (IGF) will be set up next year to decide on public policy issues for the internet. It will be made up of governments as well as private and civil society, but it will not have power over existing bodies such as ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers). Also

on the other issues not much of consequence emerged, other than relief among governments that the Summit did not end in a complete stalemate. Among Civil Society there was disappointment at the results, but also some satisfaction (not shared by all) that Civil Society had been able to maintain a significant presence and make a lively contribution to the Summit. A good example of a Civil Society evaluation can be found in EDRI-gram, the newsletter of European Digital Rights, at www.edri.org/edrigram/number3.23

The fourth big Summit issue, mainly outside the official agenda but coming up in several official contributions, too, were the human rights and freedom of expression in the host country, Tunisia. Even during the conference, several attacks on journalists and other WSIS participants took place (see for example <http://campaigns.ifex.org/tmg>), not to mention the daily problems that Tunisians experience in respect of access to information and free expression of opinions (see for example www.ifla.org/faife/faife/tunis-report2005.htm). This issue was seriously addressed in several Summit speeches, beginning from the opening address of Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations. IFLA published a press release on this topic, prepared by FAIFE. FAIFE has been active in the Tunis Monitoring Group (<http://campaigns.ifex.org/tmg/index.html>).

IFLA actions in WSIS

Although the outcome of the Summit has drawn mixed responses, libraries generally received good exposure. IFLA's participation in WSIS since 2003 has yielded results in three areas:

- Ensuring that the role of libraries is formally recognised in the policy and planning documents arising from the WSIS process
- Generating greater awareness among politicians and decision-makers (non-librarians) of the role libraries play in the Information Society
- Providing librarians with materials and tools to advocate effectively for libraries in their own countries

Despite fears that library issues might be lost from sight amid the big WSIS debates such as those on Internet governance, the results we had achieved in the Geneva 2003 phase were successfully carried forward to the final document. In the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society, the key concluding document of the Tunis Summit, the role of libraries in providing equitable access to information and knowledge for all, is emphasised. The document calls on governments to support libraries in particular "in their public service role of providing free and equitable access to information and of improving ICT literacy and community connectivity, particularly in underserved communities" (par. 90(k), cited in full below).

This indicates recognition that libraries are considered to be an essential element in building an inclusive and democratic Information Society. It was

interesting to hear how many non-librarians shared this view. Libraries and for example the activities of Bibliotheca Alexandrina were mentioned continually in various connections. In a high level seminar organised by UNESCO, three of the panellists and several members of the audience, none of them librarians, spontaneously referred to the importance of libraries -- without having to be prompted by librarians. This was gratifying, since it shows that the hard work and interventions of IFLA members in WSIS and its PreComs since 2003 have borne fruit. There is far more general awareness of libraries today than there was when we started.

The WSIS process has also yielded a set of core documents and other tools that librarians can use for advocacy. During the Summit IFLA publicised the Alexandria Manifesto and the Alexandria Proclamation, as well as the Library Success Stories database referred to above. An earlier document, adopted by the Conference of Directors of national Libraries (CDNL) in Oslo in August, is also clearly related to the Summit: Maintaining our digital memory: a declaration of support for the World Summit on the Information Society. Communiqué from the Conference of Directors of National Libraries (CDNL).

The results of the Alexandria pre-Summit were also reported in a special session in Tunis. This was one of many official parallel events and comprised a panel discussion about the findings of the pre-Summit. It attracted an audience of ca. 35 persons, both non-librarians and librarians. The discussion between the panel and the participants was very active and indicated several matters shared by librarians and their users. Confused by the layout of the gigantic WSIS, another 16 librarians had ended up in the wrong hall for this session. Instead of giving up, they held their own quite successful reporting session in a different hall with a confusingly similar name!

IFLA President Alex Byrne took part in a panel discussion on "The role of WIPO and NGOs to balance intellectual property rights." Here his well-informed and balanced presentation stood out among some of the more emotional contributions. For IFLA and libraries generally, the Summit ended on a high note when Alex reported to the WSIS plenary of the pre-Summit 'Libraries - the Information Society in Action' (www.ifla.org/files/assets/wsisis/Documents/byrne-plenary-address.pdf). This was presented in one of the limited number of slots available to Civil Society speakers, and was very well received. The speech is now part of the official WSIS documentation, and can be referred to as such.

IFLA in the Mediterranean region

In addition, it is worth mentioning that IFLA created and recreated contacts with stake-holders in the Mediterranean region. The Bibliotheca Alexandrina pre-Summit was the first major IFLA event in the Arab world ever. A preliminary agreement was made with the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation **for the Dialogue between Cultures** (www.euromedalex.org) to find concrete co-operation forms. The existing co-operation with Bibliotheca

Alexandrina was continued, and the contact with AFLI (Arab Federation for Libraries and Information (www.afli.org, in Arabic only) was renewed. The Malaysian-based alliance Global Knowledge Partnership (www.globalknowledge.org) offered very concrete help by offering a meeting point for the IFLA WSIS participants on its stand.

What next?

The next step for IFLA is to make more widely known the results of the Summits, and to encourage its members to use them in their library advocacy on the regional and country level. Some follow-up conferences have been planned, e.g. by the Swiss and Danish colleagues. The topic will be presented in several regional meetings, as in the SCECSAL, Crimea2006, CONSAL and InfoVision 2006 conferences. When possible, IFLA representatives will also promote the WSIS results in national library events.

Special tools will be produced for libraries to easily create material for their promotion work, but this is in an early phase. The Libraries Success Stories database will be maintained and developed. New contributions are welcome: www.tribalpixel.ch/ifla!

The second and last Summit has taken place, but the process has not been completed and the work has not ended. For IFLA members and librarians everywhere, there is now the challenge to follow up and ensure that we capitalise on the formal recognition, general awareness, and advocacy experience that we have gained.

The text of §90, sub-para k of the document *Tunis Agenda for the Information Society*

WSIS-05/TUNIS/DOC/6 (rev. 1):

90. We reaffirm our commitment to providing equitable access to information and knowledge for all, recognizing the role of ICTs for economic growth and development. **We are committed** to working towards achieving the indicative targets, set out in the Geneva Plan of Action, that serve as global references for improving connectivity and universal, ubiquitous, equitable, non-discriminatory and affordable access to, and use of ICTs, considering different national circumstances, to be achieved by 2015, and to using ICTs, as a tool to achieve the internationally-agreed development goals and objectives, including the Millennium Development Goals, by: [...]

k. *supporting educational, scientific, and cultural institutions*, including libraries, archives and museums, in their role of developing, providing equitable, open and affordable access to, and preserving diverse and varied content, including in digital form, to support informal and formal education, research and innovation; and in particular supporting libraries in their public service role of providing free and equitable access to information and of

improving ICT literacy and community connectivity, particularly in underserved communities;

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