

## International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA)



### Contribution to the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Draft Declaration of Principles and Draft Action Plan

#### INTRODUCTION

1. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) welcomes the opportunity to comment on and contribute to the WSIS Draft Declaration and Draft Action Plan issued for consultation following the PrepCom2 meeting held in Geneva in February 2003.
2. IFLA is the NGO representing the interests of library and information services, their staff and users. We were established in 1927. We now have 1,720 members in over 150 countries, representing hundreds of thousands of staff working in library and information services. We are accredited with several United Nations agencies, including UNESCO, with which we have Formal Associate Relations status.
3. Among the Core Values of IFLA, as set out in our Statutes, are:
  - *The endorsement of the principles of freedom of access to information, ideas and works of imagination and freedom of expression embodied in Article 19 of the Universal declaration of Human Rights,*
  - *The belief that people, communities and organizations need universal and equitable access to information, ideas and works of imagination for their social, educational, cultural, democratic and economic well-being, and*

- *The conviction that the delivery of high quality library and information services helps guarantee that access*
4. IFLA's Governing Board has adopted a set of Professional Priorities, several of which are directly relevant to the pursuit of the ideals behind the concept of the information society, including:
    - *Defending the principle of freedom of information*
    - *Promoting literacy, reading and lifelong learning*
    - *Providing unrestricted access to information*
    - *Balancing the intellectual property rights of authors with the needs of users*
    - *Promoting resource sharing.*
  5. We believe that the World Summit on the Information Society is a major opportunity for the world community to harness the potential of information and communications technologies to tackle the digital divide and provide equitable access to information, inspiration and knowledge. In doing so, the disadvantages commonly suffered by those in rural areas, least developed countries and those with disabilities, low incomes, deprived of education and training and other under-served groups may be overcome.

## **GENERAL**

6. The worldwide library and information profession stands ready to play its part in helping to deliver the objectives set out in the draft documents. Libraries exist to provide access to information, ideas and works of imagination, regardless of the format in which they are presented. In countries where governments and other agencies have had the foresight to invest in new technologies for their library services, librarians have grasped the opportunity to enhance and develop their services. For example, in the United Kingdom, the national lottery funded Peoples' Network enabled 4,300 public libraries throughout the country to provide public access to the Internet by December 2002, with 30,000 public access PCs. More than 2,000 libraries provided broad band access. Public library ICT centres were used for 46 million hours in the year 2002. 80% of public libraries were providing free access. In one service 80% of users had never used the Internet before.
7. Libraries offer an ideal environment in which to deliver services required to achieve an information society to a wide range of people, from young children to the elderly. Studies have shown that the *public* library, for example, is one of the very few institutions in a local community that is open to all, regardless of income, employment status, education, ethnic origin, gender or ability. Public libraries are staffed by people whose ethos is service to their clients and who have skills in locating sources of information. In this respect they are different from some of the other agencies referred to in the draft documents. They also

offer a thoughtful environment where people can learn new skills and take time to find the information they require. They are not under pressure to buy products or to conform to a particular point of view.

8. Libraries have a proud tradition of cooperation. They work together to lend materials to one another in the service of their users, to collaborate on the acquisition of expensive or specialist materials and, more recently, in the negotiation of licences to make available electronic publications. They are therefore experienced in making maximum use of scarce resources in the service of their communities of users.
9. Libraries are also adept at cooperating with other agencies within the public, voluntary and private sectors.
10. IFLA has been disappointed that, in the discussions so far at the PrepCom meetings and in earlier drafts, insufficient attention has been given to content. The current texts are a great improvement in this respect, although we have suggestions for further consideration of the need for access to authoritative content. Whilst the availability of access through the development of ICT networks is a prerequisite for the global information society; that is not the end of the story. It is true that the technological infrastructure is required to deliver the information, inspiration and knowledge that people need. But the content to be delivered by that infrastructure needs to be appropriate, authentic, timely and in languages the people understand. This will require a great deal of resources and commitment. Whilst there is a huge amount of information available on the Internet 'free', (or at least without further charge, once the connection is achieved and paid for), much of it is spurious, inaccurate, out of date, inappropriate and in inaccessible languages. Furthermore, searching for the required information and assessing its accuracy are skills that need to be acquired. Libraries have always considered that this is part of their core business and continue to do so in the electronic age.
11. Very few individuals can afford to buy all the print-based information they need during their life-time. The answer to this problem, developed over the years in most countries, is the library; be it a public library serving the local community, or school, college and university libraries to serve communities of teachers and learners, or national and research libraries to support research, or corporate libraries to support enterprise. In the same way, even those who can afford the hardware and software, together with the telecommunications charges (and many cannot and will not be able to for the foreseeable future), will need access to expensive electronic publications that can be afforded only on a collective basis. The library is the key agency in providing an answer to this problem. The library has the additional advantage that it can also provide an environment where the necessary searching and interpretative skills can be acquired and developed.

12. We believe, therefore, that the potential role of the library in helping achieve the aspiration of the information society should be given greater emphasis in the draft documents.
13. We hope that the repetition of statements made in the draft Declaration of Principles in the draft Action Plan can be eliminated. We also hope that the final Action Plan will be a shorter document concentrating on practical proposals that can be put into effect, monitored and evaluated. We have some specific suggestions for amendments to the draft documents set out below.

### **DRAFT DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES**

14. Paragraph 19: **Community access points:** We suggest that a reference to the user-friendly environment provided by libraries should be mentioned here. We suggest the following wording: “ Libraries in particular provide an effective environment for making use of ICT to access information and for learning the skills required for effective searching.”
15. Paragraph 21: **Access to knowledge:** It would be helpful to include the text of Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 at this point, either in the text or as a footnote: “*Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and 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*”.
16. Paragraph 30: **Capacity Building:** We suggest to include the conclusion that capacity building has started in numerous information literacy programmes performed by public and other types of libraries. Special attention must be paid to enable staff to meet professional requirements for the new era. Educational institutions should make use of well-established professions and services as provided by librarians and information specialist. Education for ICTs includes technical training and development of critical thought. It should be part of the general curriculum of all educations.
17. Paragraph 32: **Capacity Building to enable people to benefit from the opportunities provided by ICTs:** We suggest to add: Free public library access should be part of such public policy.
18. Paragraph 33: **Training ICT specialists:** We stress that this should be complemented by training of information specialists and mediators, providing them with didactic skills.

19. Paragraph 36: **Role of stakeholders:** Whilst we agree that the danger exists that ICTs may be used for criminal or terrorist activities, we urge caution to avoid unnecessarily infringement of civil liberties by the introduction of laws which curtail the legitimate rights to access to information of innocent citizens or which, of themselves, may promote social division.
20. Paragraphs 38 and 39: **Good governance:** We would like to link paragraph 38 and 39 by the following: Good governance is based on informed citizens. Public libraries and other parts of the library and information network guarantee unbiased access to a variety of sources; they implement a user perspective in their services and empower citizens to freely gather information and form opinions.
21. Paragraph 40: **Market environment:** We think that it is unrealistic to expect that the necessary investment in the deployment of infrastructures and the development of new services will come entirely, or even mainly, as a result of favourable market conditions. Especially, but not exclusively, in the developing countries, there will be a need for significant investment in the provision of infrastructure by the public sector to ensure equitable access.
22. Paragraph 48: We suggest to include: Cultural identity and linguistic diversity include respect for oral traditions and indigenous knowledge. Libraries are the natural focal point for collecting and preserving living heritage and make it accessible to the local communities an society at large.
23. Paragraph 50: **Content:** We wholeheartedly agree that there should be an “equitable balance between intellectual property rights and the needs of the users of information.” We are concerned, however, that various developments in intellectual property, and particularly in relation to electronic publications suggest that this balance could easily be skewed against the interests of users. We would like to see more efforts directed at achieving fair dealing or fair use regimes which have been reasonably successful for print publications achieved in the electronic arena. We would also like to see more developments along the lines of the World Health Organisation’s HINARI scheme which aims to make available current health science publications available to institutions in the developing world, including their libraries, at more affordable prices.
24. Paragraph 53: It is our opinion that this policy dialogue and the envisioned international and regional co-operation should respect and build on established networks and infrastructure, such as the international library and information service network which already includes a variety of means for acquisition of international knowledge and cross-national information transfer.

## DRAFT ACTION PLAN

25. We offer the following observations and suggestions with the aim of encouraging practical application of the principles put forward in the draft Declaration.
26. Paragraph 3: **Universal access:** We suggest that the reference to libraries in this paragraph should be elaborated by including the following: “libraries can provide a thoughtful environment, staffed by trained intermediaries who can enable people to acquire new skills and obtain access to authoritative information.”
27. Paragraph 6: **Low cost connectivity:** We fully agree that universal access policies should be introduced to achieve connectivity at low cost. The action plan should include the recommendation that Member States ensure that universal access policies apply to all libraries that provide access to the general public. In principle such access should be free at the point of delivery.
28. Paragraph 18: **Resource mobilization:** We fully agree that emphasis should be placed on the development of “culturally sensitive local content” but warn that this should not be used to justify censorship. There is a need both to create ‘born digital’ material and to digitize material available at present only in print form. It is also important to recognize the urgent need for the preservation and conservation of fragile materials recording the cultural history of civilizations and the wealth of indigenous peoples' knowledge.
29. Paragraph 21: **ICTs in education:** We agree that teachers act as a gateway to the Information Society and that therefore their skills development needs support. The same applies to librarians, especially public librarians and those serving in colleges, schools and universities, bearing in mind that they serve a wide age range of people in their local community. We recommend that a reference to the need to support the skills development of librarians be added to this paragraph.
30. Paragraph 22: **Capacity building for ICT use:** We suggest to add that children from an early age on should be trained and welcomed to make use of the library; they should also be the main target group for reading and literacy programmes provided by public and school libraries.
31. Paragraphs 25 and 27: **Information security and Fighting cybercrime:** We agree that concerns about security and terrorism must not be allowed to curtail free access to information and ideas. There is evidence that measures taken in some countries since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 infringe the ability of innocent citizens to exercise their human rights. For example, librarians and booksellers have been required by law enforcement agencies to disclose to the authorities the books their clients have bought or borrowed, and

to disclose the information accessed by users on the Internet, without the need to obtain court orders.

32. Paragraph 28: **Good governance:** IFLA has long campaigned for an equitable balance between the legitimate rights of the creators and distributors of intellectual property and the equally legitimate needs of users. We are concerned that some trends in intellectual property rights, especially in relation to electronic publications, will result in more restricted access. There is especial need to ensure that this does not hinder access to information and knowledge in the developing world. We would like to see more developments such as the HINARI project of the World Health Organisation, which helps to ensure the availability of electronic health journals at more affordable prices to university libraries and other institutions in developing countries.
33. Paragraph 29: **Market environment:** Whilst we agree that competition will help drive down prices, we are less confident that this will by itself “ensure the ongoing modernization of networks and services”. Especially in the "thin markets" characterized by low population density, distance and poverty, unbridled market forces may reduce or eliminate competition, thereby removing both service diversity and cost constraints. We believe that in many circumstances there will need to be substantial public investment in establishing public access points and in ensuring their sustainability as the hardware and software develops.
34. Paragraph 34: **Intellectual property rights:** We fully endorse the need to strike a fair “balance between intellectual property rights and the public interest”. We have commented elsewhere on the need to be vigilant that licensing regimes and other regulations adopted in the electronic environment do not tip the balance away from the public interest. We are working closely with the International Publishers Association to adopt mutually acceptable measures that will achieve this balance. We also fully endorse the need to achieve protection against the unfair use of indigenous knowledge.
35. Paragraph 36: **E-Government:** We agree that public administration can make effective use of ICT tools to enhance transparency, accountability and efficiency in the delivery of public services. Public libraries in many countries have shown themselves capable of best practice in this field, given appropriate investment.
36. Paragraph 43: **Content:** Local authorities have an important role to play. In many countries local authorities are responsible for public libraries. They can therefore provide a vital role as accessible service points providing electronic access to a wide range of other local government services and can also assist the disadvantaged to produce and disseminate their own content.
37. Paragraph 45 (a): **Benchmarks:** We urge Sub-Committee 2 to add the following bench-mark; “All public libraries to be connected to the Internet by 2006.”

38. Paragraph 45 (f): **Training content workers:** We fully agree with the proposal to include librarians and archivists in the proposal for “Equipping and training content workers in the LDCs in making use of the expertise and operational capacity of the relevant international professional organisations.” We stand ready to participate in that process.

## **FINALLY**

39. The world community, if it takes seriously the principles in the draft Declaration and if it has the political will to deploy the financial resources required, has the opportunity to make a real difference to the lives of millions of people throughout the world. We urge the WSIS to recognise the key role that libraries of many kinds and in many places can play in helping to achieve this mission. Please do not waste resources on reinventing the wheel, whilst ignoring existing infrastructures. Instead, apply relatively modest resources to existing networks, such as libraries. The skill, enthusiasm and commitment of librarians will not fail you.

**Note:** *The documents to which this is a response are WSIS Draft Declaration of Principles WSIS/PCIP/DT/1-E and WSIS Draft Action Plan WSIS/PCIP/DT/2-E, both dated 21 March 2003*

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