Examining new technologies, legislation, standards and budgets

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I FLA was established as an umbrella organisation for library associations around the world in 1927. In 1976 institutions were eligible for membership, but IFLA's general products and services remained primarily oriented towards its Association members, who are the major conduit for standards and policies developed by IFLA. Currently, an overwhelming majority of all national library associations take pride in belonging to IFLA.

To keep IFLA's association members informed on progress in matters of international interest, press releases are sent on a regular basis. In addition, the executive board holds regular meetings with presidents and chief executive officers of library associations to exchange views on a many topics.

The *IFLA Council Report 1995–1997*, issued just before the 63rd IFLA Council and General Conference in Copenhagen, 31 August–5 September 1997, highlights IFLA's efforts in five key areas: access to information; the electronic environment; preservation and conservation; services and standards; and professional development. In all of these areas, IFLA's association members have played a major role in developing policy and ensuring progress. IFLA in turn provides a framework to address political, social, professional and technological issues which are of relevance to library associations worldwide.

For example, Council 1997 established a permanent executive board committee on Freedom of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (FAIFE). IFLA's member associations worldwide are now nominating candidates to serve on this committee. An Australian colleague, Alex Byrne, has been nominated as the chair. One of the committee's charges will be to address specific incidents of censorship which inhibit library associations from fulfilling their responsibility to provide information, and, together with the international library community, to seek a solution.

A second committee established by Council in Copenhagen was the Committee on Copyright and other Legal Matters. Through this committee, IFLA will work to defend access to digital information as other international organisations seek to regulate this environment. In 1996 IFLA issued its *Position paper on copyright in the electronic environment*, which encouraged the use of electronic information in libraries and called

for no legal restrictions hindering libraries and their patrons from using digital data. In December 1996 IFLA sent three representatives to the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) conference in Geneva to lobby on behalf of libraries and library associations, and it will continue to make serious investments in time and money to send IFLA specialists to WIPO, the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the World Bank, the Asia Foundation, and the Council of Europe, and many other bodies to make the voice of librarianship heard.

Many IFLA activities of particular relevance to associations are carried out by sections and round tables. For example, the Section on Preservation and Conservation, together with the Canadian Library Association and the Canadian UNESCO Commission, have worked on a resolution to be presented to the UNESCO General Conference in November 1997 calling for a wider use of permanent paper. IFLA's member associations were called upon to lobby their national UNESCO commissions to support Canada's efforts in this area.

The program of the Section on Education and Training stresses education for librarianship. This translates into activities that update professional skills, and encourages cooperation with other associations and inter-governmental agencies. The section has also prepared the *World guide to library, archive and information science education*. Although an excellent reference tool, the ultimate goal of the *World guide* is to develop a scheme for reciprocal recognition of diplomas in library science to enable professionals to move more easily across national boundaries.

Together with UNESCO, IFLA has created *Guidelines for library twinning*, and in conjunction with these *Guidelines* a 'twinning database' has been developed at the UAP Core Program Office. Associations or institutions wishing to establish a twinning relationship, including staff exchanges, can utilise the resources of the UAP Office.

IFLANET, IFLA's WWW server, has answered hundreds of thousands of requests for documents. IFLA conference papers are also posted to IFLANET to allow access for those who were not able to attend the conference so they may benefit professionally.

A number of Listservs and the informa-

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tive IFLA web site (www.ifla.org) provide a means for librarians and others to communicate efficiently and effectively. The server makes it possible for membership, officers and staff to respond more quickly to issues needing member input and to develop policies and other positions by consensus quickly.

Within IFLA there is a Round Table for the Management of Library Associations, which works closely with the Core Programs, Sections and Round Tables. Some of the projects undertaken by the Round Table include:

• the organisation of seminars and workshops based on the *Guidelines for the management of professional associations in the fields of archives, libraries and information.* Also a product of the Round Table, the *Guidelines* have been translated into nine languages and used worldwide.

• supporting the creation of new and democratically established library associations in Eastern and Central Europe and the countries of the former Soviet Union.

• the creation of a database and clearinghouse on library associations worldwide. The data collected will be used to update the *World guide to library, archive and information science associations*, last published in 1990.

• the organisation of meetings within IFLA conferences examining such topics as the challenge of balancing financial resources with membership demands for new and improved services; suggestions for sources of revenue; how library associations react to new technologies in libraries; and how to develop library associations.

As I wrote in the introduction to the *IFLA Council Report 1995–1997* IFLA will always be vigilant in examining the impact of new technologies, legislation, standards and budgets on the profession as a whole. In that sense, IFLA could easily be depicted as the international library association. ∎

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