

IFLA condemns new Chinese internet regulations

Intellectual freedom is the right of every individual to both hold and express opinions and to seek and receive information.

Intellectual freedom is the basis of democracy.

Intellectual freedom is the core of the library concept.

In October 2005 the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) Committee on Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (IFLA/FAIFE) condemned the latest actions of the Government of the People's Republic of China to limit freedom of access to information and freedom of expression on the internet.

The chairman of the IFLA/FAIFE Committee, Professor Paul Sturges, said the continuing moves by the Chinese government to control online information flow are an extremely worrying development that once again leaves Chinese internet users unable freely to seek information from a full range of sources online in the interest of forming a balanced view. Updated regulations introduced on the 25th September 2005 have the potential to further stifle discus-

sion in an online environment already under pressure from extensive government intervention. The Chinese government is proving itself to be resolutely committed to restricting its citizens' human rights in the online public sphere.

It has been reported that China's 'e-police' are now actively involved in policing online discussions and pre-empting political actions through active intervention in chat rooms. The active participation of Western computer companies in repressive developments is of serious concern. IFLA noted that Yahoo provided information that allegedly led to the jailing of journalist Shi Tao for ten years.

The new 'Rules on the Administration of Internet News Information Services' issued by the Ministry of Information Industry and the State Council and reported by Xinhua, the official news agency, update all existing internet rules. They impose re-

strictions on the reporting of politics, the economy, the military and foreign affairs, and are aimed at local Chinese journalists instead of the foreign press. Websites are banned from reporting information that endangers 'national security' and 'national interest'.

Blogs and personal web pages, which already have to be registered with the government, have to 'be directed towards serving the people and socialism and insist on correct guidance of public opinion for maintaining national and public interests'. Two new regulations prevent the encouragement of 'illegal gatherings' such as strikes, and the organisation of activities under 'illegal social associations or organisations'.

Other sources report that China's e-police are using the internet themselves to shape political discourse. The government is hiring 'internet commentator teams' to pose as chat room users and advocate the government line in discussions that potentially might lead to unrest. ■

NICS secures free Cochrane Library access for another two years

The National Institute of Clinical Studies (NICS) has secured a two year renewal of Australia's national license to the Cochrane Library, thanks to funding by the Australian Government. This ensures this important resource remains freely available for all Australians — the Library's highest user group.

NICS was formed five years ago to improve health care by closing important gaps between the best available evidence and current clinical practice. It negotiated the initial three year national license with funding provided by the Australian Government in 2002 and has since developed tools such as the NICS User Guide to help users navigate the Library.

The Cochrane Library is recognised internationally as the best single source of reliable evidence about the effects of health care interventions. It is updated quarterly and contains a database of systematic reviews of evidence known as 'Cochrane Reviews'. International experts, working in review groups such as EPOC, prepare the reviews in answer to questions about the effectiveness of health care interventions. Evidence is gathered and appraised primarily from worldwide clinical trials.

Samples of the issues covered recently include the effects of vaccines for measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) in children, epidural versus non-epidural ornoanalgesia in labour, and the results of physical training for asthma sufferers. To access these reviews and others in the Cochrane Library, as well as the NICS User Guide, link to: <http://www.nicsl.com.au/Cochrane>. ■

Sixty-two languages in one portal!

As a way of enriching Australia's linguistic and cultural cyber-space, seven *MyLanguage.gov.au* of Australia's state and territory library services have joined forces in creating a national portal for multicultural Australians. The site, at <http://www.mylanguage.gov.au>, is now searchable in over sixty languages.

The national MyLanguage portal is a joint partnership between the State Libraries of NSW, Queensland, SA, Victoria and WA, and the NT and ACT Library and Information Services. The concept was inspired by three key ideas: that an 'information society' is dependent on fostering access to and publication of multilingual and multicultural information; that libraries are crucial gateways to multilingual information resources; and that technology and the internet are necessary components to developing access to information and resources for new and emergent communities. The site is currently in beta testing mode. Long-term development of the site and its content will occur as a collaborative effort between the seven state and territory library partners.

What this means for the public is that MyLanguage.gov.au will provide access to over six million information links: search engines, web directories, government websites, digital library projects and syndicated news headlines, all available in over sixty languages other than English.

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