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## IFLA and Its Role in International Policy Making

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*Throughout history the mission of the library ... remains unchanged although change is constantly occurring in the ways in which librarians fulfill the library's mission.* (IFLA, 1999)

The International Federation of Library Associations began in 1927 as an association consisting mostly of national library groups and academic libraries. One of the very first international non-profit and non-governmental associations, IFLA was organized with a focus on international discourse between librarians. Although in its first decade membership was centered mainly in European and Western nations, by 1940 IFLA had association members from China, India, Mexico, Egypt, and Japan. Today, new technology both enables and empowers more than 1600 members from 140 countries to work toward common goals. IFLA members share not only a dedication to library service, but also a commitment to the idea that the library is an evolving force that has the power to inform, influence, and impact all cultures, including the evolving global culture. Current membership includes 61 industrialized and 85 Third World nations. The U.S. has seven library associations and 150 institutions that participate actively in IFLA.

Just as IFLA has grown in membership over time, its focus has been broadened, both from within by new perspectives introduced with each new culture that joins the Federation, and from without by revolutionary changes and technological progress. IFLA's stated objective is "to promote international understanding, cooperation, discussion, research and development in all fields of library activity, including bibliography, information services and the education of personnel, and provide a body through which librarianship can be represented in matters of international interest." (IFLA, 1999) IFLA provides libraries and librarians with a powerful network for shaping and guiding international policies in a time of rapid technological, cultural and political change.

## A Brief Overview of IFLA's Structure

IFLA consists of two categories of voting members: Association members, open to associations of libraries, librarians and library schools, and associations of biblio-

graphic and research institutions; and Institutional Members, which include libraries, library schools, bibliographical, and research institutions. IFLA is based on democratic principles, and the President and Executive Board are elected. The current Executive Board has members from France, Russia, U.S.A., U.K., Germany, Botswana, China, and Norway. Members have voting rights in all matters. The General Council of Members is the "supreme governing body." Two other categories are not allowed votes: personal affiliates, and sponsors. Since 1993 IFLA has allowed institutions not involved in librarianship to join as sponsors.

Another body, the Professional Board, oversees the five Core Programs' eight divisions (three for different types of libraries, four for different library activities, and the Division for Regional Activities, with this eighth division focusing on libraries and information specialists in developing countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean). Each section is steered by an elected, expert-based standing committee.

## Programs

All members are active in the IFLA core programs. The very wide spectrum of concerns is revealed in the list of core programs: Preservation and Conservation; Universal Availability of Publication; Universal Bibliographic Control and International MARC; Universal Dataflow and Telecommunications; and Advancement of Librarianship in the Third World. New round tables are created as needed as outgrowths of working groups. In addition to the work done in the core programs, IFLA also hosts an annual international conference, which is the largest conference of library professionals in the world. IFLA also publishes *IFLA Professional Reports*, which includes reports on professional meetings and bibliographies of conference papers. The *IFLA Publication Series* is a series of monographs. Sales from these publications help support IFLA. Other funding comes from sponsors, grants, government subsidies, UNESCO, and other funding agencies, contributions from several national libraries, and membership fees.

## Communication

To facilitate communication and cooperation among IFLA's members, IFLANET was established in 1994. As the "virtual IFLA," IFLANET provides an international listserv for librarians that also links listserv members to IFLA headquarters' IFLADOC, a document server, and provides links to over 1000 external resources. Each core program, division and section also has a page/link. IFLANET HOME is supported by The National Library of Canada, and its mirror site, IFLANET MIRROR (EUROPE), is maintained by the National Library of France. IFLANET MIRROR (ASIA and PACIFIC) is hosted by the National Library of Canada. More mirror sites are being recruited in Third World countries. The goal of IFLANET is to provide a "worldwide communications network for libraries and librarianship that will transcend the barriers of time, place and level of development." (Wedgewood, 1995)

## Goals

IFLA's stated objectives are:

- To represent librarianship in matters of international interest.
- To promote continuing education of library personnel.
- To develop, maintain and promote guidelines for library services. (IFLANET, 1998)

These stated objectives do not reveal the true breadth of IFLA's work. Besides sponsoring regional workshops and conferences, IFLA's annual conference and exhibition is the largest international event for professionals in the library and information field. A good example of the true scope is reflected in a description of the IFLA Conference 2001 theme: *Libraries and Librarians: Making a Difference in the Knowledge Age*. The theme was chosen in the belief that "The power of technology supports sophisticated systems for connecting people to new forms of knowledge and creates linkages between the expanding physical and intellectual universes. By harnessing rapidly developing technology with a reaffirmation of the historical values and contributions of librarianship, the chaos and experimentation of the Information Age transforms into a new era of human development—the Knowledge Age." (IFLA, 2000)

IFLA 2001 will be held in Boston, the first annual conference to be held in the U.S. since 1985. Many workshops will be available via satellite. The sub-themes will emphasize and advance the notion that librarians need to take a leadership role in the Information Age, and by forming a collaborative partnership, help in developing policies. Ongoing work groups, regional meetings and conferences, scholarly studies and publications allow for the dissemination of current research and responsive policy making.

IFLA serves as a major resource for libraries worldwide to harness the potential revolutionary power of the Internet. If new service paradigms are created to take advantage of the Internet, libraries worldwide can become more vital community institutions. The broad impact of the Knowledge Age is affecting the policies of libraries worldwide in widely disparate ways. The global focus of IFLA provides both a force and a mechanism for divining and designing empowering responses for libraries and librarians. The list of contents in the IFLA Journal (v.24, no.4, 1998) gives a glimpse of the diverse foci. Articles include Libraries in Cambodia: *Rebuilding a Past and a Future*; *Libraries and Cultural Heritage in Africa*; *Memory of Iberoamerica: Reading 19th Century Latin America Newspapers*; *Towards a Networked Community of Africans in the Diaspora: Problems and Prospects*; and *Women As Managers of Libraries: A Developmental Process in India*. Reports from meetings held in March of 1998 include the regional meeting on the UNESCO Public Library Manifesto, preservation training for Anglophone

Africa, and the expert meeting of educators from library and archives schools in Africa, Nairobi and Kenya.

It is clear that IFLA does not limit its priorities to structural and social technological factors, although exploration of their impact upon libraries in both developing and industrialized nations remains the priority. IFLA also maintains a presence in the global debate over intellectual freedom. In 1998 The Freedom of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression office opened in Copenhagen. Both the promotion and the prevention of intellectual freedom are being dramatically affected by Internet technology and IFLA hopes to provide a forum and a voice in the development of related policy decisions. IFLA's status in such organizations as UNESCO and WIPO ensures that its voice will be heard.

New and ongoing initiatives focused on the creation of digital libraries and the transformation of library services that will occur through its creation are also primary areas of interest to IFLA's members. Much work is

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## Working

by Paulette Switzer  
Circulation Manager  
Marylhurst University

Working in a small college library  
Speaking English every day, and nights  
Dreaming in Arabic and Welsh, seeded  
Phrases racing through my  
Deeply sleeping body, resting  
On a raised bed of buried impressions,  
Like rhizomes, like initiations  
Into another culture, some new garden soil.

Cross-pollinating phrases resonate  
More than books over the counter, life  
Experience checking in and checking out:  
Hello, we say, *llyfrgell*, the library of our souls;  
A grateful diolch and thanks again for  
Bringing your mind, your heart  
And blooming here  
*Alhamdulillah*, yes, God is with us—  
We are working to translate living,  
Growing dreams.

*Paulette Switzer has worked in the Shoen Library of Marylhurst University since 1993. She has studied Welsh and French, and her travels have included Ireland and Wales. This poem was originally written in 1996, when Marylhurst had many United Arab Emirate students.*

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## Quality School Libraries

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*Day in the Life ...*, a themed issue of *School Libraries Worldwide* (Vol. 6, No. 1, January 2000.) Here school librarians from Sierra Leone, Korea, Australia, Botswana, Canada, and Japan, as well as other locations share a typical day. The authors of these stories represent a worldwide profession that has much in common regardless of whether they work in a busy, urban center or miles from another population center. They all relate busy, sometimes unorganized and even chaotic days in which they respond to the needs of students and teachers as they arise. They would all agree that the school librarian should be active in the school and community. The languages and demographics vary, but all librarians seem dedicated to literacy and developing information accessing skills for their students.

School librarians in developing countries face many problems, such as low literacy rates of parents, the need to purchase books in many languages, and often very little funding or administrative support. These concerns, as well as similarities, are shared in an ongoing manner on the School Libraries listserv, IASL-LINK.

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being done in Third World countries, especially in Africa. In 1998, IFLA's Regional Section for Africa launched a staff development program to increase staff competency, professionalism and professional growth in African countries whose people are some of the most isolated in the world. IFLA recognizes the socio-economic barriers that must be overcome in less-developed countries to enable them to access the benefits brought through the GII. International literacy is also a key issue that IFLA hopes to impact through initiatives and policy recommendations. One of the fastest growing round tables is women's issues (RTWI), which has focused on wide-ranging issues such as the status of women librarians in various countries, the need to target women in developing countries, and providing service to community women. A recent RTWI conference drew speakers from the International Information Center and Archives for the Women's Movement in Amsterdam; the Korean Women's Development Institute in Seoul; the Center for Women in Ekaterinburg, Russia; Bulawayo, Zimbabwe; and Rabat, Morocco. Issue papers on emerging concerns such as the international forum on copyright law, the decline of government funding, and outreach to latchkey children, reflect IFLA's total commitment to world betterment through libraries. One member, Duane E. Webster, summed up that commitment clearly when he stated that "We face an exciting era where new technology must be viewed as a precious public asset to be leveraged for the benefit of society as a whole, not as an exploitable economic commodity for the monetary gain of a few." (Wedgeworth, 1995) 

### International School Library Day

International School Library Day, a celebration of school libraries, started in 1999 and is held annually on the third Monday in October. People involved in school librarianship are encouraged to celebrate and advocate for school libraries on that date. Librarians are encouraged to organize an activity in their school library for parents, students, teachers, and community members to celebrate the role that school libraries play in education. And in a continuation of the *A Day in the Life ...* activities, librarians and others are invited to send an electronic message to the Web site describing their local International School Library Day activities. These efforts aim to promote a sense of community among people who are involved in school librarianship around the world. 

Future IASL conferences will include New Zealand in 2001 and Malaysia in 2002. Contact information for IASL in the U.S. is: IASL, Suite 300, Box 34069, Seattle, WA 98124. The Web site is <http://www.iasl-slo.org>.

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