



World Library and Information Congress: 70th IFLA General Conference and Council

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World Library and Information Congress opening address

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President

Dear members of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, it is with great joy and satisfaction that we greet you and welcome you to the World Library and Information Congress, the 70th IFLA General Conference and Council. We are indebted to our hosts, the National Organizing Committee of Argentina for their courage and tenacity. It sustained their commitment to host IFLA, with all the challenges of the recent years. Join me in a round of applause as we congratulate them.

We meet as IFLA in the Latin American region with its rich indigenous cultures and knowledge systems, which have sustained life in the vast, varied environments of the sub continent. We celebrate these cultures and acknowledge the traditional owners of these lands. These indigenous cultures have co-existed with and adapted Spanish and Portuguese languages and cultures as well as those brought by immigrants from many nations as bridge into the world's economies. As librarians and information science professionals we subscribe to 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. In fact, all human beings have a right to this.

Thus it is of no surprise to learn of the variety of innovative library systems and services that are being rooted and grown in the rich Latin American soil. These Library and Information Systems range from those that nurture the voices and self-confidence of small ethnic groups to those that creatively bridge the information divide.

I would like to pay tribute and acknowledge the innovative approaches that address Information needs for indigenous populations. The exploratory professional activities that are

creating library services that are meaningful to communities who “preserve their traditions orally and in mother tongue” (Aliaga, 2004). In some cases these languages have no written languages. The sharing of these experiences is invigorating to all who have similar challenges. We learn from successes and failures, we also learn that we should take courage and experiment, like you are doing here in Latin America.

Here in Argentina, there is a whole network of library services, addressing the most diverse communities, under the heading of the National Committee of Popular Libraries (CONABIP). These popular libraries have played a significant role for more than a century in providing support for literacy, reading and sharing socially relevant information. In recognition of this pioneering work, let us, members of IFLA, so privileged to be gathered here in Buenos Aires, think for a moment of all the smaller and larger libraries in the world that are serving people with information services, regardless of circumstances. The IFLA Community relates to all of them and acknowledges all alternative approaches to information services, which really support the needs of people. We therefore welcome signals such as come from the Social Forum of Information, Documentation and Libraries (SFIDL), to strengthen libraries’ social objectives.

To take one challenge as an example: how well are we dealing with the human right of children to information?

The theme of our Congress: Libraries, tools for education and development, means libraries and schools work together for an educated population. But we cannot suffice by just serving the educational system with library materials; we need to open up the wealth of sources from which a child and every human being can find his or her own way to learning and developing wisdom of life. It is incumbent upon us therefore to extend these opportunities to the millions of children who have no access to schools and education, such as street children, working children, and orphaned children such as those affected by war and HIV/AIDS.

We have to be involved with communities that we serve; we have to establish partnerships with parents, teachers and social agencies that work in recognition of the rights of children as human beings. We need partnerships, not only at the local level, but also at the national, regional and international level, at which IFLA works.

At this congress we will have a one-day workshop which brings telecenters and libraries together, to explore shared values and different approaches to the provision of information for education and development.

It is our hope that many more partnerships will follow, as we investigate and evaluate our strengths and weaknesses as professional sections. For example, we could partner around information literacy both internally among sections, and externally, with other significant organizations. Our Congress already offers encouraging examples of such collaboration.

The first experiences of IFLA, in worldwide advocacy, within the framework of the World Summit of the Information Society, have demonstrated the need and power of cooperation; with other international organizations, and amongst ourselves as national member associations. These are only the first steps to influence governments to establish and maintain democratic information services, and live up to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, the knowledge and skills that we gained, as members of IFLA will be wasted if we do not manage the knowledge to benefit the national associations as they embark on advocacy with their governments worldwide. The issues covered by the core activities in the field of Copyright and other Legal Matters, and of Freedom of Access to Information and freedom of Expression (CLM and FAIFE), will affect the essence of our professional practice and service

delivery. While always prepared to question as professional practice, we must be willing and prepared to stand for our principles and defend the rights of our users, worldwide.

The intensified focus of IFLA on advocacy and professional development is gradually changing our federation into a pro-active, effective and energizing international voice for libraries. We welcome the many changing initiatives that are being undertaken. We will work towards a coherent structure and strategy of our federation. We also welcome for example the New Professionals Discussion Group; we look forward to their cross-cutting approaches to international professional issues.

In the coming years, it will become even clearer that IFLA is a membership organization. Dependent upon library associations and institutions, and the volunteering good will of many devoted professionals. The best resource that IFLA has is in its members. People who give their time, share their knowledge generously, and inspire each other to greater effectiveness. The challenge for us is to manage the knowledge that we share, so that we advocate for and build a strong worldwide network of library and information services..

Let us not wait until we are back in our offices, but let Buenos Aires be the starting point of a more collaborate approach to our work. Let us open up new allies; let us not limit our contacts and exchanges to the familiar and the known. Why have we come all the way to Latin America? Why do we make all these efforts in time and money? Our Argentinean colleagues have been working hard to prepare a wonderful venue and programme; section members have been corresponding all over the globe to arrange inspiring discussions; An IFLA congress is a unique opportunity. Let us make the best possible use of it; let every minute be worthwhile; look for the unknown, the unexpected, overcome the limits of cultures and languages and join in to the vibrant dance of IFLA in Buenos Aires.

Let's tango!