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	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Social Inclusion: how can public libraries embrace the challenge of reaching out to serve all people in their community?</i></p> <p>Us and Them: libraries in the community</p> <p>Alex Byrne IFLA President Sydney, Australia</p>
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It is easy to think of difference: race, religion, gender, sexuality, class, wealth, politics, etc. Driven by opportunity, necessity or conflict, the movement of peoples around the world has been making many of our countries increasingly diverse so that these differences are becoming more evident in our own communities. While some countries have long had a melange of ethnicities, languages, cultures and beliefs, others had diversity thrust open them through the processes of colonialism and others have gained it latterly through migration and relocation of refugees. Further community diversity has resulted from the communications revolution which has enabled us all to experience vicariously the behaviours and lifestyles of others far removed from us and our communities. As I saw in a recent television program, for instance, Aboriginal Australian teenagers in Tennant Creek can express themselves through African American rap rhythms. Others may feel emboldened to explore their sexuality in ways that would previously have been taboo in their communities. Still others may be inspired by religious or political beliefs from cultures far removed from their own. This increasing pluralism and the accompanying calls to recognise and respect difference are challenging the character and sometimes the stability of many of our communities. At its best, it enriches our communities and makes them more tolerant and more respectful of the rights of all while, at its worst, it can lead to hatred and intercommunal violence.

To relate this to libraries, we need only think of the Danish Cartoons affair, which was debated at the 2006 World Library and Information Congress in Seoul. In that sequence of events, we saw a newspaper editor respond to what he considered to be self-censorship by illustrators by inviting cartoonists to defy the Islamic tradition which proscribes pictorial depictions of the Prophet Mohamed. As you know, publication and republication of those cartoons caused tremendous offence which led to riots and attacks on Danish and Norwegian embassies. It became an issue for libraries because of the calls to censor the publications which featured the cartoons and because it raised questions about the limits to freedom of expression and, by implication, the right to access ideas and opinions which some found offensive.

An earlier example lay in the *Human Immunology* affair. That matter was sparked when *Human Immunology*, a high status research journal published by Elsevier for the American Society of Histocompatibility and Immunogenetics, published an article on the genetic distinctiveness of the peoples of the eastern Mediterranean including those who live in Israel, Palestine, Syria and the Lebanon (Arnaiz-Villena et al. 2001). Following complaints from some who felt that it mixed science with an ideologically driven perspective on the history of Mediterranean peoples, the article was removed from Elsevier's ScienceDirect database (Krimsky 2002). Fortunately, the outcry resulting from the suppression led to Elsevier's adoption of a new policy on retraction. However, the events demonstrated that a scientific paper could be suppressed in response to pressure resulting from

passionately held beliefs rather than have its research merits debated through scholarly mediums. The incident again exposed the tensions inherent in a pluralistic world, the tensions which inflame much of the terrorism and conflict which we see on the nightly news.

I don't need to repeat the terms of difference, the languages of hatred, since we are all aware of them or at least aware of the epithets which are used in our own societies. But we must be aware that they are usually not based on innate properties or innate differences between people, only some superficial or stereotypical characteristic. In fact, the terms which can be most offensive in one culture or setting can be innocuous or even friendly in another. For me to say in Australian English, for example, "You're a bastard" to someone I don't know would be quite offensive, meaning that I thought the person was unbearably difficult. If I said gaily it to a friend, it would be received as a term of endearment, as a friendly comment on my friend's behaviour. Neither usage refers to the original meaning of the term, illegitimacy. In the realm of race, the "N-word", as it is often called in the United States, is today unmentionable, to the extent that Mark Twain's great novel of life on the Mississippi, *Huckleberry Finn*, has been persistently one of the most challenged books in American public and school libraries, partly because of its use of that word. However, not too long ago, its politer form was considered to be simply a descriptive noun which would be used routinely in orthodox work on race and race politics, census reports and other publications with no pejorative intent. Terms such as "communist", "capitalist", "catholic", "protestant", "Jew", "Muslim", "atheist", "gypsy", "HIV positive" may have some descriptive value but often serve more to divide. They create categories of difference; they identify those who are different from the rest of "us" who are presumably "normal".

The search for patterns and the making of distinctions between peoples is part of the human condition and may well have had some historical benefits in the construction of communities and societies which were sufficiently robust to withstand vicissitudes. However, their pathological development into xenophobia, the fear of foreigners, has had dire consequences for categories which were thought worthy of extermination or to merit social, cultural and economic domination. We rightfully condemn the Holocaust against Jews, Gypsies, Gays and others during the Nazi era in Germany as well as the awful history of apartheid in this country and too many other examples. But we must also be concerned about the lesser manifestations of intolerance which lead to distrust between communities, discrimination and sometimes hostility. The patterns and distinctions on which those edifices of difference and manifestations of intolerance are built are generally based on limited information, assumptions, misinformation or outright propaganda.

This brings the discussion back to our domain. As information agencies, libraries have a responsibility to provide access to "good information", that is, to information which is authentic, authoritative and, as far as possible, reliable. As information specialists, we design our libraries and especially our libraries serving the general public to deliver high quality information including reference and research materials but also those which generally inform and entertain. We cannot guarantee that the information in those materials is accurate – that is the job of scholars, authors, editors, etc – but we can confirm its provenance and indicate its authority. And we can assist our clients to develop the skills to judge those qualities for themselves; to develop the ability to recognise their information needs, locate relevant information and assess its reliability and utility; in short, to develop information literacy.

So we counter lack of information and misinformation by providing information which is reliable and trustworthy and which often includes multiple perspectives and interpretations. We oppose the propagandist by enabling our clients to investigate issues of interest and importance and to seek information which will help them understand the varieties of opinion on any question. By facilitating understanding we promote social cohesion.

Ours is an honourable commitment, a noble commitment to the provision of access to high quality information. It is a commitment which is complemented by our strategies to promote literacy, reading and, increasingly, information literacy so that people will have the skills not only to locate information of interest but to interpret its value. It is a commitment which justifies our claim to be identified as a profession, the library and information profession, because it both demands and demonstrates a strong social purpose, shared ethical ideals, well developed techniques founded on a body of distinctive knowledge, and collaboration to achieve outcomes. These characteristics of a profession place us in the company of the other recognised professions – such as medicine and engineering –

and are evident in the program of this World Library and Information Congress as well as in the daily practice of libraries and information services throughout the world.

But, in identifying ourselves as members of a profession, we distinguish ourselves from the publics which we serve. As the *Devil's Dictionary* puts it, a profession is "a conspiracy against the public" [CHECK]. In serving our communities, we have to become a conspiracy *for* the public because that is what our professional commitment demands, to provide the public – our clients – with access to high quality information. Unlike many vocations, and dare I say some professions, it is not for us to hoard information for the benefit of ourselves and our colleagues. It is not acceptable for librarians to hold our expertise tightly so that we might be highly regarded and respected as "experts" and our clients be disempowered. Our expertise flourishes when we employ it to open up the world of information for our clients, by finding ways of enabling them to seek, locate and use the information resources which will enhance their lives through study, work or recreation. This implies a close identification with their interests and needs. Thus, we must resolve the "us and them" of the profession versus the public by ensuring that we are embedded in our communities, whether they are the academic community of a university, the environment in which I serve, or the broad community of a town, city or region served by a public library.

We are, of course, familiar with the methods we employ to achieve that embedding through the use of community membership of library boards, user selection of resources, liaison and outreach services, client feedback, etc. These are all most important but more is required: we need to identify with our communities so that we are both of them and for them, so that we are they and they are us. This can be seen clearly in the most successful libraries and information services, those which their clients feel belong to the community and work for the benefit of the community. Where that identification is weak, the sense of "them and us" grows and the library's services are judged critically, sometimes harshly.

If we only identify and talk with those who use our services, we can live in a fools' paradise, a self-congratulatory space in which we are proud of what we do but ignore those who are underserved or not served at all. We might be doing a very good job in serving those who do use our services and might feel very comfortable but that approach falls short of fulfilling our mission to provide the public with access to high quality information. However, we would ignore the needs of the other members of our communities who may have been marginalised through a history of oppression or systematic deprivation – as has been the case for the Indigenous peoples of many nations – or through illiteracy, lack of shared language, cultural differences, and their limited numbers in the community.

It is for that reason that many libraries and information services have introduced outreach programs which aim to reach the non-users and the underserved. Many have built collections, and sometimes created websites, in languages other than the dominant language or languages of the community. For example, my library, the University of Technology Sydney Library maintains part of its website in Chinese and has a Chinese speaking librarian because of the University's very large Chinese language segment of students and the nearest branch of the City of Sydney public library specialises in Chinese language newspapers, magazines, books and audiovisual materials.

This becomes a much greater challenge in today's increasingly pluralistic societies. To encourage library use, not only do we need to reach across the barriers of age, class, education, geographic location and disinclination but also through the thorny hedges of language and custom. We might need, for instance, to find ways to engage with women in a segment of the community which believes that women should have no interaction with strangers, especially if they should be male. Or we might need to build a trusting relationship with recently arrived refugees who have suffered severe privations and with whom we have little language in common. To surmount these difficulties, we need to do what we have always done: build relevant collections, train and lead our staff, maintain and extend community relations. But we need to do those things in a new context: build relevant multilingual and multicultural collections, develop cultural awareness among our staff and enhance their communications abilities, find ways to engage with communities which may be indifferent or ignorant of the benefits of library services. Sometimes we need to be braver by resisting pressure groups who are opposed to special services for minorities and the marginalised or who object to the provision of access to information to which they object as was demonstrated in the Front National's objections to the holding of supposedly "left wing" newspapers in public libraries in the south of France or in the very frequent challenges to books in public and school libraries by lobby groups in the United States. The most often challenged book of 2006 in the USA, for instance, was a delightful children's books,

And Tango makes Three, which was thought to promote homosexuality because it described the use of a male couple of penguins in the New York Zoo to foster a vulnerable egg. When we fail to resist such pressures, we can further marginalise the vulnerable at least by giving the objectors cause to claim that their challenge had merit.

When we are successful in developing our services and demonstrating our principles, we enhance social inclusion and cohesion. We help to transcend the differences we see in our communities and to celebrate them so that they enrich our communities rather than providing reasons for antagonism and hostility. When we don't respond to those needs, we implicitly support power structures in our communities which privilege some elements and marginalise others. In doing so we align ourselves with some community elements and disregard others, those who are often referred to as "minorities", "them", people other than "us".

Why should we be bothered with "them"? Isn't it up to social workers to build social inclusion? Shouldn't we just build the best possible libraries so that they may come – if they happen to be interested in what we have to offer?

Although meritorious, and of course vital to the stability of our nations, the arguments in favour of social inclusion and cohesion do not provide primary justifications for libraries and information services to engage with the diverse elements of our pluralistic societies. They are good arguments and they may well assist us to obtain stronger funding and political support for libraries and information services, but our primary obligations come from another direction, the right to information. This right, summed up in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, states clearly that: "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." It is expanded by Articles 1 and 2 (equality in dignity and rights and non-discrimination), 6-11 (legal rights), 18 (freedom of thought, conscience and religion), 21 (political participation), 26 (education) and 27 (cultural and scientific participation). And the Universal Declaration's preamble makes it clear "that every individual and every organ of society" has a responsibility "to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and ... to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance". These rights and their implementation are fleshed out in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which most nations have ratified and thereby committed themselves to respect.

Consequently, as important "organs of society", libraries and information services are expected to engage with fundamental rights. In accepting both "the inherent dignity and ... the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family" and our professional commitment to providing access to information, it follows that we have a duty to reach out to serve all people in our communities. The important and stimulating program of this session demonstrates the many innovative ways through which our colleagues throughout the world have responded to this challenge. They demonstrate how we can reorient our services by considering our physical spaces, our services, our collections, our websites and online resources, our information literacy programs, our interactions and – ultimately – our attitudes to strive to serve the interests of all the members of our communities. They show how we can respond to and benefit from the pluralism we are seeing in so many communities around the world and how we can contribute to strengthening our communities by endeavouring wholeheartedly to provide access to high quality information to all members of each community. In achieving that goal, we fulfil our responsibilities as libraries and information professionals, enrich our communities and our own lives, and build social inclusion and cohesion which benefits everyone. The "us" identifies with "them" and we become truly the information professionals of our communities.