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ADDRESS TO THE 69TH IFLA COUNCIL II 08.08.2003, ON THE HOPES FOR MY PRESIDENCY

KAY RASEROKA

IFLA PRESIDENT 2003 – 2005

Permit me, distinguished colleagues, to pay tribute to the founders, past Presidents, officers and members of the Federation, whose vision, dedication to the values of the profession of librarianship and information services have positioned us, their inheritors and heirs, to stand where we are today: the global voice of librarianship, united in our belief in the Core Values of IFLA. Let me take this opportunity to thank members of the outgoing Governing Board members and wish them the very best in their future endeavours:

Rashidah Begum
John M Day
Wanda V Dole
Mary E Jackson
Jeronimo Martinez
Sally McCallum
John Meriton
Winston Tabb

I request that the slide on Core Values be projected on the screen to remind us all of what, as members of the Federation strive for:

- The endorsement of the principles of freedom of access to information, and freedom of expression
- The belief that people, communities and organizations need universal and equitable access to information ideas and works of imagination for their social, cultural, democratic and economic well being
- The conviction that delivery of high quality library and information services help to guarantee that access
- The commitment to enable all members of the Federation to engage in, and benefit from, its activities without regard to citizenship, disability, ethnic origin, gender, geographical location, language, political philosophy, race or religion.

This is a wonderful time to be a librarian. We all have immense opportunities to use our key professional skills of helping people advance knowledge to enrich lives¹ and to create an environment within our libraries and information centers that enables individuals in the diverse communities, which we serve, to enjoy freedom of access to information.

We have done extremely well in the organization of information and the establishment of standards, guidelines, and manifestos as a foundation for service. Now is the time to ACT. Let us use these tools to provide better information services. Let us advance our commitment to our core values through concrete actions that help people to freely access the information they need for advancement in all aspects of their lives.

In selecting ‘Libraries for Lifelong Literacy’ as the theme for my Presidency, I am deeply conscious of the fact that many, many people, all over the world, have no opportunity to make use of or benefit from printed information. The barriers are various:

- Inability to read in any language
- Inability to read in a particular language needed to access relevant information
- Sight disability for various reasons including loss of sight due to aging.

The developments in information and communication technologies (ICTs) are changing our ability to create and access information without regard to distance. While these technologies still make extensive use of the printed word, they also make it possible for people who cannot read to obtain information through audio-visual media. The challenge for us, librarians is to stretch our frames of reference to creatively and imaginatively exploit all aspects of ICT for the benefit of humanity.

In a recent visit to the library of the Canadian Institute for the Blind (CNIB), it occurred to me that there are similarities in the experiences of those who are blind or dyslexic and

¹ (Year Book British Library 2002/2003 p5)

those who belong to an oral tradition. If people in both developed and developing countries can listen to stories of their own heritage, hear those from the experience of others, gather at their local libraries to obtain information on health, agriculture, the weather and other topics by listening to tapes or broadcasts, consulting websites, and so on, the barriers caused by print disability will be overcome.

Information and communication technologies will thus contribute, in a practical way, not only to bridging the information access divide, but also to enlarging vistas and increasing the potential for sustained personal learning and growth.

The issue of access to information by the print disabled through the use of ICTs raises important questions of copyright. Audio-streamed materials are often accessible only on a one-to-one basis and may be broadcast to groups only with special permission in order to satisfy copyright requirements.²

The challenge here is for librarians to engage in the various aspects of intellectual property rights in support of the IFLA core activity on Copyright and Other Legal Matters.

We need to:

- Understand the commercial influences on the construction of copyright regimes
- Explore and expose the detrimental effects of such regimes on the realization of the fundamental principles of sharing information for educational and personal advancement rather than commercial benefit
- Apply this principle to all sources of information and knowledge, from indigenous knowledge systems to scholarly information systems.

I wish to challenge us to focus on developing the information and knowledge society from childhood, through partnership between the public and school library systems.

While we aggressively engage in advocacy at the World Summit on the Information Society at the international level, the reality of our claim that

Librarianship is the only profession which is really alert to an information literate citizenry as the prerequisite for personal and democratic empowerment, lifelong and societal and economic development.³

must be reflected through case studies of successes and efforts at developing information literacy within both public and school library systems. As we focus on user needs we empower ourselves to be the heart of the information and knowledge society from the

² I wish to acknowledge contributions from Rosemary Kavanagh of CNIB in discussion of this issue

³ Bundy, A (2002) Growing the community of the informed: information literacy: a global issue. *Australian Academic and Research Libraries*, 33 (3) Sep 2002 125 – 34.

point of view of users, the electorate who are ultimately the guarantors of sustainability of libraries.

Last but not least, the HIV/AIDS pandemic is a serious threat to life all over the world, but particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. The spread of the virus is due in large part to ignorance, particularly among young people. Ignorance can only be overcome through education and the provision of relevant information. Libraries and information services therefore have a major role to play in combating the spread of HIV/AIDS by providing accurate and up-to-date information on its causes, on effective protective measures and treatments and treatments, and a safe space for counseling on support services for AIDS affected and infected.

During my Presidency, the President and President-Elect will work as a team. The Governing Board will focus on the vision, strategy and actions that only it is capable of implanting.

National library associations are the foundation of IFLA and will work as partners with the Governing Board in formulating and implementing actions for advocacy at the national level.

Our success as leaders of the Federation will depend on your support. We urge you to focus on actions that will have clear, measurable outcomes and that will make a difference to library users and help them to participate fully in the evolving information and knowledge society.

Volunteers of the Library and Information services profession, thank you for your commitment. Let us go back to our communities and continue to give service with joy, enthusiasm and creativity: Aluta Continua! Travel well and best wishes.

I declare the 69th IFLA Council II, closed.

Kay Raseroka
President