

Elisabeth Niggemann, Opening Statement on Behalf of IFLA

Speaking here in my capacity as both the Director of the German National Library, and as a member of IFLA's Standing Committee on National Libraries, I would like to introduce the conference by saying a few words about IFLA and its commitment to working with its partners to preserve and enhance the culture of books and reading in our digital age.

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) is the global voice of libraries, with members from over 150 countries. IFLA's greatest asset is its members. A major strength of its members is their diversity in progress – in access to information resources and to communications and technology facilities, for recognition by their community, governments, or in legislation, in application of professional practice standards, and their capacity to advocate for their essential role and importance to society. One thing all IFLA members have in common is a commitment to the written word – and to ensuring that library users around the world are able to access as many books and printed materials as possible.

IFLA helps its members in a number of ways. Of great relevance to today's discussion is the world of IFLA's Copyright and other Legal Matters Committee, or CLM. CLM advocates for a fair and balanced copyright regime in a number of arenas, particularly the World Intellectual Property Organisation. IFLA representatives have stepped up their involvement in a number of WIPO Committees in recent years, including the Committee on Development and Intellectual Property, and the Standing Committee on Copyright and Related Rights. In June this year IFLA representatives met with the new WIPO Secretary General Francis Gurry to discuss co-operation and we hope that IFLA will now be more directly included in WIPO's planning and activities.

In addition to WIPO, IFLA is also keen on strong relations with other organisations that are central to its advocacy work. The IFLA/International Publishing Association joint committee was set up earlier this decade as a way for our two organisations to meet and discuss matters of mutual interest. This has achieved a greater understanding of the other's position in a number of areas. As you can imagine it involves at times frank and open discussion of our opposing views but overall this is done in a spirit of respecting those views and also of working together to find areas of agreement, or agreeing to disagree. We hope to expand our relationship with IFRRO in a similar way during 2010 to ensure that our co-operative work is strengthened further, and I look forward to hearing from both organisations during the presentations today.

This conference will tackle a subject of great interest to all the communities represented here – the authors, the publishers, the rightsholders, the policy makers and the librarians. For too long we have taken it for granted that the culture of reading print material, that most of us in this room have grown up with, will endure even as more and more parts of our lives become governed by digital devices. Only recently has there been a growing awareness that things are changing – in the way that we consume information, the way we make information available and the way in which information is exchanged.

That things change should not be a surprise to our professions. After all, librarians have had to move through many periods of change in the past, from increasingly literate populations, the mass production

of books and printed material, automation of library facilities and now to the emergence of the first large-scale repositories of digital material such as Europeana. However, while we can see that things are changing, it doesn't mean that the conditions are in place for us to meet the challenges we face head on. There is a lot of work to be done in-house by the library community to deliver the services users expect in the 21st century. But there is also a lot of work for us to do with our partners to create the access frameworks that are necessary to support the highest quality services and encourage people to continue reading at a time when attention spans are getting shorter and information sources more diverse.

This is why IFLA is extremely pleased to be involved in today's conference on 'Enhancing the culture of books and reading in the digital age'. Reading is integral to human development, and without the organisations represented here today, the chain that promotes and delivers access to books and reading material would breakdown. Authors want their works to be widely available and their rights to be respected, publishers wish to distribute books and support the generation of new material, while rightsholders organisations are key to the supporting of these aims. Librarians, meanwhile, are committed to freedom of access to information in the widest sense possible and we firmly believe that the best way to do this is to work in tandem with our partners in the chain. On behalf of IFLA I would like to welcome you all to today's workshop, and I am sure that the presentations you will hear will provide us with many ideas of how to work together towards our goal of enhancing the culture of reading in today's world.