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Libraries – A Force For Change: - Inspiring, Surprising, Empowering

Report of the President

Wednesday, August 15, 2012

Dear colleagues,

It is my pleasure for the next few minutes to give you the President's Report on activities over the past year. That's a pretty tall order to carry out in such a short time, but I will do my best.

It has been a very busy and productive year. That is due in no small part to the dedicated team I have working with me on the Governing Board. We met three times over the past year to discuss strategic and professional issues that affect our federation. In addition, every member of the Governing Board has taken on responsibility for one or several projects and they have enthusiastically developed them over the year; and the results show. So many many thanks to the members of the Governing Board; I hope that I haven't been too demanding as your Chair. In a few minutes the Secretary General will outline some of IFLA's key initiatives for the 2011/2012 year, and I know she will describe some very positive results. The development of our advocacy programs and policy positions, often in cooperation with our strategic partners has meant that IFLA has a voice that is being increasingly listened to on the international scene.

I will only mention a few highlights of activities that have taken place over the past year. The two that really stand out in my mind are the advocacy and representation activities that we have undertaken to move towards the adoption of a legal instrument for copyright limitations and exceptions by the World Intellectual Property Organization, and secondly, my first Presidential meeting devoted to the topic of Indigenous Knowledge: Local priorities, Global contexts.

There is no doubt that with the advent of globalization in all its manifestations - increasingly important decisions that affect our local communities are being addressed, debated, adopted, and enforced at the international level via global organizations and multi-lateral treaties.

A case in point is the matter of copyright limitations and exceptions for libraries and archives.

On balance, I am pleased with our progress. Two meetings last year of the WIPO Standing Committee on Copyright, one of which I attended, put copyright limitations and exceptions on the agenda for the member states.

Now it will be up to us to continue the pressure, at subsequent committee meetings. It is critical work. After all, the treaties adopted by WIPO will define and guide the development of copyright laws in countries across the world.

On the other hand, like many of you I am sure, I would like it done very quickly. But the truth is, we are dealing with an international organization with many differing interests from many countries. And of course, there are many competing private sector players who also have a voice at the table.

So, with so many perspectives at play, let me just say that we are “making haste, slowly.” However I do want to point to the stellar work being carried out on our behalf by the members of our Copyright and Other Legal Matters Committee.

Rest assured that, of all the issues on our plate, copyright remains at, or near the top of our priorities.

The second highlight for me, which I described at the Opening Ceremony, was the presidential meeting on Indigenous Knowledge held in April in Vancouver. It was an amazingly informative and also heartfelt exchange of perspectives on the organization, ownership and stewardship of traditional knowledge and information. While discussions were at times emotional and divergent, we all came away with positive feelings that we will find a way forward that is respectful of indigenous traditions, yet as open as possible to others.

IFLA’s Indigenous Matters Special Interest Group will continue work in this area. They hosted at this conference a session illustrating how librarians can develop and deliver innovative library services for indigenous peoples that respect their cultures while advancing the key values of librarianship.

The Group is also working on the development of a statement on the place of libraries in supporting indigenous language revitalization.

I firmly believe that with respect to indigenous knowledge, libraries can be a huge and helpful voice in moving towards solutions that are respectful of, and acceptable to, all perspectives.

In addition to these major highlights, I would like to mention two programs which support members, one program which matured this year, and one which just got off the ground.

The first is of course IFLA's Building Strong Library Associations program. The results so far have exceeded our expectations. Seven countries have now been offered the training modules and have been trained in a variety of activities that are necessary for the smooth running of a national library association.

The new program to support our members which has just been launched is the **IFLA International Librarian Leadership Development Programme**. Its purpose is to develop librarians, who have already exhibited leadership potential, and help them get experience and mentorship in working on IFLA projects around the world. It is specifically designed to provide leadership development within IFLA, and through that, create a group of leaders who can effectively represent the wider library sector in the international arena. The first cohort of twelve Associates have begun their program at this conference, and we have already been very impressed with their active participation here in Helsinki.

I just want to also mention the tremendous amount of work that has gone into developing policy and standards to support our strategic and advocacy initiatives. The list is very long, and includes policies and guidelines on legal deposit, orphan works, traditional knowledge, media and print literacy, e-Lending, and I could go on. These policies will serve us well, not only at the local or national level for implementation, but also to provide us with a sound basis for when IFLA representatives enter into negotiations with other partners or even adversaries; we can speak with confidence that we have sound positions on all the issues that are being discussed at the international level.

As you can see, there is so much that is taking place within and around our Federation since our last conference in Puerto Rico. For more information about these activities, I invite you to read IFLA's annual report which has just been released.

However, IFLA work is not all about policies and standards. There is a side to my role as IFLA President that involves representation at various meetings, events and celebrations around the world. Since Puerto Rico, I have met with 15 library associations or other groups in 10 countries. It would have been several more if I had been able to accept all the invitations that I received. Some of these trips were to celebrate certain milestones, such as the 300th anniversary of the National Library of Spain and the naming of Yerevan, Armenia as the World Book Capital for 2012.

I thank you all for inviting me to speak to your library professionals about IFLA and my theme. Your generosity in hosting me has always been superb. I hope that I have been able to contribute in some way to enhancing the visibility and impact of libraries in your countries. My message has always been that we should never underestimate the power of libraries to make positive changes in peoples' lives, and therefore, in their communities and in society as a whole. I hope to continue to meet with many of you in various parts of the world, especially in the regions, in the months to come.

It remains for me to thank the Secretary General and the IFLA staff for their dedication and competency in achieving the goals of the Federation, at times under tight pressures and timelines. Their good humour was always evident. What is truly admirable is that the work of headquarters goes beyond the sound administration of the organization, but extends to undertaking creative initiatives that demonstrate action and results on a daily basis. The Secretary General is truly fearless! It is a great pleasure for me and the Governing Board to work with her and all the staff.

And finally, just a word of thanks to our hosts here in Finland for a conference full of exciting professional content and glorious days that dispel the myth of the gloomy Finn.

Kiitos, thank you everyone.

Ingrid Parent

IFLA President 2009-2011