

IFLA/FAIFE

Libraries and Intellectual Freedom

"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".

Article 19 of the United Nations Universal declaration of Human Rights.



The right to know

All human beings have the fundamental right to have access to all expressions of knowledge, creativity and intellectual activity, and to express their thoughts in public.

The right to know and the freedom to express are two aspects of the same principle. The freedom of expression is realized by the preservation of the right to know. The right to know is related inherently to the freedom of thought and conscience and all other fundamental human rights. Freedom of thought and freedom of expression are necessary conditions for the freedom of access to information.

The right of access to information and ideas is vital for any society. If citizens are to participate and make informed choices, they must have access to political, social, scientific and economic information and cultural expressions. They need access to the widest range of ideas, information and images. Freedom, prosperity and the development of society depend on education as well as on unrestricted access to knowledge, thought, culture and information.

This right to intellectual freedom is essential to the creation and development of a democratic society. The state of intellectual freedom in libraries is an important indication of the progress of democracy in a nation

Gateways to knowledge

Freedom of access to information through public institutions such as libraries intends to guarantee the individual full opportunities to encounter free expression. Good quality library services form an essential component of the universal access.

A commitment to intellectual freedom is a core responsibility for the library and information profession. Libraries and library staff should therefore adhere to the principles of intellectual freedom, uninhibited access to information and freedom of expression and recognize the privacy of library user:

- Libraries provide access to information, ideas and works of imagination. They serve as gateways to knowledge, thought and culture.
- Libraries provide essential support for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development for both individuals and groups.
- Libraries contribute to the development and maintenance of intellectual freedom

- and help to safeguard basic democratic values and universal civil rights.
- Libraries have a responsibility both to guarantee and to facilitate access to expressions of knowledge and intellectual activity. To this end, libraries shall acquire, preserve and make available the widest variety of materials, reflecting the plurality and diversity of society.
 - Libraries shall ensure that the selection and availability of library materials and services is governed by professional considerations and not by political, moral and religious views.
 - Libraries shall acquire, organize and disseminate information freely and oppose any form of censorship.
 - Libraries shall make materials, facilities and services equally accessible to all users. There shall be no discrimination due to race, creed, gender, age or for any other reason.
 - Library users shall have the right to personal privacy and anonymity. Librarians and other library staff shall not disclose the identity of users or the materials they use to a third party.
 - Libraries funded from public sources and to which the public have access shall uphold the principles of intellectual freedom.
 - Librarians and other employees in such libraries have a duty to uphold those principles.
 - Librarians and other professional library staff shall fulfil their responsibilities both to their employer and to their users. In cases of conflict between those responsibilities, the duty towards the user shall take precedence.

IFLA and IFLA/FAIFE

IFLA (International Federation of Library Association and Institutions) supports, defends and promotes the basic human rights defined in Article 19 of the United Nations Universal declaration of Human Rights -- www.unhchr.ch/udhr/index.htm. This commitment has been affirmed in a Statement on Libraries and Intellectual Freedom -- www.ifla.org/node/608 -- approved by the Executive Board on 25 March 1999.

IFLA is an organization of worldwide scope representing more than 1600 members in almost 150 countries all over the world. IFLA was founded in Edinburgh in 1927. It is the first and largest international non-profit, non-governmental organization aiming to further the cause of librarianship.

The primary function of IFLA is to provide librarians throughout the world with a general forum for international contacts and exchange of ideas and experiences. It promotes international understanding, cooperation, discussion, research and development in all fields of library activity and provides a body to represent librarianship in matters of international interest.

IFLA/FAIFE (Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression) is the instrument of IFLA to promote intellectual freedom and the vital mission of libraries as gateways to knowledge and ideas.

IFLA/FAIFE was launched in 1997 based on an IFLA resolution adopted in Copenhagen. The initiative consists of a Committee and an Office. The Committee has 27 members nominated by national library associations from almost all parts of the world. An Office located in Copenhagen, Denmark, funded by the Danish Library community, the City of Copenhagen and the Danish Government, supports the Committee.

Through the IFLA/FAIFE initiative IFLA furthers intellectual freedom in all aspects, directly or indirectly, related to libraries and librarianship. IFLA/FAIFE monitors the state of intellectual freedom within the library community worldwide, supports IFLA policy development, co-operates with other international human rights organisations, and responds to violations of free access to information and freedom of expression.

IFLA/FAIFE Mission and Actions

The overall objective of IFLA/FAIFE is to raise awareness of the essential correlation between the library concept and the values of intellectual freedom. To reach this goal IFLA/FAIFE collects and disseminates documentation and aims to stimulate a dialog both within and outside the library world.

Networks of colleagues, media contacts, human rights activists and others support the work of IFLA/FAIFE. The ambition of IFLA/FAIFE is to act as a focal point on the issue of intellectual freedom, libraries and librarianship.

IFLA/FAIFE maintains an up-dated information service on the Internet and will produce an annual report, for public release, on the state of freedom of access to information and freedom of expression within the library world.

IFLA/FAIFE suggests and promotes IFLA general policies in the field of intellectual freedom. It proposes IFLA positions and executes appropriate actions at both international and national levels.

IFLA/FAIFE responds to violations of freedom of access to information and freedom of expression affecting libraries and librarianship. It also provides advice and assistance to librarians, libraries or library associations on request.

IFLA and IFLA/FAIFE supports and co-operates with relevant international bodies, organisations or campaigns such as UNESCO, PEN International, Article XIX, Index on Censorship, IFEX and Amnesty International.

Latest Revision: 5 January 2007

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