



Libraries@the Heart of the Information Society

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After many months of preparations, finally delegations of States, non-governmental organizations and other interests groups get together in Geneva for the World Summit on the Information Society. IFLA is among them. **More than 6000 participants** are expected in this mix of formal representation, information markets and policy-making meetings.

Again, IFLA has a strong representation at this Summit. Presidents (current, elect and past), Secretary-General and Headquarters staff, IFLA delegation Members from Uganda and Finland; Danish and Dutch Library Associations are present. Many Swiss colleagues are giving their utmost, after all preparatory meetings, (Prep-Coms), to make a grand final. We give you an impression:

- A fresh publication: the proceedings of the IFLA Prelude to the World Summit, held in November, were the first surprise. It contains a number of introductions, telling why IFLA, libraries are involved in the issues of the World Summit. And all the reports from the interviews between national library representatives and the government representatives, per country are included. This will also be a valuable tool in the follow up of the World Summit.
- IFLA has two booths at the large exhibition, well prepared by the Swiss colleagues: one booth together with the International Organization of Archives; the other one includes IFLA and is prepared by the Swiss UNESCO Commission. Charles Batambuze (Uganda) shows the bookmobile project with printing on demand. Many other success stories are contained in the IFLA leaflet, which is distributed at the Prelude and at the Summit.
- Thanks to many preparatory meetings, a larger number of librarians are now included in the official government delegations, among them: Finland, Iceland, Malaysia, New Zealand, Russian Federation, Thailand and United States. Two Swiss librarians are Courtesy VIP's in their government delegation. It shows that governments have recognized the role libraries can and should play in the Information Society and information policy making.

Entering the enormous building complex of Palexpo, where the Summit takes place, we get the badge, which opens doors to the meetings, public transport and the exhibition. It is well organized; Swiss police and army are at security checks, and circling above our heads in helicopters. But inside, at the exhibitions, there is a friendly atmosphere: the high tech image of ICT is balanced with the high touch from people in remote areas, in colorful cultures and a sense of life.

Tuesday, at 17.00 hrs, we gather at a planning meeting in one of the Swiss libraries. IFLA has a time slot of 3 hours the next day, and we discuss the programme.

- IFLA Programme: five speakers will take turns with short talks:
 - **Sjoerd Koopman** (IFLA Headquarters) on Library Success Stories related to the Information Society
 - **Genevieve Clavel-Merrin** (National Library of Switzerland) on the theme: Libraries at the Heart of the Information Society (IFLA pre-summit conference)
 - **Sinikka Sipilä** (Finnish Library Association and member of the National Delegation, Library strategies, example from Finland)
 - **Kay Raseroka** (IFLA president, Botswana) on Libraries, their role in literacy development
 - **Alex Byrne** (IFLA president-elect) on Delivering the Information Society
- We hope there will come enough participants, as there are many programmes.
- The library voice will also be heard in the session organized by UNESCO on Cultural Diversity: **Marianne Scott** (past chair of CLM, Canada) will speak about copyright issues from the point of view of libraries and library users. We'll support her from the audience. The delegations to the World Summit have a difficult task: many paragraphs in the Draft Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action are still not agreed upon.
- IFLA issues a press release supporting the draft Declaration and Action plan in general, but asking for a greater sense of urgency and funding to meet the requirements of a true worldwide information society.
- IFLA will also give its endorsement to a Civil Society Declaration, in which some library issues are included. This will strengthen necessary partnerships for the future as well.

It takes sometimes a lot of imagination that library advocacy can only be done by joining forces and really get together and work day and night on papers, presentations and formulations. But this first IFLA day, Tuesday at the Summit was well spent.

Marian Koren

Member IFLA Governing Board
Netherlands Public Library Association

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