



Librarians State Summit 'only the beginning'

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For immediate release

"The World Summit on the Information Society is only the beginning of a process to make sure that people across the globe have the information they need for their lives, prosperity and freedom" said **IFLA President Kay Raseroka** on the opening day of the Summit in Geneva.

As leader of the global network of libraries, Kay Raseroka speaks for more than 2.5 billion library users worldwide - more than the total number of mobile phone users. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) has actively participated in the work to draw up the draft Declaration of Principles and the Action Plan -- www.itu.int/wsis/documents/listing-all-en-s|1.asp -- which will be adopted during the Summit. IFLA welcomes the principles and the proposed actions and especially the unqualified reaffirmation of human rights, including the right to freedom of expression and information, which has been secured with such difficulty during the preparatory process.

However, IFLA is concerned that the 2015 deadline for meeting targets is too far away and that funding mechanisms have not yet been identified. We need to have a sense of urgency with closer but realisable deadlines. A rapid and high return on a modest investment will be gained by building on the existing global library network. Libraries, big and small, are found in most communities throughout the world. They provide community access points in which knowledgeable staff assist and train users in their own languages. They need to be strengthened by the provision of affordable Internet bandwidth, low cost or free access to high quality information, resources for training and development, and mechanisms to stimulate the creation of local cultural and linguistic content.

Kay Raseroka has a sense of urgency about this program. Drawing on her life in Botswana and South Africa, Kay is well aware of the need for children and young adults in the developing world to have the same access to knowledge as those in the 'North'. She is deeply conscious of the health challenges faced throughout the world and particularly of the AIDS epidemic in sub Saharan Africa: *"Without ready access to good information, people do not know how to protect themselves and their families. The medical systems, which are under such strain, cannot provide the best treatments so we see our people die young. If we wait until 2015 to ensure worldwide access to information, then another generation will be dead. We need a five year program to strengthen libraries, a program which can show considerable progress by the time of the Tunis phase of the Summit."*

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