



Report on IFLA's participation on PrepCom2

The second Preparatory Committee meeting (PrepCom2 -- <http://www.itu.int/wsis/preparatory/prepcom/prepcom2.html>) of WSIS was held in Geneva from 17-28 February.

1. The **PrepCom** consists of representatives of all the member states of the UN. It is charged with preparing the draft declaration and draft action plan for consideration by the Summit meeting in December 2003. It is chaired by Mr. Adama Samassékou of Mali. This was its second meeting. There will be a third and final meeting in September. We were not represented at PrepCom1.
2. Because of the importance of this two-week meeting, we organised a substantial IFLA delegation, which operated on a "shift" system to lessen the burden on individuals. Our delegation is listed in Appendix 1. Our Swiss colleagues ably led by Daisy McAdam and Danielle Mincio arranged the logistics superbly.
3. Much of the time of the many of the meetings we attended was unfortunately taken up by debates on procedures. In particular, Sub-committee 2, which also consists of the representatives of UN member states, and is responsible for drafting the Declaration and Action Plan, was reluctant to incorporate the contributions of the representatives of "civil society" (i.e. NGOs like us and the business sector) in the drafts. Much of the time was taken up debating which parts of a report should appear within square brackets!
4. Despite this, we have had some impact. Christine spoke at one of the consultative sessions and the panel responded by acknowledging the importance of libraries. Ellen established a position on the Civil Society Drafting Group, which is drafting the Civil Society's suggestions for the Declaration and the Action Plan. Ellen also established a position on the Academia and Education 'Family' Group. She submitted IFLA's main submission to the WSIS process for possible inclusion in the Civil Society document. Susanne and Ross spoke at meetings of the Civil Society drafting group and Civil Society plenary session, although they, like the national delegates, got too hung up on procedure. It is important that NGOs like us find ways in which to influence the national delegations. We also took part in an unofficial Open Forum and received some support for our views. Overall, the problem is that the national delegates, or some of them are jealous of their position as negotiators and suspicious of civil society representatives. We did however make useful contacts with some sympathetic national delegations, e.g Australia, France New Zealand (Winston Roberts was a member of their delegation), and Switzerland. Hiroshi Kawamura of Japan suggested that we form our own Library 'family' but our feeling was that it was better to take part in broader 'families' in an attempt to influence others.
5. We had prepared various documents in relation to the WSIS.
6. The IFLA delegation formed an alliance with the IPA representatives and agreed a joint statement (appendix A) based on previous IFLA/IPA joint statements. IFLA and IPA representatives are the nominated contacts for the culture group with IPA taking the major responsibility because it is based in

Geneva.

7. We met Mr. Samassékou privately to discuss the potential role of libraries in the information society. He was very appreciative and enthusiastic. At that meeting he announced that he would accept our invitation to him to speak at the Berlin conference. This, I think, is a major coup for us. It should provide us with opportunities to put our case, emphasise to our members of the importance of the summit and possibly gain some media coverage.
8. The latest versions of the draft declaration and the draft action plan which emerged during PrepCom2 are attached as Appendices B and C. A revised version will be issued on 21 March. It appears that groups from civil society may be allowed to comment on it. We must take that opportunity.
9. There are only two brief references to "libraries" in these documents, so far. In the Draft Declaration, paragraph 31 concerning infrastructure, it states; "Community access centres and public services (such as post offices, libraries, schools) can provide effective means for promoting universal access in particular in remote areas, as an important factor of their development." This echoes similar statements in the G8 DOT force document.. In the draft Action Plan, paragraph 35 (f) appears the following statement: "Equipping and training content workers in the LDCs, such as archivists, librarians, scientists, teachers and journalists in making use of the expertise and operational capacity of the relevant international professional organizations." However, there are many other sections which could be interpreted as being relevant to library and information services, such as several references to freedom of information and aspects of infrastructure.
10. Nevertheless, it is disappointing that, so far, given the enormous efforts we have put in through the UNESCO consultative process, the electronic discussion forums, during PrepCom2 and other meetings, that the potential role of libraries is still not recognised adequately. The degree of influence of UNESCO as a major UN agency seemed rather disappointing. The ITU is the organiser of these events and as a result it seems that 'pipes are more important than content' to quote one delegate. We need to discuss with our many UNESCO contacts how it can be more influential in this process.
11. The next steps in the WSIS process are:
 - 14-16 March 2003: UNESCO Switzerland initiative in favour of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs): The Lugano Round Table. We met Mr Alain Modou on two occasions to discuss this and other possibilities for influencing the end result. (see separate document GB 03-059). IFLA will be represented at the round table by Henri Sene (Senegal), IFLA Regional Manager, Africa and Jacinta Were (Kenya), Chair, IFLA Africa Section. Sjoerd Koopman may also be able to attend. Alix Chevallier will also be there.
 - 21 March 2003: revised versions of the draft declaration and Action Plan will be released
 - 28 July-1 August 2003 (to be confirmed): Inter-session meeting to be organised by UNESCO in Paris
 - 15-26 September 2003: PrepCom 3, Geneva
 - 3-4 November 2003: IFLA pre-summit briefing conference
 - 10-12 December 2003: World Summit, 1st Phase, Geneva
 - 16-18 November 2005: World Summit, 2nd Phase, Tunis
12. Recommendations
 - IFLA National Association Members to contact their governments and relevant NGOs within their countries to urge them to ensure that the final declaration and action plan includes proper recognition of the role of libraries. We should follow this up with briefings also placed on IFLANET.

- IFLA to be fully represented in the forthcoming meetings leading up to the two phases of the summit, preferably with greater continuity between the shifts.
- Establish links with the WSIS web site <http://www.itu.int/wsis/>
- Arrange to have a booth at the summit (Swiss colleagues are willing to staff a booth)
- Publish a leaflet on the role of libraries in the information society and in bridging the digital divide.
- Consider publicity initiatives to catch media and delegates' attention (e.g. a demonstration of the Camel library service of Kenya and a banned books exhibition in the Palais des Nations)
- Pursue the plans for a pre-summit briefing conference with vigour.
- Publicise the plenary session to be addressed by Mr. Samassékou.
- Place regular WSIS updates on IFLANET and IFLA-L

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