



Report on IFLA's participation on PrepCom-3 Geneva, 15-26 September 2003

First of all, we must express our deepest gratitude for the incredible commitment of our Swiss colleagues, led by Danielle Mincio and Daisy McAdam, to ensuring the effective representation of IFLA and the concerns of the global library community in Geneva before, during and after each of the meetings and to the planning for our own Preconference, "Libraries @ the Heart of the Information Society". Without their extraordinary efforts, our concerns could not possibly have been as well recognised in the draft Declaration of Principles and draft Plan of Action as they have been.

The latest versions of those documents, which can be found at <http://www.itu.int/wsis>, include a number of direct references to libraries, archives and information services but also many mentions of our professional concerns including unrestricted access to information, freedom of expression, preservation and the need to strengthen and exploit the existing worldwide network of libraries. Those references are well embedded in the documents and have received considerable support from government delegates as well as our colleagues in the civil society sector.

Unfortunately, however, PrepCom3 was adjourned without finalising the draft documents. Many issues were agreed, or substantially agreed, but major points of division emerged. It did not prove possible for the various committees to discuss a significant number of issues raised by government delegations nor many of the substantial matters of concern to civil society.

One of the major areas of division is in regard to the ownership and governance of the Internet. Some major governments and significant regional groups have made conflicting proposals for inclusion in the Declaration of Principles. Their concerns hinge about the openness or otherwise of the Internet and its status as either a private sector, market oriented communications network or a shared resource which will be governed in the interests of all nations and peoples. At this point, it appears unlikely that this fundamental difference can be resolved.

The deliberations finally reached an impasse on Friday night. Under the guidance of the President, M Adama Samassékou, the Bureau proposed that the drafts be adopted as the bases for future negotiations and that the PrepCom3 should resume 10-14 November and 7-9 December. After considerable discussion, we understand that it was agreed to resume 10-14 November subject to funding being found for the meeting. Further extension to 7-9 December has not been confirmed at this time.

We are writing to the principal actors to indicate IFLA's support for their attempts to bring the PrepCom process to a satisfactory conclusion.

Our Preconference has now assumed greater strategic significance because it will occur just before the November resumption of PrepCom3. It has the potential to provide an informal arena in which some solutions to the impasse might be explored. The participation of M Samassekou underlines this opportunity. Consequently, we call upon all national library associations and national libraries to do all in their power to

encourage their governments to be represented at the Preconference and to ensure that their associations and/or libraries must be represented as well. This will be a key opportunity for us to influence the agenda of governments in the lead up to the Geneva phase of the Summit.

Kay Raseroka, President

Alex Byrne, President-elect

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