

Introduction

This publication of the IFLA/FAIFE World Report is the fourth in the series published since 2001, with the aim to “offer timely and detailed summaries of the state of intellectual freedom and libraries worldwide” (<http://www.ifla.org/faife/report/intro.htm>). The previous reports can also be accessed at this URL.

In 2001, with the launch of the first IFLA/FAIFE World Report, the President of IFLA at the time, Mrs Christine Deschamps stated: “The IFLA/FAIFE World Report is a living document and more countries will join the project in the future. The World Report is a living proof of the global aspects of IFLA/FAIFE and of IFLA’s support to democracy and development.”

This fourth World Report confirms her statement by representing 116 countries of the world, the most in one report since the first publication. As there are many countries that are still not represented, the potential for expansion is still vast and a large amount of work needs to be done in order for this series to reach the ideal of becoming “the authoritative source on libraries and information services with regard to intellectual freedom in a global perspective” (<http://www.ifla.org/faife/report/intro.htm>). Most of the 116 countries that participated have IFLA members. It is, however, exciting that a number of participating countries are not listed as having IFLA members at the time of publication. This FAIFE initiative may also play an important role in increasing awareness of IFLA’s activities worldwide and may encourage institutions to join in a body uniting the library and information profession.

This report followed up and expanded on issues explored in previous reports. Detailed discussions on the methodology and analysis of findings are covered in later sections of the report. In addition to providing library statistics and details about Internet access in libraries, the report also deals with the same issues covered in the 2005 report, namely anti-terror legislation, freedom of information laws, violations of freedom of access to information and freedom of expression, the social responsibility of libraries, and ethical issues. These topics are reported on in the individual country reports, followed by an analysis of the data and conclusions that can be drawn. The six commissioned articles provide further information on pertinent issues and explore matters ranging from censorship and legislation, to transparency and the anticorruption role of libraries.

The report highlights a number of successes that have been achieved worldwide in terms of freedom of access to information and freedom of expression. It is nevertheless evident that IFLA, FAIFE and the broader library and information community should be very concerned about many of the issues addressed in the report – in each of the sections issues have been identified that need the urgent attention of library authorities and individual library patrons. In this sense we trust that the report will be useful – and a wake-up call – not only to the library and information community, but also to everyone who has an interest in freedom of access to information and freedom of expression. This research is an overview that identifies tendencies (especially when data was compared with that of previous reports); yet, more in-depth research is needed in many cases. We trust that the report would help identify such issues and inspire researchers to address them.

The 2007 IFLA/FAIFE World Report was a concerted team effort and we would like to thank all parties that were involved in the research and pre-press work for their role in making this publication possible.

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The Editors
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