



Promoting the global information commons:

A statement by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions to WSIS Tunis PrepCom2

Madam Chair, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

I thank you for the opportunity to be heard on behalf of global civil society on the subject of financing. I speak on behalf of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) and its member associations and libraries throughout the world and also the Scientific Information Working Group and the Education Working Group.

We speak not just for libraries and information services but for the two and a half billion people who use them, the people of civil society. For their sake, we ask governments and the global community to find ways of resourcing the program of action with a **sense of urgency** and in **partnership with all stakeholders**. The people of the world need vigorous action now, not in a decade, because a child entering school today will likely have finished in a decade. In a world suffering from HIV/AIDS, conflict, natural calamities, gender discrimination and other causes of marginalisation, we need urgent and concerted action if we are to promote a truly inclusive and mutually beneficial global information society.

Libraries, archives and information services provide access points to the Internet for members of communities and also the support and skills development which are essential to effective use. They not only maintain our cultural heritage but also the records which are essential to effective government and to continuing economic development. Through such means they build capacity in communities and nations and help to redress disadvantage.

IFLA advocates a global information commons through which all people will be enabled to seek and impart information. Its realisation requires, at a minimum, ubiquitous access to sufficient affordable bandwidth, up to date and affordable ICTs, unrestricted multilingual access to information and skills development programs to enable all to both access information and disseminate their own while respecting the fundamental right of human beings to both access and express information without restriction. .

This requires investment by governments, international agencies and business entities through the harnessing of **all available infrastructure and resources** in partnership with civil society. A modest investment in the worldwide network of libraries and information services would **build on the existing foundation** to:

- provide an extensive web of internet access points, each supported with advice and training
- offer relevant information in appropriate formats, languages and
- develop literacies and capacity
- support health and education
- advance the position of women
- provide opportunity and choice for children and the benefits of lifelong learning
- promote innovation and economic development
- ensure the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage and diversity
- foster respect and understanding between peoples.

We have three proposals for new wording. First, we propose a new paragraph on financing to appear after paragraph 24 of the operational part of the final document:

“Investment should be applied in partnership with all stakeholders including grass roots communities and civil society and should build on existing infrastructure to create sustainable mechanisms to enable major progress against the goals as quickly as possible.”

Second, in the section ‘Improvements and Innovations of Existing Financing Mechanisms’, the following paragraph should be added:

“We recognise that innovative financial mechanisms that should contribute to bridging the digital divide may rely on lowering the costs of access to information and software resources and on making those resources freely available to all. Such innovative efforts should include:

- a) supporting the implementation of open access initiatives to scientific, technological, cultural and educational information; and
- b) raising awareness about the existence and use of free software, open source software and low-cost proprietary shareware.”

We also have a specific recommendation for an additional clause in paragraph 6 on the achievement of targets and objectives. We suggest the addition of:

“enhancing capacity and sustainable access to content by improving connectivity and otherwise investing in existing infrastructure including the global network of libraries, archives and information services”.

Finally, we invite you to our pre-Summit conference in the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Alexandria, Egypt, on 10 and 11 November 2005 at which we will show how libraries and information services around the world are realising the global information society for all.

IFLA, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, thanks you Madam Chair and Delegates for the opportunity to be heard and reminds Delegates of the urgency of applying the financial and human resources of the world to achieving a truly inclusive global information society.

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