

# **Librarianship, an international profession**

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## **Introduction**

The green coastal plain of Zululand, South Africa, which some of you may have visited in 2007 when the IFLA World Library and Information Congress was held in Durban, is incised by many deep valleys. For the rural people living there, it can be a long walk from one village or homestead to another across the valley to talk to a neighbor. Often, people don't need to walk. Instead, they conduct conversations across a valley, without shouting but casting their voices to the other side in the musical Zulu language:

“Fikile!”

“Sawubona!”

“Unjani? “

“Ngikhona, ngiyabonga!”

But there are limits to the distance that the human voice can travel. The invention of writing was the first step that enabled us to cross the barriers of space and time, and the first revolution in human communication since the essential human capacity of speech and language. Early evidence of Sumerian pictographic writing (antedating cuneiform) comes from the ancient cities of Kish and Uruk, around 3500 BC (Rice 1994). Around 3000 BC there is evidence of the first Sumerian libraries or archives, which were connected to temples. These collections were probably primarily local in nature. However, by the time of the great library of King Ashurbanipal (c. 668-630 BC) in the Assyrian capital, Nineveh, we see an ambition to collect more widely, as the King sent agents to collect documents from all parts of his empire (Rubin 2004).

Although it is anachronistic to use the term “international” in this context, it is in the story of the great Hellenistic libraries of Alexandria and Pergamon that we can perceive the beginnings of the international dimension of our profession. The Library at Alexandria, founded in the reign of Ptolemy I Soter in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, aggressively collected books from beyond its country's borders, and it is even said that the Library's agents confiscated books from ships entering the harbor, copied them and returned the copies to the ships, whilst keeping the originals. (This story may, however, be apocryphal and reflect wishful thinking on the part of librarians.) The Library at Alexandria was engaged in rivalry with the library of the King of Pergamon. This led to an

early example of bibliographic trade sanctions, when the Ptolemies forbade the export of papyrus to Pergamon, forcing the Pergamenes to start using the substance we now know as parchment.

The fine editions of the ancient Greek philosophers that were printed in the Renaissance were made possible by the Byzantines and the Arabs, who preserved, studied and copied the ancient Greek works in their libraries after the Western Roman Empire had disintegrated. Were it not for the Arabs, who established great centers of learning throughout the Arab world – as far afield as Timbuktu – much of our classical heritage would have been lost. Knowledge is international. Libraries worthy of their name do not limit themselves to books from their own city or their own country.

An interesting example comes from 19<sup>th</sup> century South Africa and New Zealand. The same British colonial administrator, Sir George Grey, served as governor of New Zealand (1845-1853 and 1861-1868) and of the Cape Colony (1854-1861). He took a great interest in philology and amassed a considerable collection of early books and pamphlets dealing with the indigenous languages of Sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania – vocabularies, grammars, translations of catechisms, hymns and gospels, mostly produced by missionaries. Through a combination of generosity and accident, these materials are now held in the National Library of South Africa, in Cape Town, and in the Auckland Public Library, in New Zealand, but although legislation was passed to permit the exchange of materials, South Africa's national library still holds significant Maori and Polynesian materials. It is interesting to note that, in addition, these two outposts of the British Empire acquired some incunabula and medieval manuscripts from Sir George Grey.

From early times libraries have had an international dimension. In this paper I shall refer quite briefly to some of the well-established and better-known international activities of libraries, before moving on to describe some contemporary trends that make it incumbent on us all to take an interest in matters international.

### **International librarianship in the twentieth century**

It was in the twentieth century that interest in international librarianship took on the many forms that we know today. The American Library Association (founded in 1876) and the (British) Library Association (founded in 1877) engaged in international activities at an early stage. Initially these mainly took the form of representation at each other's conferences and at those of other national associations, but in the first decade of the twentieth century cooperation between the USA and the United Kingdom was manifested more concretely in the adoption of the Anglo-American cataloging rules of 1908 (Munford 1976). The International Institute of Bibliography, which later became the International Federation for Information and Documentation (FID), was founded in 1895, while the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) was founded in 1927 in close association with the League of Nations. The early leaders of IFLA were inspired by ideals of world-wide peace and co-operation (Wieder & Campbell 2002).

In the first decades following World War II UNESCO exercised a strong influence on library development worldwide. The post-war emergence of independent states in Asia and Africa aroused much interest among internationally-minded librarians (Asheim 1966) and gave rise to

idealistic and ambitious plans for developing national library services. The work of foreign cultural and aid agencies, for example the work of the British Council in developing national library services in former British colonies was applauded at the time, but has since been re-evaluated more critically, as will be touched on below. UNESCO's own work in library development in the developing world emphasized the importance of libraries for education, and more fundamentally promoted the adoption of national information policies in these countries: primarily the UNISIST (World Science Information System) and NATIS (National Information Systems) programs (Parker 1974; Havard-Williams 1972). UNESCO also promoted the international exchange of publications, which was a significant activity for countries lacking foreign exchange. UNESCO's role as a partner and sponsor of IFLA programs was very important. This period saw the development of specialized international indexing and abstracting services such as MEDLARS (for medicine), AGRIS (for agriculture) and INIS (for nuclear science and technology) .

Throughout the post-war period, and particularly from the late 1960s, when IFLA adopted deliberate policies of reaching out to a potential membership outside Europe and North America, IFLA played a leading role in international librarianship (Campbell 2001). IFLA's work in international library cooperation, especially its programs of Universal Bibliographic Control (UBC) and Universal Access to Publications (UAP) were promoted in its publications and in the writings of leaders such as Maurice B. Line, who wrote dozens of articles promoting UAP. As part of this program, an Office for UAP was set up in the British Library Lending Division at Boston Spa. The Office provided an infrastructure for efficient international inter-library loan and document supply, inter alia by the introduction (in 1995) of international inter-library lending vouchers – a system which still exists today and is operated by IFLA. The British Library Lending Division itself became a major international supplier, while in various other countries national institutions such as the Technische Universitätsbibliothek Hannover in Germany, and the Canada Institute for Scientific and Technical Information (CISTI) took on an international document supply role as well. National libraries adopted an increasingly international outlook, serving as national centers for international lending and for universal bibliographic control. The Conference of Directors of National Libraries (CDNL) was founded in 1974.

As information and communication technology developed in the 1970s and 1980s “library cooperation on an international scale” (Havard-Williams 1972:172) became increasingly feasible, and the early notions of cooperation were progressively extended to resource sharing and networking. The MARC format, developed in the USA, soon became an international standardization phenomenon, generating national variants and international cooperation in the development of library catalogs, union catalogs and national bibliographies. This also stimulated international cooperation in respect of cataloging rules, standards such as the international standard bibliographic descriptions (ISBDs), and the fundamental principles of cataloging, as expressed more recently in the *Functional requirements for bibliographic records* (FRBR) and related principles for authority records.

Other international non-governmental organizations such as the FID (which was dissolved in 2002) have also provided forums for international cooperation, discussion and reflection. Beginning in the 1950s various specialized international associations such as IAML (International Association of Music Libraries) and IBBY (the International Board on Books for

Young People) were established, as were regional bodies such as ACURIL (Association of Caribbean Research, University and Institutional Libraries), CONSAL (Congress of Southeast Asian Librarians) and SCECSAL (Standing Conference of East, Central and Southern African Library and Information Associations). The growth of international associations has been attributed to greater international awareness following the Second World War, as well as to the advent of regular, affordable air transportation (Harrison 1989) – it was no longer necessary for delegates to spend a week or more on board an ocean liner to attend an international conference.

In the 1980s and 1990s there was increasing emphasis on the impact of information for development (Stone 1993). In a significant number of developing countries well-intentioned, western-inspired library development programs had begun to falter. Starting in the 1970s a critical re-evaluation of these post-colonial efforts, sometimes referred to as “cultural imperialism” (Foskett 1976:7), got under way, as is described, for example, in contributions by younger African librarians such as Adolphe Amadi (1981) and Kingo Mchombu (1982) and in seminal works such as Gassol de Horowitz's *Librarianship: a third world perspective* (1988) and *The quiet struggle: information and libraries for the people of Africa*, by Sturges and Neil (1990).

In spite of the critical questions, a number of governmental aid agencies, particularly those of the USA, Canada, Great Britain and the Nordic countries, have continued to play a significant role in supporting library development in the developing countries, as have a number of foundations such as the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in the USA, and the Open Society Institute in Europe. These donors increasingly emphasize accountability and the sustainability of projects. This has stimulated programs aimed at capacity building by providing training opportunities for future leaders of the library profession in developing countries, such as those of the Mortenson Center for International Library Programs at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the Goethe Institut (Germany) and the Jay Jordan IFLA/OCLC Early Career Fellowship program of OCLC in partnership with IFLA.

I have only barely touched upon the variety of international activities in which librarians were engaged as the end of the twentieth century approached. Today matters such as bibliographic standardization, document supply, exchange of publications, joint publication, preservation and digitization projects, restitution or repatriation of stolen or looted materials, responding to natural or man-made disasters in other countries, collection development and services in area studies, all at the international level, are part and parcel of the normal activities of many libraries world-wide, certainly of larger libraries. Attendance at international conferences, study abroad, job exchanges, working in foreign libraries, etc., offer networking and career development opportunities for many individual librarians, particularly younger colleagues. And I have not even touched on the dominance of OCLC as a world-wide cataloging platform, or on the many European library projects and programs with which many of you will be familiar, the work of EBLIDA (European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations) LIBER (*Ligue des Bibliothèques Européennes de Recherche*, European Association of Research Libraries) or the CENL (Conference of European National Libraries), the close collaboration among the Nordic countries, or the various programs for library development in the emerging countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

## **Libraries in the Information Economy**

I started this paper by referring to the first revolution in human communication, the invention of writing. I did not touch upon the second, the invention of printing, but move on now to the third, the revolution brought about by digital information and communications technologies. We live now in what has been referred to as the information society, the knowledge society, or the information economy. Modern information and communications technologies (ICTs) are bringing about a profound transformation in the information and knowledge landscape, affecting the creation, distribution, dissemination and repackaging of information as well as the interactive sharing of knowledge. Modern ICTs allow information to be carried swiftly and unobtrusively across national boundaries, but while information can flow faster and more freely, it is also recognized as the raw material for the new economy, as a key resource for competitiveness, and as a valuable asset for those who own and can control it. Thus the information economy is characterized by a number of trends, of which I highlight the following three:

- Dematerialization
- Globalization
- Commodification

I hope to show that these trends have implications for libraries too, and make it imperative for librarians to be aware of international trends affecting libraries.

### *Dematerialization*

By allowing information to be unbundled from its original physical carriers, modern ICTs bring about a shift from the economics of things to the economics of information.

When information is carried by things – by a salesperson or by a piece of direct mail, for example – it goes where the things go and no further. It is constrained to follow the linear flow of the physical value chain. But once anyone is connected electronically information can travel by itself...what is truly revolutionary about the explosion in connectivity is the possibility it offers to unbundle information from its physical carrier” (Evans & Wurster 1997:73).

This has made possible what Clarke (2003:1) has called a weightless and dematerialized economy. A somewhat frightening example of dematerialization is the world-wide economic crisis that originated in problems in the US sub-prime mortgage market. American banks gave large loans to home-buyers who had little or no chance of repaying them. To sidestep restrictions on how much they could lend, the banks “securitized” the loans by selling them off to pension funds, insurance companies, and other banks around the world. They used complex financial schemes to make them appear safe and devised new financial instruments called special investment vehicles (SIVs) to avoid having to show the loans on their balance sheets (Robinson 2007). As dematerialized assets, essentially just information transmitted from computer to

computer in worldwide networks, these bonds flowed around the world, ultimately affecting institutions and individuals who had no inkling that they were exposed to the risks of sub-prime mortgage loans in Stockton, California or Cleveland, Ohio. They also triggered the collapse of many other financial institutions whose stability relied on a combination of dematerialized assets and confidence.

As personal diaries and photo albums are being replaced by ephemeral virtual equivalents on Web 2.0, a consequence is that a great deal of this content is likely to disappear at any time. This material reflects currents and movements in society, so that its disappearance will entail a loss of society's memory. It would be as if all personal diaries, letters, photographs and other documents recording the existence of individuals and families were to be loaded on garbage trucks and sent off to landfills. If nothing is done to preserve at least some of this material, the coming generations, or the "digital natives" will know less about their grandparents, parents and contemporaries than any generation since the invention of photography. Local newspapers and directories have long been a fruitful source of data for social and economic historians. Hence the replacement of printed newspapers, directories and other current reference materials by digital versions will leave a huge historical discontinuity unless measures are taken to collect and preserve at least a sample of their digital content. Web content is ephemeral. It can be moved from one server to another, and from one country or another, with a few clicks of a mouse. Hence international approaches are needed to ensure its preservation.

Like investment bankers, librarians have been investing heavily in dematerialized assets. Increasingly libraries, singly or as part of library consortia, are replacing print-on-paper journal subscriptions and physical acquisition of reference materials and monographs by the signing of licensing deals. These deals involve dematerialized information, the right to access content in the form of streams of electrons, for display on computer screens. The management of digital resources, and especially digital preservation, are major challenges to our profession internationally. And the problem really is international, since the notion of a place of publication, a cornerstone of universal bibliographic control and universal availability of publications, has become opaque.

### *Globalization*

It has been said that the Dutch East India Company, founded in 1602, was the world's first multinational corporation (Wikipedia 2008). Since World War II a number of factors have accelerated globalization. They include the creation of institutions to improve worldwide economic stability, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, mechanisms to lower barriers to international trade, such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and various multilateral and bilateral trade agreements. Also significant are improvements in international transport and communications – especially modern information and communication technologies (ICTs). Globalization may not be new, but modern ICTs, and especially the Internet, have provided a platform for its accelerated spread.

Globalization is not an exclusively economic phenomenon. It has wide-ranging social and

cultural ramifications, and it is contested terrain. Supporters of globalization point to benefits such as more rapid economic growth, improvements in living standards and the peaceful resolution of international political and economic tension. But these benefits are not evident everywhere. They are said to accrue to countries that “engage well with the international economy” (Global education 2007). Countries that do not “engage well”, whether for ideological reasons or because of economic or geographic handicaps that prevent them from taking advantage of globalization, tend to get left behind. This is emphasized by a broad anti-globalist or mundialist movement that has come into prominence as a result of large and sometimes violent demonstrations at world economic summits. They cite a range of problems attributed to globalization, for example the heavy social and economic costs of economic restructuring required to be competitive in the world market, a growing gap in the standard of living between richest and poorest countries, environmental damage, and the erosion of national cultures and languages (Global education 2007)

An example of concerns about the homogenizing effect of globalization is to be found in the fast food business. The McDonald’s fast food chain, which relies on highly efficient industrial methods, has come to symbolize both globalization and Americanization. McDonald’s has become the best-known fast food brand in the world. It has 30,000 restaurants in 120 countries (BBC 2007). Its presence in many of these countries is resented by a range of groups, including animal rights activists, anti-globalists, labor unionists, people concerned with architectural heritage who object to the garish yellow McDonald’s arches in their historic cities, and others who simply want to preserve their traditional cuisine.

For librarians and information workers in developing countries there are problems that are less widely known. These concern the flow of scholarly information between the developed and developing world, referred to here for convenience as the North and the South respectively, particularly South-North and South-South information flows. These range from highly *desirable* South-North information flow – e.g. contributions by African scientists and scholars to the international scientific and scholarly literature – to *exploitative* South-North flow – e.g. the recording and subsequent commercial exploitation in developed countries of indigenous knowledge obtained from traditional communities and practitioners in African countries (Britz & Lor 2003).

The impact of globalization on South-North information flows can be both positive and negative. There is a risk that weaker voices will be drowned out. At the same time countervailing forces are also able to operate globally using the infrastructure on which globalization thrives. This is exemplified by the work of organizations such as the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP), based in Oxford, England. In 1998 INASP launched African Journals Online (AJOL), a scheme to enhance the visibility of and access to journals published in Africa (AJOL 2007; INASP 2007).

South-South information flows similarly benefit from globalization. As more material is being published electronically (born-digital), as more print and other analogue material is digitized, and as more bandwidth is made available, some of the barriers to resource sharing will fall away.

While the world is being pulled ever closer together by the process of globalization, there is also

a counter-trend towards nationalism, particularism and fundamentalism. In Europe, the process of European integration has been accompanied by regionalism, giving rise to greater recognition of regional languages and dialects, and greater autonomy for regions such as Catalonia and Wales. These developments have been mainly of a peaceful nature. Elsewhere a rising tide of nationalism has seen the (sometimes violent) break-up of states such as Yugoslavia. The failure of states such as Somalia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been accompanied by widespread violence and disruption which have spilled over into neighboring countries. In other societies where globalization is seen as a threat to traditional values the backlash has taken the form of religious fundamentalism. The global village is not necessarily a safe place.

An unfortunate side-effect of globalization is global terrorism, which has led to greater governmental secrecy and to the curtailment of privacy (for example, the privacy of library users) and of freedom of access to information – an issue of direct concern to our profession, and one on which library associations in various parts of the world have taken a stand. The 2005 *IFLA/FAIFE world report* (Seidelin & Hamilton 2005) reports the result of a survey of libraries in 84 countries, in which questions on anti-terror legislation and its effects on libraries after September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 were included. Respondents in some of the countries expressed concern about newly passed legislation and its potential for “mission creep” – the possibility that police powers could be applied more broadly than the original mandate for fighting terrorism.

ICTs can liberate as well as constrain. The ubiquitous digital camera and mobile phone are liberating because it becomes ever more difficult to suppress information. Websites and blogs are important media for those resisting repression. Of course repressive regimes fight back. Freedom of access to information and freedom of expression are essential for the development of a well-educated, information-literate population that is able to participate actively in the knowledge society. However, there are countries that aspire to develop as knowledge societies while severely restricting freedom of expression, particularly on the Internet. These countries may conceivably make progress towards the information society, but the knowledge society proper is beyond their reach. A knowledge society requires a high degree of creativity, intellectual curiosity, openness to divergent views and critical interaction, which depend on intellectual freedom (Lor & Britz, 2007).

IFLA in 2002 issued an Internet manifesto (IFLA 2002) stating that access to the Internet and all its resources should be consistent with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, particularly article 19:

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Globalization also includes a global movement of people, bringing with it such problems as the brain drain, boat people, refugees and illegal immigrants, but also enriching us with multiple languages and diverse cultures, customs and cuisines – not to forget the challenges of library services to multicultural populations. This is international librarianship delivered to our front door.

## *Commodification*

It is generally accepted that information (or rather knowledge) is the dominant strategic resource of the information economy, comparable to land in the agricultural era and to capital in the industrial era. This means that knowledge has commercial value, and gives rise to competition. It has become a commodity.

In the past most printed books and journals went out of print once demand for them tapered off and it was no longer economically viable for publishers to reprint them and hold stocks for the trickle of sales that might still be anticipated. However, modern ICTs enable publishers to exploit a “long tail” (Anderson 2006) of content that they produced over a long period of time. Very small sales volumes can still be profitable if the content is stored and distributed digitally. This applies not only to born-digital content, but also to analogue content that is subsequently digitized. Thus the Internet makes it possible to continue exploiting the content profitably for much longer. One effect of this is the unbundling of journals. In many cases the salable unit is no longer the journal title, but the individual article. Another effect is a greater emphasis, often under the guise of combating piracy, on locking up information content.

It is known that media corporations such as the Walt Disney Company, anxious to retain its monopoly on such popular cartoon characters as Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck, lobby the USA Congress for the extension of the term of copyright whenever copyright on such creations is due to expire and they become part of the public domain (Facó 1999; Langvardt & Langvardt 2004). In the USA and the European Union copyright currently expires 70 years after the death of the creator. Because copyright law generally does not make distinctions between different types of content, this period also applies to obscure novels, newspapers or journal articles published a hundred years ago or more. This is not as weird as it may sound. Depending on the jurisdiction, the work of an author who published a first book at the age of 22 in 1870, then lived to the ripe old age of 92, dying in 1940, would still be in copyright until 2010.

These problems have significant implications for libraries and their users. Librarians would like to use modern ICTs, specifically digitization and Internet access, to make such materials available to contemporary users. One such user might be a doctoral student in Italian Literature, looking for an obscure 19<sup>th</sup> century author who has not yet been “researched to death” by other doctoral students. But to be able to digitize these books legally, libraries have to determine whether or not they are still in copyright (this depends on when the author died, which may entail considerable research) and, if the book is in copyright, they have to seek permission, which entails determining who and where the owner of the copyright is. Since this concerns books published as long ago as the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this may be difficult or impossible, giving rise to what are called “orphan works”. Orphan works are “works of which the copyright owner cannot be identified and located by someone who wishes to make use of the work in a manner that requires the owner’s permission” (IFLA/IPA Steering Group 2007). In a time of mass digitization, orphan works have become a hot topic, one that affects many research libraries. And since copyright is a universal phenomenon while copyright law differs from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, you will appreciate that this is a problem with an international dimension.

The commodification of information has had a profound effect on Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) regimes as well as on the ability of developing nations to gain access to and benefit from information. The rich nations, more particularly the USA and the EU, have taken the lead in setting international standards to ensure that the interests of IPR owners are better protected. There is a strong drive to ensure that their interests are also protected in the developing countries. A “carrot and stick” approach is being used to force developing countries to tighten restrictions on the use of intellectual property. The “stick” is the threat of economic sanctions, and the “carrot” is admission to free trade agreements (FTAs). In the latter case the snag is that developing countries may be required to adhere to more stringent requirements than those that apply in the internal market of the dominant partner. The result is that these nations fail to incorporate in their legislation all the available limitations and exceptions that are needed to open up access to knowledge for their populations (Consumers International 2006).

In many developing countries the main beneficiaries of enhanced copyright protection will be foreign rights holders rather than the authors of the developing country itself. This is likely to make health care and education more expensive. It could also stifle the indigenous book industry and inhibit the development of a reading culture in the poorer countries (Britz, Lor & Bothma, 2006). Negative effects are not restricted to developing countries. Free trade is not necessarily fair trade.

There is also a counter-trend. In the case of commodification of information there is also a remarkable altruism, a culture of sharing, which is exemplified by the open source model of software development (Miller 2006), the Wikipedia, and last but not least, the open access movement, which has arisen at least in part as a reaction against the high cost of “toll access”. The high cost of access to resources affects not only libraries and users in developing countries but also even the wealthiest research libraries in the developed countries. The open access movement has attracted much attention and wide support from many quarters, including governments, grant-making bodies, and professional organizations (Lor 2007). IFLA stated its position on open access in 2003, in its *IFLA Statement on Open Access to Scholarly Literature and Research Documentation* (IFLA, 2003). The statement affirms the importance of comprehensive open access to scholarly literature and research documentation.

## **Conclusion**

Since the mid-1990s the economic, political and ethical aspects of the international flow of information, particularly (but not only) between developed countries and developing countries, have emerged as an important theme. The gap between rich and poor countries is often referred to as the “digital divide”. However, it is not merely digital, as it has significant political, legal and economic dimensions. Librarians have become increasingly aware of the impact on their institutions and users of decisions on intellectual property and related matters that are taken at international forums such as the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), and in multilateral or bilateral trade agreements between countries (Britz, Lor & Bothma 2006; Lor 2008). In addition, issues of freedom of access to information and freedom of expression (Byrne 2007), and vexed questions of tolerance in multi-cultural environments have come to

prominence at the international level as a consequence of increasing globalization (Sturges 2006).

It is not surprising that advocacy has become a key activity of IFLA, which represents libraries and librarians internationally, often in partnership with other national and international organizations such as the (US) Library Copyright Alliance, the European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations (EBLIDA) and eIFL (Electronic Information for Libraries). Only through cooperation and continuous monitoring is the library profession able to ensure representation at the plethora of international meetings and to keep abreast of the huge volume of documentation generated by the international organizations. Currently, most of this documentation is disseminated through the Internet. Globalization has seen to it that the international affairs relevant to library professionals have multiplied to an extent that could not be foreseen by their predecessors. To many practicing librarians much of this may seem remote, but continuing vigilance is called for. It is therefore important to raise awareness of international issues in the profession.

What does this mean to the practicing librarian? The motto “think globally, act locally” comes to mind. We need to be aware of what is happening around us, locally, nationally and globally. IFLA and its international partners can fight effectively for libraries and their clients in international forums only if they work with national library associations. National library associations need to support the international advocacy work by environmental scanning at the national level, by raising the awareness of their members, and by advocacy at the national level. National library associations, again, depend for their vitality on their regional, local and specialized branches and units. The answer, therefore, is that practicing librarians need to be involved in their local and professional associations.

This year, of course, you will be able to think globally and *act* locally. The 2009 IFLA Congress is coming to Milan in August. This will offer you an opportunity to be involved in a truly international event, to expose yourself to more or less the full spectrum of international librarianship, and to share with foreign delegates your own insights and expertise. I hope that I have been able to demonstrate to you that international librarianship is an integral part of our profession. The IFLA Congress will demonstrate to you that international librarianship can be fun too.

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