

**LISLIG EC REPORT on the World Library & Information Congress,  
73<sup>rd</sup> IFLA General Conference & Council, Durban South Africa,  
19-24 August 2007**

**LISLIG EC AGM & Meeting 30 October 2007  
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Attending the IFLA conference was a great experience and it is a privilege to share my conference experiences with you today.

It was a great opportunity:

- to meet librarians from all over the world and to network. Personally I got to know librarians from Egypt, USA, Croatia, Australia, Kenya, Canada and Palestine.
- It was also a great opportunity to hear of work being done in the various institutions and to hear of the latest academic research in library and information services.

Some background information to IFLA: The IFLA Congress is held each year in a different part of the world. This year was the 73<sup>rd</sup> conference & council, and the theme was 'Libraries for the future: progress, development & partnerships'. 2007 is also the 80<sup>th</sup> birthday of IFLA. LIASA, as a member of IFLA, was the Congress host this year. It was special occasion and a huge accomplishment for South Africa and LIASA to host the congress, and this also coincided with the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of LIASA. This was the first time IFLA was held in SA and the second time in Africa, with Kenya hosting in the 1970s. Next year's congress will be held in Quebec, Canada followed by Italy in 2009 so start your attendance planning and research now! It was announced at the IFLA AGM that Ellen Tise, Director of Library Services at the University of Stellenbosch, is the IFLA President Elect for 2009-2011.

The conference was situated in the magnificent surrounds of the ICC, (the International Convention Centre), with vast spaces for the conference sessions, exhibitors, poster sessions and the opening and closing ceremonies. The social events were well organised, and the cultural events gave the conference visitors a sense of South Africa's cultural and musical diversity. There were plus minus 90 presentations in 4 time periods over the day and running parallel in 3 to 4 sessions with approximately 4000 delegates,

including day visitors. There were 3500 full registrations, and also many information industry people.

The conference was opened on Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> by the Australian IFLA president Alex Byrne. The ceremony was ably directed by South African Gcina Mhlophe who introduced all the delegates by way of their country flags in a huge visual display. Speeches made included those by the Minister of Arts and Culture, Pallo Jordon and by Ellen Tise, IFLA President elect. The key note address was by Justice Albie Sachs.

I purchased a DVD of the opening ceremony which included Justice Albie Sach's inspirational key note address which highlighted 3 key points: Firstly 'people as 'libraries on legs'' and the importance of recording oral histories, memories and traditions;

Secondly 'libraries as havens' for people for study and knowledge acquisition, also for contemplation and recreation. The notion of community libraries particularly for people living in crowded and poor conditions, the library becomes a place where people can converse, dream and read in their own language.

Thirdly 'libraries you can't see', computerisation and the new virtual library providing information.

The DVD is in the Rhodes collection and I am sure could be borrowed by arrangement. Please contact me in this regard.

Gcina Mhlophe, well known story teller and 'mother of books' was the opening ceremony presenter and made the point of asking the delegates if they had brought along their eyes and ears, and also hearts and soul with reference to Albie Sach's address.

IFLA has eight main divisions namely General research libraries, Special libraries, Libraries serving the general public, Bibliographic control, Collection and services, Management and technology, Education and research, and Regional activities. Papers were presented in these broad categories and covered a wide range of topics. Simultaneous interpretation services were available in the IFLA working languages +- 6 languages. Also useful was the Newcomers Session where first time IFLA delegates were given tips on how to get the most out of the conference. The Mentoring Session gave delegates new to the profession the opportunity to

network with outstanding information specialists, to share ideas and form professional relationships.

Good weather enabled participants to mingle in the many outdoor café areas and one could hear many different languages being spoken as people made new friends or reconnected with old friends. There was a real ‘buzz’ in the atmosphere with people either rushing to attend sessions or crowding the social areas.

Readings by Southern African authors were presented in the Exhibition Hall and I attended a sensitive and humorous reading of ‘Harvest of Thorns’ by the well known Zimbabwean author Shimmer Chinodya.

I also visited the vast exhibition hall where there were many trade exhibitions, and one could obtain promotional material and view product demonstrations.

I was fortunate to attend a study tour organised by the IFLA Genealogy and Local History section to the Killie Campbell Museum and Archive attached to UKZN, The Durban Gov Archives and talk at UND on the Hidden Years Music Archive project which included info on the digitisation process of music collections, including ILAM.

Also of interest was the 2007 Access to Learning Award given by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation where recognition is given to libraries who provide innovative access to online information, educational and development opportunities. This was won by the remote Northern Territory Library Service of Australia project.

The arranged social and cultural activities were an opportunity to meet other delegates and for the international visitors to get a feeling for South Africa. A very successful beachfront party hosted by the Mayor was held on a balmy Durban evening with eats, music and dance by the sea. A cultural finale gala with the theme ‘Cultures of Africa’ was hosted by the Minister Pallo Jordon on the Wednesday evening and held in and around the beautiful Durban City Hall with entertainment and crafts on sale. Included were Zulu dancers, Gumboot dancers, Indian music and dance as well as local bands. The buffet foods featured four prominent South African cuisines. Also arranged were library visits and many different tourist tours pre, during and post the conference.

## **A few key points**

Developing new professionals for the future: important to develop and create a diverse workforce, important to stop attrition of the younger librarian work groups, important to develop leadership skill, and we need to acknowledge that young professionals contribute to organisational strategy.

eLearning: new to students and library professionals. Important to support students and librarians need to learn how to learn online. Libraries are finding themselves under pressure to provide e-learning facilities.

Law Libraries section: moves to provide 'free access' to law, judgements and legislation via the internet. In SA by work by the Southern African legal information institute.

Document delivery and resource sharing section: unfilled requests usually 'hidden' or not discussed, this needs investigation. A General trend of fewer ILL requests as 85% researchers use the internet first. Trend by Libraries to use Google Scholar to enhance visibility of records. Also electronic book loans via linked publisher websites. Virtual learning environment has arrived with the Open Library, Global Memory net and World Heritage net – multimedia, multilingual and universal access.

Genealogy and Local History Sections: Emphasised the role librarians can play in recording oral histories. There is an African proverb which says, 'When an old man dies, a library burns down.' Important Role for librarians in salvaging vanishing cultures and in creating spaces for intergenerational storytelling and preservation of memory.

Reference and Information Services: Focus should be on organisational development. Can not replace existing staff - the middle aged, the boring! So training is important. New paradigm of librarians should meet users where they are even if mobile and hand held. Estimated 10% of work hours should be taken up by training or personal development such as research.

General: We are moving towards Library 3.0, a term first used in 2006. - The Virtual Library, where the trend is to have information technology consultants and not librarians. Important to hire staff for attitude and then train for skills. Need to be able to work with the generation Y. Be innovative for example place a librarian in the university coffee shop. Barriers to

Library 3.0 are an aging workforce and Library stereotypes. Students of the future will have online access to resources from around the world.

Personally it was inspiring and professionally invigorating to spend time with such a large group of very motivated librarians. We need to stay informed and aware of new trends in libraries, and librarians themselves need to put time aside to engage in research and make known their findings. To this end I would encourage you to try and attend a future annual IFLA Conference. I think it is an essential life and work experience for every library and information professional!