

# Gateways to information, knowledge and culture

69th General Conference of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions [IFLA]

**M**ore than 4560 participants from 133 countries attended the 69th General Conference of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, which was held in Berlin from 1–9 August.

The theme of the Congress, 'Access Point Library: Media — Information — Culture' was symbolised by the Congress logo, based on the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin and reflecting the role of libraries of all kinds as gateways to information, knowledge and culture.

Freedom and equity of access to information and freedom of expression were pervasive sub-themes throughout the Congress. This was dramatically reflected by Jean-Pierre Arnoult's account of the destruction and looting of libraries in Iraq. Jean-Pierre was the only librarian in a recent UNESCO mission sent to assess the effects of the war on Iraq's cultural heritage. Delegates were stunned by distressing photographs of damaged and destroyed libraries and archives, and various pledges of assistance were made during the discussion. A resolution urging action by governments to help restore the library and information infrastructure in Iraq was passed by the Congress in its closing session.

Lively debates also took place on the impact of the anti-terrorism legislation being introduced around the world, which often impedes free access to information. The Congress also approved a resolution deploring the introduction of legislation which violates fundamental human rights to

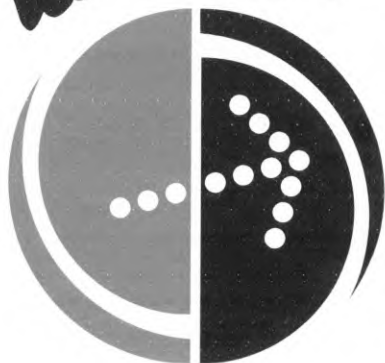
privacy and unhampered access to information in the name of national security, and calling for the repeal or amendment of all such legislation in order to protect these rights.

Outstanding among several important keynote addresses was a presentation on the forthcoming World Summit on the Information Society by Adama Samassékou, president of the Preparatory Committee for the World Summit and formerly Minister of Education in Mali. Describing the destruction of the Berlin Wall as 'an historical celebration of liberty and solidarity', Mr Samassékou went on to note that 'there are other walls which divide human beings; there are those who can read and those who cannot; there are the information rich and the information poor. We speak of our planet as 'globalised', but in reality it is torn by many divides — not only the so-called 'digital divide'. Discussing the nature of the transition towards an information society, Mr Samassékou declared: 'I am profoundly convinced that the role of libraries and information services in the creation and diffusion of knowledge and in formal and informal education will not only continue to be indispensable, but will become more and more important.'

At the end of a six-year period of office, Christine Deschamps handed over the presidency of the Federation during the closing ceremony to Kay Raseroka of Botswana, whose presidential theme for the next two years will be 'Libraries for lifelong literacy'. ■

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