

The activities of IFLA FAIFE

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In this talk I shall explain why FAIFE exists within IFLA and then describe the activities of FAIFE.

Article 19 of the United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights states:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of 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.”

This is where the work of FAIFE begins.

As librarians, we do not practice our profession in isolation from the society in which we live and work.

This interaction between our profession and our society is recognised by IFLA, which organises itself around “three pillars” – members, the profession, and society.

When we look at the library in society we need to consider not only the instrumental value that libraries deliver for society but also the intrinsic value of what libraries – and librarians – stand for in society: the principles and ethics which underpin our professional practice.

Included in every Code of Ethics for our profession is commitment to the human right of free access to information and freedom of expression.

So: because of the interaction between libraries and society, because of the ethical principles which underpin our profession as librarians, and because human rights form part of those ethical principles – that is why FAIFE exists within IFLA.

The history of FAIFE can be quickly described -

- IFLA Conference, Munich, 1983 – resolution on behalf of librarians who are victims of violation of human rights: IFLA recognises the relevance of engagement with human rights issues
- IFLA Conference, Istanbul, 1995 – resolution on the importance of access to information and freedom of expression: IFLA sets up a committee (CAIFE) to examine this activity
- IFLA Conference, Copenhagen, 1997 – resolution to establish a Committee on Freedom of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression: IFLA establishes FAIFE formally within the IFLA portfolio of activities.

- 1998 – FAIFE office established in Copenhagen
- 2000 – FAIFE designated a “Core Activity” of IFLA
- 2007 – FAIFE integrated into IFLA HQ at The Hague

So this year – 2007 – marks the tenth anniversary of the establishment of FAIFE within IFLA. This is therefore a good time to assess the activities of FAIFE.

The FAIFE Committee, meeting here in Berlin in 2003, identified three main purposes of FAIFE’s activity:

- ***Education*** – to build up knowledge and awareness of matters relating to intellectual freedom
- ***Advocacy*** – to promote the principle of intellectual freedom and Article 19
- ***Intervention*** – to engage with specific instances where intellectual freedom is challenged.

The various activities of FAIFE all contribute to these three purposes.

I will say something first about the statements and resolutions developed by FAIFE.

Then I will say something about the research carried out by FAIFE – academic research, fact-finding missions, surveys and questionnaires, and also the involvement of expert groups.

This will lead me to say something about FAIFE's series of annual publications - the IFLA/FAIFE *World Report* series.

Then I will say something about the workshops and seminars organised by FAIFE, including the FAIFE sessions at the annual World Library and Information Congress. I hope, in describing these activities, that I will give you some idea of the ways in which FAIFE goes about its work.

FAIFE has developed a number of statements and resolutions on behalf of IFLA, setting out IFLA's position on matters relating to intellectual freedom. Here are some examples:

- ***Statement on libraries and intellectual freedom*** (The Hague, March 1999)
- ***Declaration on libraries, information services, and intellectual freedom*** (Glasgow, August 2002)

These statements assert that commitment to intellectual freedom is a core responsibility of the library and information profession.

- ***Terrorism, the Internet and free access to information*** (The Hague, October 2001)
- ***Resolution on National Security Legislation*** (Berlin, August 2003)

These statements affirm the importance of free access to information and freedom of expression in the context of the fight against terrorism; and warn against the introduction of national security legislation which violates the human rights of personal privacy and information access.

- *IFLA Internet Manifesto* (Glasgow, August 2002)
- *IFLA/ UNESCO Internet Manifesto Guidelines* (published Copenhagen, September 2006)

The *Internet Manifesto* notes the increasing global flow of information across the Internet and the growing threat of a digital divide. The *Internet Guidelines* give advice to librarians who are concerned to safeguard freedom of access to information on the Internet.

These various statements set out IFLA's position on intellectual freedom issues and provide the basis for IFLA's advocacy work in this area – for example at the World Summit on the Information Society.

The creation of the *Internet Guidelines* is a good example of the way in which FAIFE goes about its work.

- 2002: *Internet Manifesto* adopted by IFLA
- 2004 – 2006: workshops in Kampala (Uganda), St Petersburg (Russia), Havana (Cuba), Santiago (Chile)
- March 2006: expert group meets in London to produce draft *Guidelines* for consultation
- September 2006: *Guidelines* published.

This shows the way in which FAIFE works. The advice given in the *Guidelines* is based on research and extensive consultation. Deliberately, that consultation has involved areas of the world which sometimes do not have a strong voice in our international professional community. These principles - of research, consultation and inclusion – are fundamental to FAIFE's way of working.

Research underpins everything that FAIFE does – and that research is carried out in four ways:

- **Academic research:** Stuart Hamilton's PhD, *To what extent can libraries ensure free, equal and unhampered access to Internet-accessible information resources from a global perspective?*

Co-sponsored by FAIFE and the Royal School of Library and Information Science in Copenhagen.

This research has underpinned work on the *Internet Guidelines*.

- **Fact-finding missions:**
Cuba (1999), Kosovo (2000),
Tunisia (2005),
Israel /Palestine, (April 2007)

The mission to Israel and the occupied territories of Palestine is planned for April this year.

- **Surveys and questionnaires:** results published in the *World Report* series (on the state of intellectual freedom in countries across the world) launched by FAIFE in 2001.

I will say something more about the *World Report* in a moment.

- **Use of experts:** for example, in developing the *Internet guidelines* and in writing articles for the *World Report* series.

The *World Report*, published every two years, brings together reports from countries around the world on the current position regarding libraries and intellectual freedom in those countries. The publication now also includes articles on specific aspects of intellectual freedom.

In the alternate years, *Theme Reports* are published – bringing together articles on a particular theme (or a range of themes) within the broad concept of intellectual freedom. Here are the titles published so far as *Theme Reports*:

- ***Summary report: Libraries, Conflicts and the Internet (2002)***
- ***Theme report: Libraries for Lifelong literacy: unrestricted access to information as a basis for lifelong learning and empowerment (2004)***
- ***Theme report: Libraries and the fight against HIV/AIDS, poverty and corruption (2006)***

The themes covered in these reports and the geographic coverage of the articles and reports in the *World Report* series illustrate the breadth of the work of FAIFE in its intellectual scope as well as its geographic coverage.

This knowledge base of research and reports and publications and articles is continually being deepened and extended by the various workshops and seminars organised by FAIFE through its members – and also, of course, through the contribution made by FAIFE to the professional programme at the World Congress organised annually by IFLA.

At present FAIFE is focused on three main topics of investigation and discussion.

- ***Access to health information in the fight against HIV / AIDS***
- World Congress, Seoul, August 2006
- *Theme Report, 2006*
- World Congress, Durban, August 2007.

This was a main theme of FAIFE's work in 2006 at the World Congress in Seoul, Korea, and also in the 2006 *Theme Report*.

This will also be a main theme for FAIFE in 2007: the subject of a session at the World Congress in Durban, South Africa in August – jointly organised by FAIFE and by the Health and Biosciences Section of IFLA.

- ***Access to information in the struggle against corruption***
- Zagreb workshop, December 2006
- Satellite meeting, Johannesburg (Goethe Institute) – August 2007
- *Theme Report, 2008*

This was the subject of a workshop held in December 2006 in Zagreb, Croatia in partnership between FAIFE, the Croatia Library Association, and Zagreb University. This work will be carried forward at a satellite event to be held in Johannesburg in August before the World Congress – hosted by the Goethe Institute in Johannesburg in recognition of Claudia Lux as the incoming IFLA President.

This will also be a main theme of the 2008 *Theme Report*.

Our activity on these two topics illustrates another aspect of the way in which FAIFE works – by developing topics over time: building up knowledge through a sequence of different events and perspectives.

The third main topic for FAIFE at present also illustrates this – and also shows how complex the issue of intellectual freedom can be. Because this topic asks a very difficult question

- ***Is freedom of expression an absolute right or are there limitations which must apply?***
- Satellite meeting, Oslo (Nobel Institute), August 2005
- Debate on the Danish cartoons, Seoul, August 2006
- A further meeting – in an Islamic country?

In Oslo in 2005 FAIFE discussed this issue, in the context of censorship, in a satellite meeting at the Nobel Institute.

In Seoul in 2006 FAIFE took the discussion further, debating the specific example of the Danish cartoons and the offence felt by many Muslims because of the depiction in those cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed – with FAIFE asking the question: “Is freedom of expression an absolute right of all human beings, or are there topics and circumstances where it does not apply?” There is now a suggestion that FAIFE should continue this discussion about the relationship between tolerance and offence and freedom of expression – and should do so by holding a further meeting on the subject of the cartoons, this time located in an Islamic country.

So, FAIFE supports education, advocacy, and interventions in support of intellectual freedom by raising our awareness and deepening our knowledge about issues related to freedom of access to information and freedom of expression.

In many instances FAIFE does this by working in partnership:

- with the Sections and other Core Activities of IFLA
- with other Human Rights organisations
- with UNESCO
- with universities and other scholarly institutions like the Nobel Institute and the Goethe Institute
- with national and regional library associations – including some national library associations which have established their own FAIFE committee at national level.

- with major funding bodies: DANIDA and now SIDA

Most of FAIFE’s funding comes from outside IFLA – in the first several years of FAIFE’s existence funding came from DANIDA, the Danish international development agency; and now funding comes from SIDA, the Swedish International Development Agency. SIDA has agreed a five-year funding programme to support FAIFE activity from 2005 to 2009.

This substantial support from SIDA is very welcome but it illustrates the dependency of FAIFE on external funding and therefore the vulnerability of FAIFE if that funding is not renewed because of other priorities which are outside of FAIFE's control.

Over the past ten years FAIFE has proved itself to be an essential component of IFLA – so long as IFLA wishes to stand on those three pillars of members, the profession, and society. As current IFLA President Alex Byrne writes in the *Theme Report 2006*:

“In providing full and unbiased access to information we take a stand – a stand in favour of truth and justice and the human right to know”.

In other words, by providing access to information our profession helps to empower people, to develop communities, and to enrich society. FAIFE makes an essential contribution to that work within our international professional community.

This is why we have to find a future for FAIFE within IFLA which is not so dependent on the uncertainties of external financial support from one single source of funding. If FAIFE is essential, then FAIFE has to be made sustainable within the IFLA of the future.

Thank you for listening.