

**IFLA/FAIFE World Report Series
Vol. VII**

**Access to libraries and information:
Towards a fairer world**

Editor: Theo J.D. Bothma

IFLA/FAIFE 2007

Access to libraries and information: Towards a fairer world

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World Report Series vol. VII

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Contents

Preface	4
– Paul Sturges	
Introduction	5
– Theo Bothma and Retha Claasen-Veldsman	
Authors	6
Articles	7
<i>From censorship to freedom of access to information and freedom of expression in South Africa</i>	7
– Archie L. Dick	
<i>Corruption and transparency in Russia: The anticorruption role of libraries</i>	13
– Irina Trushina	
<i>The USA PATRIOT Act: An example of the impact of national security legislation on libraries</i>	19
– Barbara M. Jones	
<i>Censorship in Arab countries</i>	24
– Kamel Labidi	
<i>On libraries and intellectual self-defence</i>	29
– Jane Duncan	
<i>The interrelated roles of archival and right of access to information legislation to promote democratic government in South Africa</i>	37
– Ethel Kriger	
Methodology	46
– Retha Claasen-Veldsman and Theo Bothma	
Country reports	52
– Retha Claasen-Veldsman, Erica Cosijn, Archie Dick, Ina Fourie, Maritha Snyman and Theo Bothma	
Analysis and conclusions	405
– Theo Bothma and Retha Claasen-Veldsman	
Appendices	446
2007 IFLA/FAIFE World Report questionnaire in English	446
2007 IFLA/FAIFE World Report questionnaire in Spanish	457
2007 IFLA/FAIFE World Report questionnaire in French	469

Preface

IFLA/FAIFE places great importance on its biennial World Report. This carefully researched survey provides the information professions with a regular insight into the state of intellectual freedom worldwide as it relates to libraries. It seems to be the nature of the sector that few out-and-out *causes celebres* emerge (although a few could be named). The world of journalism is a constant ferment of dangerous and threatening activity, and book publishing produces difficult cases all the time. Internet problems feature prominently in the press and on the Internet itself. Yet it might be possible to assume that libraries exist in an intellectual freedom safe haven. Unfortunately this is not the case. Libraries also share in the threats to privacy and the restrictions on access that trouble the world of knowledge and communication generally. Possibly because the threats creep up on libraries and are often experienced at second hand (for instance, through the suppression of a book or the blocking of a website), they are easier to ignore. The World Report is intended to open our eyes, alert us to dangers and enable us to fight emerging threats or support colleagues in other parts of the world.

The earlier editions of the World Report were produced by the FAIFE Office in Copenhagen (now sadly no more). However, with generous funding from Swedish Sida and the research and editorial efforts of a team at the University of Pretoria, the 2007 World Report emerges through a different route. It follows essentially the same plan as its predecessors, but we are proud to say that more countries than ever before have reported on their own national situation. The World Report will never appear without some controversy. Arguably it would be less of a contribution if it did. Not all of it is cheerful reading, but there are tales of success for national communities of librarians, as well as indications of current and expected problems. FAIFE organises and contributes to professional events all over the world. The good effects of these spread out globally, but the World Report gives everything FAIFE does a solid backing of information content. Please read it, learn and continue to refer to it hereafter.

Paul Sturges

*Chair of the IFLA/FAIFE Committee
March 2008*

Introduction

This publication of the IFLA/FAIFE World Report is the fourth in the series published since 2001, with the aim to “offer timely and detailed summaries of the state of intellectual freedom and libraries worldwide” (<http://www.ifla.org/faife/report/intro.htm>). The previous reports can also be accessed at this URL.

In 2001, with the launch of the first IFLA/FAIFE World Report, the President of IFLA at the time, Mrs Christine Deschamps stated: “The IFLA/FAIFE World Report is a living document and more countries will join the project in the future. The World Report is a living proof of the global aspects of IFLA/FAIFE and of IFLA’s support to democracy and development.”

This fourth World Report confirms her statement by representing 116 countries of the world, the most in one report since the first publication. As there are many countries that are still not represented, the potential for expansion is still vast and a large amount of work needs to be done in order for this series to reach the ideal of becoming “the authoritative source on libraries and information services with regard to intellectual freedom in a global perspective” (<http://www.ifla.org/faife/report/intro.htm>). Most of the 116 countries that participated have IFLA members. It is, however, exciting that a number of participating countries are not listed as having IFLA members at the time of publication. This FAIFE initiative may also play an important role in increasing awareness of IFLA’s activities worldwide and may encourage institutions to join in a body uniting the library and information profession.

This report followed up and expanded on issues explored in previous reports. Detailed discussions on the methodology and analysis of findings are covered in later sections of the report. In addition to providing library statistics and details about Internet access in libraries, the report also deals with the same issues covered in the 2005 report, namely anti-terror legislation, freedom of information laws, violations of freedom of access to information and freedom of expression, the social responsibility of libraries, and ethical issues. These topics are reported on in the individual country reports, followed by an analysis of the data and conclusions that can be drawn. The six commissioned articles provide further information on pertinent issues and explore matters ranging from censorship and legislation, to transparency and the anticorruption role of libraries.

The report highlights a number of successes that have been achieved worldwide in terms of freedom of access to information and freedom of expression. It is nevertheless evident that IFLA, FAIFE and the broader library and information community should be very concerned about many of the issues addressed in the report – in each of the sections issues have been identified that need the urgent attention of library authorities and individual library patrons. In this sense we trust that the report will be useful – and a wake-up call – not only to the library and information community, but also to everyone who has an interest in freedom of access to information and freedom of expression. This research is an overview that identifies tendencies (especially when data was compared with that of previous reports); yet, more in-depth research is needed in many cases. We trust that the report would help identify such issues and inspire researchers to address them.

The 2007 IFLA/FAIFE World Report was a concerted team effort and we would like to thank all parties that were involved in the research and pre-press work for their role in making this publication possible.

Theo Bothma and Retha Claasen-Veldsman

March 2008

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