

The politics of the World Summit on the Information Society

Alex Byrne*

Abstract

Promoted by the United Nations organisations, the World Summit on the Information Society was initiated to interrogate the global issues and challenges resulting from the widespread use of ICTs and the growth of the information economy. Its first phase, held in Geneva in December 2003, brought together 16,000 delegates and was directed towards the adoption of a Declaration and an Action Plan. The second phase, planned for Tunis in November 2005, is focussed on implementing the Action Plan. Reflecting the role of libraries and information services at the heart of the information society, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), strove to highlight the sector's concerns including freedom of access to information and the digital divide. Alex will discuss the robust geopolitical discourse and undercurrents of the Summit and the ways in which IFLA sought to influence the outcomes of the Geneva phase and its approach to the Tunis phase.

Much has been written about the Information or Knowledge Society, notably by Castells in his three volume work *The information age: economy, society and culture* (1996, 1997, 1998). It is a post-industrial society in which wealth can be generated substantially through the creation and use of knowledge and its transmission as information. It is a society which we have seen develop in Australia and other advanced economies where employment generation has largely shifted to the service sector with increasing emphasis on education and, especially, its essential foundation, literacy. Employment in the industries which have been the traditional generators of wealth – agriculture, the extractive industries and manufacturing – has declined while productivity has increased. Although still a major producer and supplier of commodities, Australia has become a most significant provider of services to the Asia Pacific region – especially financial and consulting services and higher education. It has become a knowledge or information based economy and society and exemplifies a global trend, especially in the more developed nations but also reflected in the aspirations of developing nations.

Much of the literature about the changes in society blurs the distinction between information and knowledge, often using the terms interchangeably. Indeed, information is often elided

* Alex Byrne is the President-elect 2003-2005 of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA - <http://www.ifla.org>), will be President 2005-2007 and chaired IFLA's Committee on Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression 1997-2003. In his day job, he is the University Librarian and a Deputy Chair of the Academic Board at the University of Technology, Sydney where he can be contacted on Tel +61 2 9514 3332, Fax +61 2 9514 3331, alex.byrne@uts.edu.au.

into data to compound the confusion. Eliot's aphorism is more needed than ever: "Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?" (TS Eliot, The Chorus from *The Rock*, 1934).

The World Summit on the Information Society

The World Summit on the Information Society, known to participants as WSIS (pronounced "Whisis") or SMSI in French (Sommet mondial sur la société de l'information pronounced "Simsi"), was emphatically not about wisdom or indeed about knowledge although one might hope that its pronouncements and outcomes would be wise and would, in the words of the President of the preparatory process M Adama Samassékou, foster a society built around *shared knowledge*.

The Summit was proposed and sponsored through the ITU (International Telecommunication Union) and consequently its initial focus was on information technology, not information or "content" and certainly not knowledge. And therein lay a fundamental problem to which I shall return.

Promoted by the United Nations and its agencies, the World Summit on the Information Society was initiated to interrogate the global issues and challenges resulting from the widespread use of ICTs and the growth of the information economy. It is the latest in a series of United Nations sponsored summits and conferences to highlight major global issues. It followed such other events as the World Conference on Women (Beijing, China – September 1995), Millennium Summit: "The role of the United Nations in the 21st century" (New York, 6-8 September 2000), World Conference against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance (Durban, South Africa, 31 August - 7 September 2001), World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, South Africa, 26 August - 4 September 2002).

The process

The Summit's first phase, held in Geneva in December 2003, brought together 16,000 delegates and was directed towards the adoption of a Declaration of Principles and an Action Plan. The second phase, planned for Tunis in November 2005, is focussed on implementing the Action Plan.

As with other UN sponsored Summits, the actual three day Summit is the culmination of several years of negotiations and consists of set piece speeches by leaders of government and United Nations agencies together with an exhibition and a multitude of presentations by governments, international agencies and advocacy groups. The World Summit on the Information Society differed from previous summits in that its planners explicitly and formally recognised three groups of stakeholders: governments, civil society and business entities. In fact there was a fourth which the UN agencies were perhaps too polite to mention – or which was perhaps too obvious to them – the international governmental organisations themselves. In the event the hierarchy of influence was governments first, international governmental agencies a close second, civil society a distant third with business entities bringing up the rear. "Civil society" is a misnomer: it is the term employed to denote the group of non governmental organisations (NGOs) or transnational social movement

organisations (TSMOs) which represent the many dimensions of civil society. I prefer to use the term “civil society organisations”. “Business entities” is similarly inappropriate because it generally referred to peak bodies representing business interests although some powerful companies such as Microsoft were individually influential.

The process consisted of a series of formal preparatory committee meetings (PrepComs in UN-speak) which were supported by regional meetings held in Africa, Latin America and other regions of the world and focal meetings held by agencies such as UNESCO. The formal PrepCom meetings focussed on developing the two documents, the Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action, often breaking into subcommittee meetings to discuss the details of issues and the language to be used. New participants, including IFLA representatives, learned about the labyrinthine modes of international negotiation such as the startling concepts of “square brackets” and “non-papers”. “Square brackets” are put around any sentence or phrase which is not agreed to signal that it is still in draft. And, of course, the whole of a text is in square brackets until all the internal square brackets have been removed. Square brackets nested within square brackets to a mind-numbing extent! Even more Alice-in-Wonderlandish is the “non-paper”: it is a paper written and circulated for discussion which has no standing except to promote discussion. It is therefore used as a circuit breaker to resolve an impasse but simple souls, unused to international negotiations, find it difficult to see how a paper which can be argued over and even agreed can have no formal status.

The governments were certainly ‘more equal’ than the other groups but, thanks largely to the insistence and facilitation of M Adama Samassékou, the President of the PrepComs, civil society organisations were given a limited voice. Together with the business entities, they were allowed 15 minutes on the floor of a three hour or longer meeting, perhaps 3 minutes each for 5 organisations. The slots were hard to obtain and led to some competition between civil society organisations. Their brevity contrasted dramatically with the filibustering indulged in by many governmental delegations.

Nevertheless, the civil society organisations showed remarkable unanimity, putting aside their differences and specific concerns in the shared interest of emphasising the big issues. They achieved considerable success but were often frustrated by the attitudes of most government delegations who clearly felt that it was their sand patch and resented the involvement of such other parties. Their concerns and frustrations are expressed in an alternative civil society declaration which was agreed and issued during the Summit (WSIS Civil Society Plenary 2003).

Interventions on behalf of libraries and information services

Reflecting the role of libraries and information services at the heart of the information society, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), strove to highlight the sector's concerns including freedom of access to information and the digital divide. IFLA sought to influence the outcomes of the Geneva phase. IFLA representatives communicated with cognate peak professional bodies such as the International Publishers’ Association (IPA), participated in consultative meetings hosted by UNESCO, formed a delegation to the preparatory committee (PrepCom) meetings for the Summit, and organised a pre-Summit conference. A number of documents were produced including a booklet of library success stories and formal submissions to the Summit.

These interventions, which began in 2002, demanded an intense period of focussed activity by IFLA staff, members of the Governing Board and other colleagues, notably the team of Swiss librarians and students in Geneva who represented IFLA, organised the Libraries@the Heart Pre-Summit Conference and supported delegates. Their work was crucial to the whole project. The campaign was exhausting and stretched our resources considerably. It demonstrated the need for IFLA to establish an effective advocacy capability while still drawing on the knowledge, persuasiveness and contacts of our members.

Also important was the strong support provided by a number of national delegations, especially the delegation from New Zealand, which articulated our concerns in preparatory meetings in which civil society representatives, including those from IFLA, were not permitted to speak. Those interventions from the floor of the meetings were echoed by initiatives taken by a number of national library associations within their own countries. For example, the participation of IFLA President Kay Raseroka in a meeting organised by the Danish Library Association and other Danish NGO's led to the inclusion of library views in the Danish government position which was presented at PrepCom3.

The Libraries@the Heart Pre-Summit Conference, which was held in the Hall of the General Assembly in the Palais des Nations in Geneva a month before the Summit, was crucial in providing an opportunity for librarians to come together in the Geneva home of the United Nations to highlight the centrality of library and information services to the information society and to meet with members of their governments' delegations to the PrepComs and the Summit. More than 70 countries were represented at the Conference and discussions continued in national capitals. Delegates called upon the nations of the world to:

Support and extend the existing global network of library and information services to make available and preserve knowledge and cultural heritage, to provide information access points and to develop the twenty-first century literacies which are essential to the realisation of the information society. High quality library and information services provide access to the information required by the communities they serve: a modest investment in them would quickly return significant dividends.

This exhortation summarised the arguments tendered by IFLA and its members. We expressed a shared vision of an inclusive Information Society in which everyone can create, access, use and share information and knowledge and which is based on the fundamental right of human beings to both access and express information without restriction. We noted that libraries and information services provide access to information, ideas and works of imagination in any medium and regardless of frontiers; they serve as gateways to knowledge, thought and culture, offering essential support for independent decision-making, cultural development, research and lifelong learning by both individuals and groups; they assist people to develop lifelong literacy -the range of competencies necessary to engage fully with the Information Society; they contribute to the development and maintenance of intellectual freedom and help to safeguard democratic values and universal civil rights; and, consequently, they are committed to offering their clients access to relevant resources and services without restriction. We went on to assert that international understanding and dialogue is supported through access to information and knowledge from other nations and cultures. We added that IFLA and its members are committed to addressing the digital divide and the resulting information inequality. This might all seem obvious to those of us in the

library and information game but many of the participants in the Summit processes were oblivious to it.

The Declaration of Principles

After all the negotiation, a compromise Declaration of Principles was agreed (World Summit on the Information Society 2003a). Unqualified acknowledgement of the vital importance of human rights – and particularly Article 19 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* – was secured despite the resistance of several states. That resistance constituted a sad commentary on the perspective of those states which were resisting acknowledgement of an instrument which virtually all have both signed and adopted and the language of which is directly reflected in the constitutional provisions of many of the newer states. The disappointment of civil society organisations at the outcomes of the Summit would have turned to absolute dismay if the resistance had successfully compromised the commitment to human rights in a WSIS Declaration which was coincidentally adopted on the fifty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the *Universal Declaration* by the United Nations.

The WSIS Declaration of Principles has three parts:

- A statement of shared vision about the developing information society
- A list of key principles to underpin the developing information society; and,
- A summary of the processes which will lead the world's peoples towards an equitable information society.

The first part, “Our Common Vision of the Information Society”, proclaims in its first paragraph a “common desire and commitment to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society” which would be “premised on the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and respecting fully and upholding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights”. Thus, at the outset it places people, their rights and inclusiveness at the heart of the information society but it also links them to sustainable development and globalism. The buzz words are there, especially “development” with the promise it holds out to the countries of the ‘South’ that they will be able to share in the promised benefits.

The second paragraph turns to technology, accepting the challenge “to harness the potential of information and communication technology to promote the development goals of the Millennium Declaration, namely the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger; achievement of universal primary education; promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women; reduction of child mortality; improvement of maternal health; to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability; and development of global partnerships for development for the attainment of a more peaceful, just and prosperous world” and goes on to repeat the commitment to achieving sustainable development. This is a tall order for ICTs: to ensure that “no child will live in poverty” (in the words of Bob Hawke) by some time in the future. Many of the contemporary preoccupations are listed, suggesting that ICTs are seen as the latest silver bullet which will alleviate the world's ills. It is an affirmation of faith in technocracy. Although it exalts empowerment as a goal, it places the achievement of that and other goals in the hands of the experts, the ICT experts in particular. It fails to see empowerment as a primary means of achieving the other goals, including the effective use of ICTs.

The Declaration then turns to human rights and fundamental freedoms, proclaiming their universality but again linking them to development and introducing another buzz term by resolving “to strengthen respect for the rule of law in international as in national affairs”. This is a sop to repressive states which seek to impose their will on their citizens and sometimes on the citizens of other states. However, the Declaration does reaffirm without qualification the right expressed in Article 19 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, that “everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; that 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”. It asserts that this is “an essential foundation of the Information Society”. The inclusion of this unqualified statement represents a major success for civil society and governments which prize principle above posturing, human rights above geopolitical manoeuvring.

Displaying its technocentric origins, the Declaration celebrates scientific and technical achievements and the progressivist notion of attaining ever “higher levels of development”. While the ICT revolutions have certainly demonstrated capacity to revolutionise production and employment, to overcome time and distance and provide benefits for many people across the world, there is much to be done if they are to benefit *all* peoples. The Declaration shows an awareness of these limitations and states a commitment to “turning this digital divide into a digital opportunity for all, particularly for those who risk being left behind and being further marginalized”.

This need is explored in terms of empowerment of children, women and the marginalised and vulnerable in society, “including migrants, internally displaced persons and refugees, unemployed and under-privileged people, minorities and nomadic people ... older persons and persons with disabilities ... those living in remote, rural and marginalized urban areas”. More buzz words emerge in the recognition of the particular needs of those in “developing countries, countries with economies in transition, Least Developed Countries, Small Island Developing States, Landlocked Developing Countries, Highly Indebted Poor Countries, countries and territories under occupation, countries recovering from conflict and ... [subject to] natural disasters”. The Declaration also recognises the special needs of indigenous peoples but emphasises preservation of their heritage and cultural legacy rather than their current needs and aspirations. It is a carbon dated view of indigenous peoples, as a former indigenous colleague of mine, Isaac Brown, put it. This is a worthy list which implicitly sets a multitude of targets for the Action Plan but one is left with the feeling that it is simply responding to current preoccupations and pressures from advocates rather than reflecting a well considered strategy to achieve empowerment for all the world’s peoples.

The first part of the Declaration ends with recognition of the ambitious nature of the vision and introduces as new term to characterise the required commitment, “digital solidarity”. This term acquired special meaning, as we shall see. The second part identifies eleven key principles “for building an inclusive Information Society”. They are:

1. The role of governments and all stakeholders in the promotion of ICTs for development
2. Information and communication infrastructure: an essential foundation for an inclusive information society
3. Access to information and knowledge

4. Capacity building
5. Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs
6. Enabling environment
7. ICT applications: benefits in all aspects of life
8. Cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content
9. Media
10. Ethical dimensions of the Information Society
11. International and regional cooperation

I am far from sure that all of these are principles. Some such as “ethical dimensions”, “cultural diversity” and “access to information and knowledge” certainly are and many of the detailed clauses include issues of principle. However, several items on this list identify the interests of particular stakeholders who were able to persuade the negotiators that their concerns should be highlighted. “Media” and “role of governments” are examples. Some, such as “building confidence and security”, expose the undercurrents of the Summit. In the time available for this address I cannot attempt to deconstruct all of the clauses under the headings for these so called principles but I shall comment on a few.

The very first, “The role of governments and all stakeholders in the promotion of ICTs for development”, exposes the discomfort of government negotiators at the degree of recognition which this Summit accorded to civil society organisations. While it speaks the language of cooperation and partnership, it is an attempt to reassert the primacy of governments in international dialogue. One has the feeling that they sense that they are losing that power to the well organised and collaborative voices of civil society.

The sections on information and communication infrastructure, enabling environment, benefits of ICTs and “building confidence and security” return to the origins of the Summit. They assert the technocratic basis of an ICT driven information society, a society in which community well being will be achieved through the application of technology. They urge a society which is well connected with lots of bandwidth and plenty of boxes. Its benefits will be multifarious, if we are to believe the architects of the Declaration:

ICT applications are potentially important in government operations and services, health care and health information, education and training, employment, job creation, business, agriculture, transport, protection of environment and management of natural resources, disaster prevention, and culture, and to promote eradication of poverty and other agreed development goals. ICTs should also contribute to sustainable production and consumption patterns and reduce traditional barriers, providing an opportunity for all to access local and global markets in a more equitable manner. Applications should be user-friendly, accessible to all, affordable, adapted to local needs in languages and cultures, and support sustainable development.

While no one could object to “universal, ubiquitous, equitable and affordable access to ICT infrastructure and services”, it begs the question of why we would need it. Is it simply an end in itself? Is it just to further enrich the purveyors of the technologies, the owners of which are mostly located in the developed and richer nations? The section on enabling environment expands upon this, identifying legal, financial and other preconditions for achieving the goal of wider and more effective use of ICTs. However, it is the section on “building confidence and security in the use of ICTs” which presents a particular danger. Along with the desirable concerns to create a reliable and secure technological infrastructure is a thread of concern

about cyber security which plays into the hands of repressive governments by recognising that they may take measures to suppress activities for criminal and terrorist purposes or the security of States.

It is the principle of “access to information and knowledge” which eventually brings us to the core of the information society and, of course, to the role of libraries. This principle offers the key to creating a globally inclusive information society: the ability for all to express their dreams, ideas and opinions and to take in those of others, across geographical, cultural, linguistic and political barriers. Coupled with this is the creation, dissemination and preservation of content in diverse languages and formats must be accorded high priority in building an inclusive Information Society. By enabling access to information in all formats across such frontiers, and through time, libraries and information services foster understanding and communication. We thrive on and support the public domain. The Declaration recognises its importance but also responds to the demands of copyright lobbyists by calling for strong protection of intellectual property.

Under the rubric of “capacity building”, the Declaration stresses the importance of education and re-education and their foundation in literacy and ICT capability. Our institutions, libraries and information services, provide vital means of achieving these goals. They often introduce learners to ICTs and their use in seeking and using information at all levels of education and training, from the school library introducing a child to her first book to a research institute’s information centre assisting a researcher to source urgently required data. Many offer special programs for clients with special needs, including the disabled.

The tenth principle is one which I would hope that we would all wholeheartedly endorse. It is that “The Information Society should respect peace and uphold the fundamental values of freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, shared responsibility, and respect for nature”. This commitment is reflected in the core values of libraries and information services and expressed in the fundamental principle of the public library, that it should be open to all. It underpins the strong ethical stance of library and information professionals who embrace the fundamental values relating to respect for the dignity of individuals and peoples, for human rights and for freedom.

The final section of the Declaration expresses a commitment to implementing the Plan of Action. The Plan itself expresses a large shopping list of goals and targets. In earlier versions, a number of the key targets were to be achieved by the end of 2005, by the time of the Tunis meeting of the Summit. However, the negotiators resiled from these ambitious targets and moved all to 2015. This is far enough in the future to lose any sense of urgency.

What IFLA achieved

The important role of libraries, information services and archives in the Information Society is recognised in the Declaration and Action Plan of the World Summit. However, even more significant, is the recognition of many of the issues of concern to the library and information sector and our clients, the peoples of the world. They include:

- An inclusive vision of an Information Society in which everyone can create, access, use and share information and knowledge
- Freedom of access to information and freedom of expression

- Cultural and linguistic diversity
- Lifelong literacy
- Support for the disadvantaged and disabled
- Protection of the public domain and balance in intellectual property legislation
- Open access to knowledge, including scientific and technical knowledge
- Preservation of cultural heritage
- Standards to ensure interoperability
- Capacity building and enabling provisions
- Equitable access to the Internet and ICTs

Of course we didn't achieve this all by ourselves. Many of these issues were advanced and advocated by other civil society organisations and are reflected in the Civil Society Declaration. Some governments raised a number of the issues including, especially, the New Zealand delegation which not only raised the issues but continually asserted the important roles played by libraries, archives and other information organisations. Their representative, Winston Roberts from the National Library of New Zealand, did this so often and so eloquently that he was asked in a snide way whether he is a librarian (he is).

However, it is important to observe not only that libraries and archives are explicitly mentioned in the Declaration and Action Plan but that the big issues of concern to us are identified as important and as areas in which results need to be achieved. This agenda consequently provides a foundation for action in the next phase, up to the November 2005 Summit meeting in Tunis.

What IFLA learned

The advocacy campaign was exhausting and put all involved under pressure. It became clear that we needed to start preparing early, have key policy documents always at hand, have a strong and focussed delegation and have high level expertise in advocacy which can be dedicated to the project. Well prepared and consistent logistical support coupled with strong representation on the ground in key locations are essential, as the Swiss librarians and students provided for us in Geneva. Our experience also emphasised the need to work in partnership with other organisations with similar or related goals including, especially for IFLA, national library associations and major institutions, particularly national libraries. And we learned the need to develop relationships with sympathetic and influential governments. And finally it was clear that we had to do all this from the earliest possible date, if not sooner!

In addition we learned a great deal about how to organise such an important global advocacy project and established effective relationships with a number of key people. Our initiative to invite the President of WSIS PrepCom, M Adama Samassékou to IFLA's World Library and Information Congress in Berlin was particularly important since we gained privileged access to him – and a sympathetic ear for our concerns.

Robust geopolitical discourse

These lessons might relate to any intervention at this level but there is another, more sobering, lesson from the Geneva phase of the World Summit on the Information Society. It is a lesson which is not surprising to any student of politics whether at the national level or in

international relations. It is that governments and their representatives run multiple agendas and often sacrifice principle for pragmatism in order to achieve another goal.

There were three key issues which derailed the preparatory process and raised fears that the Summit meeting might have been cancelled. They were unqualified recognition of human rights, Internet governance and funding to ameliorate the digital divide. The depth of the division on those issues caused PrepCom3 to break up in disarray. That PrepCom, held in September 2003, was intended to produce final versions of the Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action so that the governmental delegations could take them back to the “capitals”, as they say, for endorsement by governments. The documents could then have been adopted at the December Summit with appropriate fanfare in the presence of many heads of state or government. However, agreement could not be reached so PrepCom3 was abandoned. Intensive lobbying followed with considerable work by M Samassékou and by Swiss representatives who, as the hosts, were considerably alarmed at the prospect of the cancellation of the Summit. M Samassékou produced another “non-paper” and a PrepCom3A was held on the eve of the Summit (literally) to patch over the differences in order to prepare final documents which could be adopted at the Summit. The endeavours were successful but the failure of many heads of state or government to attend, especially those from the richer nations, signalled the lack of confidence in the Summit’s resolutions or importance.

I referred earlier to the division on human rights. Several governments, including the Cuban, Chinese and Arab governments did not want the inclusion of unqualified support for human rights in the Summit’s documents. They were particularly concerned that any reference to the Article 19 rights of freedom of expression or freedom of information should be qualified by a phrase such as ‘subject to national law’ or ‘culturally appropriate’. Any such qualification would, of course, have nullified the acknowledgement of the universal right. Fortunately, and largely thanks to the persistence of M Samassékou and some national delegations, the acknowledgement of human rights was not qualified but recognition of governmental prerogatives was included elsewhere.

The second issue which split the negotiations was the question of Internet governance and the related question of control of the Internet. These issues brought together an unholy alliance among which the United States of America, China and the Arab states were prominent. It was extraordinary to see the US Ambassador doing a deal with the Syrian representative because Syria held the chair for the Arab League! Internet governance is currently in the hands of ICANN, a not for profit company registered with the US Department of Commerce. It administers the Internet with a light hand and is minimally interventionist. Some governments of developing nations and some civil society organisations would like to change this arrangement to give those in the ‘South’ more influence, perhaps by placing it under the control of the International Telecommunication Union or another UN agency. Other civil society organisations fear greater governmental influence or even control. And with good reason because China and the Arab nations, among others, want greater control over the Internet for political and ideological reasons. The US is prepared to parlay with them because it wishes to keep the Internet in a free market domain with many aspects regarded as tradeable commodities. The compromise achieved at the eleventh hour was to agree that any solution “should involve all stakeholders and relevant intergovernmental and international organizations” – which was code for letting governments and UN agencies take over the game. The private sector was relegated to technical and economic fields and civil society to working at the community level. The question of trying to resolve issues relating to international governance of the Internet was referred to the Secretary-General of the United

Nations to set up a working group which should report by 2005. In other words, it was postponed as too difficult to resolve at the time which was probably sensible in the last minute context of the negotiations but raises concerns about the likelihood of retaining an open and benignly controlled Internet.

The third issue which provoked deep division was a proposal by the President of Senegal to establish a “Digital Solidarity Fund” which would help reduce the digital divide. This proposal was soundly condemned by the richer nations, led by the EU with Italy in the chair. They argued that there were many other international sources of funding that should be tried first and stated their absolute opposition to the creation of such a fund. Representatives from developing nations and many from civil society interpreted this position as an unwillingness to take urgent and decisive action to reduce inequality and it is difficult to see it in any other terms. IFLA is very conscious of the need to take urgent and decisive action to bridge the digital divide. Library and information specialists are in the frontline in trying to counter the growing information inequality which drives from the imbalance in ICTs and is multiplied by the problems of language, literacy and poverty. We see an urgent need for investment in infrastructure, technical support, initiatives to develop local content, and training and support for users, especially in developing countries. We argue that investment in the existing library and information network will provide a multiplier effect, hastening and maximising the return on investment.

Undercurrents

And, finally, some comments on undercurrents at the Summit and in the process leading up to it. There are many examples of the influence exerted by particular lobbyists. They include the reference to the management of radio frequency spectrum in the section on enabling environment. Media advocates were even more successful: they managed to have inserted a whole principle relating to media. It acknowledges the crucial importance of freedom of the press and freedom of information, as well as those of the independence, pluralism and diversity of media, but also emphasises diversity of media ownership (with the qualification: “in conformity with national law”). While media independence and diversity are undoubtedly important, other no less important issues did not merit separate sections. Gender equity, to take one example, is mentioned but not highlighted to the same extent.

The road to Tunis

I hope that I have described the process and outcomes of the Geneva phase of the World Summit on the Information Society and also illuminated some of the politics of that event. IFLA and its partners have been remarkably successful in this phase. We sought and have managed to achieve the inclusion of most of our high level issues in the Summit’s Declaration and Action Plan along with recognition of the important roles played by libraries, archives and information services and those who work in them. However, if we are to build on our success, we need to take advantage of the outcomes of the Geneva phase in addressing the current phase of the Summit which will culminate with a Summit meeting in Tunis in November 2005.

An IFLA document, *Promoting the global information commons: A commentary on the library and information implications of the WSIS Declaration of Principles*, relates the

clauses in the WSIS Declaration to our concerns and to relevant IFLA programs. We need to identify concrete programs and results which show that libraries and information services know what to do to create an inclusive and just Information Society. The programs might not be enormous but they should return real results so that we can tell the international community what could be achieved with a little more assistance.

We need to plan an advocacy campaign which will get IFLA or library association representatives into the offices of every government which will be represented at the Summit in Tunis. Once inside the door, we need to have a succinct message to give: that the global library and information network is the key to achieving the vision of an Information Society. The message needs to be supported by real examples and clear statements of local needs.

IFLA needs to support this campaign by providing draft documents which can be adapted to local needs and ensuring that our principles are easily available in major statements such as the *Glasgow Declaration* (IFLA 2002). This will require resources. We need to find the resources we can and to work with partners who can provide more substantial resources.

The Tunis phase will be particularly challenging because we are unlikely to have as much support on the ground as we were fortunate to have in Geneva. It will also be difficult because of the concerns about the human rights record of the Tunisian government but, as we have done in the past, it is important that we go to Tunis to proclaim the fundamental rights of freedom of access to information and freedom of expression.

References

Castells, M 1996, *The rise of the network society*, Oxford, Blackwell.

--- 1997, *The power of identity*, Oxford, Blackwell.

--- 1998, *End of millennium*, Oxford, Blackwell.

IFLA 2002, *The Glasgow Declaration on Libraries, Information Services and Intellectual Freedom*, International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, <http://www.ifla.org>.

IFLA 2003a, *Contribution to the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Draft Declaration of Principles and Draft Action Plan*, The Hague, IFLA, http://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-s/md/03/wsispc3/c/S03-WSISPC3-C-0019!!PDF-E.pdf.

--- 2003b, *Libraries @ the heart of the Information Society: proceedings*, Geneva, IFLA.

--- 2003c, *Submission to WSIS: PART I - Informative text about the role and position of Libraries generally; PART II - The IFLA Internet Manifesto; PART III - IFLA's Glasgow Declaration*, The Hague, IFLA, http://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-s/md/03/wsispc2/c/S03-WSISPC2-C-0062!!PDF-E.pdf.

IFLA and A. Byrne 2004a, *Libraries Building the Information Society: A plan to implement the WSIS Declaration and Plan of Action [draft]*, The Hague, IFLA.

--- 2004b, *Promoting the global information commons: A commentary on the library and information implications of the WSIS Declaration of Principles "Building the information society: a global challenge in the new millennium" (Document WSIS/PC-3/DT/6)*, The Hague, IFLA.

--- 2004c, *Promoting the global information commons: a response to the WSIS Declaration of Principles from the library and information sector*, The Hague, IFLA.

IFLA and IPA 2003, *Role and needs of publishers and libraries in the information society: proposals from the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) and the International Publishers Association (IPA) for inclusion in the draft Declaration and Action Plan to be discussed at Prepcom2, Geneva, 17-28 February 2003*, Geneva, IFLA & IPA, http://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-s/md/03/wsispc3/c/S03-WSISPC3-C-0027!!PDF-E.pdf.

World Summit on the Information Society 2003, *Declaration of Principles: Building the Information Society: a global challenge in the new Millennium [WSIS/PC-3/DT/6-E]*, Geneva, WSIS.

--- 2003, *Plan of Action [WSIS/PC-3/DT/5-E]*, Geneva, WSIS.

WSIS Civil Society Plenary 2003, *Shaping Information Societies for Human Needs: Civil Society Declaration to the World Summit on the Information Society*, Geneva, WSIS, <http://www.itu.int/wsis/docs/geneva/civil-society-declaration.pdf>.