



ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA  
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## **WSIS Follow-up Conference on Access to Information and Knowledge for Development**

*United Nations Conference Centre  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
27-30 March 2006*

### **Introduction**

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) was held in two phases and gathered representatives of government, Civil Society, the private sector, and other stakeholders interested in seeing the development of an inclusive Information Society which maximizes the potential of all information sectors.

The first phase was held in Geneva from 10-12 December 2003 and the second in Tunis from 16-18 November 2005. The Geneva phase aimed to set out a clear statement of political will and to establish the foundations for an inclusive Information Society, and to take concrete steps to establish the foundations for an Information Society for all, reflecting all the different interests at stake. Two documents were agreed to at the Geneva meeting: the *Geneva Declaration of Principals* and *Geneva Plan of Action*.

The Tunis phase of WSIS aimed to put into motion the resolutions of the Geneva Plan of Action, as well as to find agreements on Internet governance, financing mechanisms, and follow-up and implementation of the Geneva and Tunis documents. Two documents were agreed to at the Tunis meeting: the *Tunis Commitments* and *Agenda for the Information Society*.

To ensure that its voice was heard in the WSIS process, the library sector organized itself on a global scale. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) organized two pre-WSIS conferences to coincide with the Geneva and Tunis phases of the Summit. The first, titled *Libraries @ the heart of the Information Society*, was held in Geneva on 3 and 4 November 2003 prior to the Geneva phase of WSIS in December of that year. The second, *Libraries – the Information Society in Action*, held from 11 to 12 November 2005, resulted in the *Alexandria Manifesto on Libraries, the Information Society in Action*.

The documents adopted at WSIS - the *Geneva Declaration of Principals* and *Plan of Action*, and *Tunis Commitments* and *Agenda for the Information Society* (see Annex 1) – identify leading roles that libraries and information centres can play in the development of the Information Society, particularly in their core competencies of content managers and access providers. However, the African



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library sector was largely absent from the WSIS debates. Much work still needs to be done to empower regional stakeholders to work within the WSIS framework to allow the sector to step into its invaluable role in the development of an inclusive Information Society.

## **Rationale**

The ECA Library is organizing the *WSIS Follow-up Conference on Access to Information and Knowledge for Development* to fill a recognized gap between the WSIS recommendations and the current state of readiness of African libraries. Through the Conference, the Library will work with African librarians and information specialists to develop and agree upon an Action Framework which will serve as a blueprint towards implementing the recommendations of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) on the continent.

The ECA Library, in collaboration with the IFLA Government and Official Publications Section (GIOPS) and Committee on Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (FAIFE), is using the Conference to capture the momentum begun during the WSIS process to bring African libraries to the forefront of the development agenda.

Libraries perform a unique function in the development of an inclusive Information Society in their capacity as content managers, providing access to value-added information and knowledge to help achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), particularly in ensuring universal primary education, eradicating poverty, improving health and combating disease, and promoting gender equality. Library services are inclusive in orientation and provide professionally organized access to information and knowledge resources to help advance knowledge sharing, preservation of local knowledge and content, indigenous languages, content management and development, access to the Internet, and many other information concerns which are indispensable to ensuring the acquisition of knowledge by Africans.

By providing access to valuable, up-to-date information resources, libraries assist practitioners and policymakers to make informed decisions to help in the fight against poverty and to promote better health services. Additionally, libraries can help to empower women and marginalized populations by offering information literacy training and lifelong learning.

Libraries help to further universal primary education by providing information on curriculum development and educational best practices to policy makers, as well as access to educational resources for students. They are fundamental in the development of literacy, which ultimately boosts an individual's chances in life as well as furthers socio-economic development at the societal level.



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The Conference will bring together regional policymakers and key stakeholders to examine these pertinent issues from a multi-dimensional and multi-sectoral perspective. Among other issues, it will consider the development of “hybrid libraries”, which provide content, information and knowledge to users in a variety of formats, as well as the use of libraries as community access points for ICTs, as called for in the Geneva Plan of Action. Additionally, through exploratory workshops and seminars, the Conference will work with participants to create a common position on libraries as local, national and regional information and knowledge centres.

### **Expected Outcomes**

It is expected that following the Conference participants will become “champions” for the sector by influencing policy at the national and regional levels, and will work in a coordinated manner to spearhead future regional actions in this area.

By working with regional librarians and policymakers to familiarize them with WSIS recommendations, the Conference will assist libraries to play their full role in the development of an inclusive as called for in the WSIS documents and ensure they are integrated into national information strategies.

It is hoped that this Conference will launch a series of workshops and seminars to link the activities of the African library sector with the WSIS recommendations, and monitor progress on the Action Framework. During the next step, the ECA Library will partner with the IFLA Africa Section and UNESCO to organize the *Regional Colloquium on Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning*, which will feed into a larger global effort in this area. The ECA Library, through the Committee on Development Information (CODI) sub-committee on Knowledge, Libraries and Information Services for Development (KLIS), will continue to work closely with libraries and information centres from across Africa to help advocate for a leading role for the sector in national and regional information strategies.

### **Conclusion**

The Conference will provide an ideal forum for policymakers and other key stakeholders to strategize towards an action plan for future steps for the sector, and to create synergies between the WSIS recommendations and the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. With the necessary support, the Conference will help to create an enabling environment for all other information sectors to move towards a common course of action in the development of the African Information Society.



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## ***Annex 1 – Specific roles for libraries as adopted by WSIS***

### **I. GENEVA DECLARATION OF PRINCIPALS**

#### **B. An Information Society for All: Key Principles**

##### **2) Information and communication infrastructure: an essential foundation for an inclusive information society**

23. Policies that create a favourable climate for stability, predictability and fair competition at all levels should be developed and implemented in a manner that not only attracts more private investment for ICT infrastructure development but also enables universal service obligations to be met in areas where traditional market conditions fail to work. In disadvantaged areas, the establishment of ICT public access points in places such as post offices, schools, **libraries** and archives, **can provide effective means for ensuring universal access to the infrastructure and services of the Information Society.**

##### **3) Access to information and knowledge**

26. A rich public domain is an essential element for the growth of the Information Society, creating multiple benefits such as an educated public, new jobs, innovation, business opportunities, and the advancement of sciences. Information in the public domain should be easily accessible to support the Information Society, and protected from misappropriation. Public institutions such as **libraries** and archives, museums, cultural collections and other community-based access points **should be strengthened so as to promote the preservation of documentary records and free and equitable access to information.**

##### **4) Capacity building**

32. Content creators, publishers, and producers, as well as teachers, trainers, archivists, **librarians** and learners, **should play an active role in promoting the Information Society, particularly in the Least Developed Countries.**

### **II. GENEVA PLAN OF ACTION**

#### **B. Objectives, goals and targets**

6 d) to connect public **libraries**, cultural centres, museums, post offices and archives with ICTs;



## C. Action Lines

### **C2. Information and communication infrastructure: an essential foundation for the Information Society**

c) In the context of national e-strategies, provide and improve ICT connectivity for all schools, universities, health institutions, **libraries**, post offices, community centres, museums and other institutions accessible to the public, in line with the indicative targets.

### **C3. Access to information and knowledge**

d) Governments, and other stakeholders, should establish sustainable multi-purpose community public access points, providing affordable or free-of-charge access for their citizens to the various communication resources, notably the Internet. These access points should, to the extent possible, have sufficient capacity to provide assistance to users, in **libraries**, educational institutions, public administrations, post offices or other public places, with special emphasis on rural and underserved areas, while respecting intellectual property rights (IPRs) and encouraging the use of information and sharing of knowledge.

h) Support the creation and development of a **digital public library** and archive services, adapted to the Information Society, including reviewing **national library strategies and legislation**, developing a global understanding of the need for "**hybrid libraries**", and fostering **worldwide cooperation between libraries**.

### **C4. Capacity building**

c) Promote e-literacy skills for all, for example by designing and offering courses for public administration, **taking advantage of existing facilities such as libraries**, multipurpose community centres, public access points and by establishing local ICT training centres with the cooperation of all stakeholders. Special attention should be paid to disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.

k) Design specific training programmes in the use of ICTs in order to meet the educational needs of information professionals, such as archivists, **librarians**, museum professionals, scientists, teachers, journalists, postal workers and other relevant professional groups. Training of information professionals should focus not only on new methods and techniques for the development and provision of information and communication services, but also on relevant management skills to ensure the best use of technologies. Training of teachers should focus on the technical aspects of ICTs, on development of content, and on the potential possibilities and challenges of ICTs.



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## **C8. Cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content**

**b) Develop national policies and laws to ensure that libraries, archives, museums and other cultural institutions can play their full role of content—including traditional knowledge—providers in the Information Society, more particularly by providing continued access to recorded information.**

c) Support efforts to develop and use ICTs for the preservation of natural and, cultural heritage, keeping it accessible as a living part of today's culture. This includes developing systems for ensuring continued access to archived digital information and multimedia content in digital repositories, and support archives, cultural collections and **libraries as the memory of humankind.**

### **III. TUNIS COMMITMENT**

There is no specific mention of libraries, although they reaffirm the commitments from Geneva which include libraries:

#### **7. We reaffirm the commitments made in Geneva...**

### **IV. TUNIS AGENDA FOR THE INFORMATION SOCIETY**

**90.** We reaffirm our commitment to providing equitable access to information and knowledge for all, recognizing the role of ICTs for economic growth and development. We are committed to working towards achieving the indicative targets, set out in the Geneva Plan of Action, that serve as global references for improving connectivity and universal, ubiquitous, equitable, non-discriminatory and affordable access to, and use of ICTs, considering different national circumstances, to be achieved by 2015, and to using ICTs, as a tool to achieve the internationally-agreed development goals and objectives, including the Millennium Development Goals, by:

*k. supporting educational, scientific, and cultural institutions, including **libraries**, archives and museums, in their role of developing, providing equitable, open and affordable access to, and preserving diverse and varied content, including in digital form, to support informal and formal education, research and innovation; and **in particular supporting libraries in their public service role of providing free and equitable access to information and of improving ICT literacy and community connectivity, particularly in underserved communities;***



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***Annex 2 - Alexandria Manifesto on Libraries, the Information Society in Action*** (from IFLAnet, <http://www.ifla.org/III/wsis/AlexandriaManifesto.html>)

Libraries and information services contribute to the sound operation of the inclusive Information Society.

They enable intellectual freedom by providing access to information, ideas and works of imagination in any medium and regardless of frontiers.

They help to safeguard democratic values and universal civil rights impartially and by opposing any form of censorship.

The unique role of libraries and information services is that they respond to the particular questions and needs of individuals. This complements the general transmission of knowledge by the media, for example, and makes libraries and information services vital to a democratic and open Information Society. Libraries are essential for a well informed citizenry and transparent governance, as well as for the take-up of e-government.

They also build capacity by promoting information literacy and providing support and training for effective use of information resources, including Information and Communication Technologies. This is especially critical in promoting the development agenda because human resources are central to economic progress. In these ways libraries contribute significantly to addressing the digital divide and the information inequality that results from it. They help to make the Millennium Development Goals a reality, including reduction of poverty. They will do more with quite modest investments. The value of the return is at least 4-6 times the investment.

In pursuit of the goal of access to information by all peoples, IFLA supports balance and fairness in copyright. IFLA is also vitally concerned to promote multilingual content, cultural diversity and the special needs of Indigenous peoples and minorities.

IFLA and libraries and information services share the common vision of *an Information Society for all* adopted by the World Summit on the Information Society in Geneva in December 2003. That vision promotes an inclusive society based on the fundamental right of human beings both to access and to express information without restriction and in which everyone will be able to create, access, use and share information and knowledge.



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**IFLA urges national, regional and local governments as well as international organisations to:**

- Invest in library and information services as vital elements in their Information Society strategies, policies and budgets;
- Upgrade and extend existing library networks to obtain the greatest possible benefits for their citizens and communities;
- Support unrestricted access to information and freedom of expression;
- Promote open access to information and address structural and other barriers to access; and
- Recognise the importance of information literacy and vigorously support strategies to create a literate and skilled populace which can advance and benefit from the global Information Society.

Adopted in Alexandria, Egypt, Bibliotheca Alexandrina, on 11 November 2005