MINUTES
The tenth meeting of the Regional Council held on Thursday 29 June
from 13:00 – 14:45 CEST online by teleconference call, via Zoom

1. Welcome, apologies, and agreement of agenda

Present:
- Regional Council Members: The RC Nthabiseng Kotsokoane (Chair), Winston Roberts (Asia-Oceania; joined at 13.15), Stuart Hamilton (Europe), Imad Bashir (MENA), Julius Jefferson (North America), Alejandro Santa (LAC), Ayanda Lebele (Sub-Saharan Africa Vice-Chair; joined at 13.20 on behalf of the SSA Chair), Jan Richards (PC liaison, on behalf of the PC Chair)
- Others: Barbara Lison (IFLA President), Sharon Memis (IFLA Secretary General) -Barbara Lison and Sharon Memis joined at 13.44, Stephen Wyber (IFLA HQ), Despina Gerasimidou (IFLA HQ), Maria De Brasdefer (IFLA HQ)

Apologies:
- Sarah Kaddu (SSA; Ayanda Lebele joined on her behalf), Te Paea Paringatai (PC Chair; Jan Richards joined on her behalf)

The Chair welcomed participants.

Agenda:
- Julius and Stuart asked the WLIC 2024 to be added in the agenda. The RC Chair noted that this was planned to be addressed under the GB updates section.

2. Agreement of Minutes

The minutes were approved.

3. Welcome by the Chair, President, Governing Board Updates

The RC Chair referred to a GB meeting held at IFLA HQ (6-9 Jun), encouraging the members to look at the published highlights and welcomed Sharon Memis as the new SG.

International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA)

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The President opened the discussion about the GB decision for WLIC 2024 in Dubai. This had received mixed feedback. Due to the high criticism especially from North and Western Europe and North America, the GB was preparing to hold an advisory referendum. The GB will then have an extraordinary meeting to decide.

It was requested that the GB also ask volunteers for their views, as they co-create the WLIC programme.

Imad Bachir asked why the referendum came after the GB decision. The President noted that this was due to high levels of criticism. Given this, the GB wanted to hear from members, giving them the opportunity to use their voting rights, and in particular to provide a way for quieter voices to be counted.

Stuart Hamilton asked how the GB would use the results of the referendum, noting concern about what would happen if the GB did anything other than to echo the decision. The President noted that she did not want to predict what would happen. He also argued that it would be unacceptable for many to have any restrictions on WLIC programming.

Alejandro asked for more information to be shared, for example what would happen if Dubai is not possible, and what would happen if it does and most of our colleagues disagree. The decision whether to go to Dubai or not would be an impactful one, given the already stormy atmosphere in IFLA.

Winston Roberts welcomed the referendum as an excellent way to get members’ opinions – colleagues in the AO region hadn’t been so vocal so far, often for cultural reasons. However, if the referendum shows a no, and the GB decides to go, this will be catastrophic to IFLA and harm the work that has been done in the regions.

Julius Jefferson underlined that if a host country wanted to host an event like WLIC, it should be tolerant to the opinion of the global community, and the Board or SG should consult with the host country.

Imad Bachir underlined that the MENA community was already working on Congress. He thanked the GB and the WLIC committee for the decision, and the Dubai library association and governmental institutions for bidding. He stressed especially that WLIC in MENA would mean a lot of things for the future, empower women in the region and raise the profile of the field with government. The recent World Cup in Qatar and international EXPO in Dubai had gone well, without any incidents and comments, but with a fantastic organization and excellent participation.

He argued that it would be selfish not to give MENA the opportunity to host a Congress because some would not be able to participate in the programme. Everyone was welcome to come, and the only limitation would be that people could not hold a session in the conference programme, but would still be able to discuss all other aspects of the library profession. He worried that a position like this could mean that a WLIC will never take place in MENA. To drop one programme is not a big problem if you compare this to what we will benefit and what we will gain as Arab librarians. All countries worldwide are struggling to develop a place where the freedom of speech is for everyone. We are all in the same position.
Patrick Danowski underlined his hope that it would be clear in the referendum that if we go to Dubai, it would be the first time that an official IFLA Unit can’t attend the conference due to the interference of a local organiser. The President noted that information materials were being prepared to accompany the referendum.

The RC Chair shared the official line from the Sub-Saharan Africa RDC, which supported Imad’s input, noting that few countries in Africa, on this basis, would ever be able to hold a conference. The Sub-Saharan Africa RDC chair asked about possibilities to hold sessions which could not happen inside the UAE in other countries.

The President also thanked Winston for noting the need to find ways for quieter members to express themselves. She also underlined that the GB had not taken their original decision lightly, and that the information about limitations on the programme had come late in the day, but was from the government and so the final word on the matter. She also confirmed that Dubai had been the only bid, and so if we do not go to Dubai, we will not have a Congress in 2024.

Sharon Memis added that the debate had been polarised, with little willingness to hear each other's arguments. A paper would be prepared, expressing the facts and the arguments for and against. She asked for the support of RC members in bringing the temperature and tone of the discussion down. In the short term, though, it was important that everyone be able to participate in the referendum. In future, it would be necessary to find a way to heal from this division, and to look more broadly at how to be inclusive, given that questions around finance, visas and beyond were also leading to discrimination.

The RC Chair closed this discussion with the hope of tolerance, respect, and work together towards one IFLA.

4. Professional Council Updates

The RC Chair asked the PC liaison to share PC updates, as well as inviting participants to share ideas about how the two Councils have worked together.

Alejandro Santa mentioned that the RC and RDCs had taken time to define their roles, but this was now clearer, and the RC could serve to listen to what’s going on in the regions and take that to the PC. It would be important to start the new term with clear definitions of roles and responsibilities, as well as trust.

Jan Richards shared that the PC and the RC should start to work together rapidly in the next term, with strong steer from the top in order to facilitate collaboration between Divisions and Units. Stuart Hamilton suggested a written set of terms on how to work together.

Patrick Danowski echoed the point about there being a steer from early on that professional and regional units should work together. He also encouraged RDCs to think about setting up networks, and referred others to the paper on this on the PC Offiers’ Basecamp.

Alejandro Santa noted the need to hold meetings of the Regional Council in the regions, in order to get to know each other, and meet with the field. This could also help IFLA team. Otherwise, we will
be missing this compass. The RC Chair agreed that it’s important to meet in the regions. Next year we need to make sure we are there and we are seen. The interaction is very important. Winston Roberts echoed the call for in-person meetings of the Regional Council, and underlined the value of doing more in the Pacific.

Julius Jefferson shared in the chat that there should be regular RC-PC meetings with a focused agenda including at WLIC.

5. Regional Division Committee Updates

Oral report, reports shared by e-mail

Council members have been encouraged to share updates about their work in writing in advance of the meeting. Stuart Hamilton noted discussion in Europe about WLIC 2024, Winston Roberts talked about webinars in Asia-Oceania, Julius Jefferson mentioned transition planning for for 2023-2025 committee and reevaluating the 2021-2023 action plans. Imad Bachir talked about work in MENA to carry out a second phase of the advocacy training project, a webinar with Iraqi institutions, launching a new platform, meetings, and working with the Lebanese Library Associations for an upcoming conference in Beirut.

The RC Chair shared that we need to have reporting templates.

6. World Library and Information Congress

6.1 Update on plans for regional hubs

Oral reports

Stephen thanked the chairs who suggested hosts for regional hubs. The RC Chair asked the RDC Chairs to promote the regional hubs to maximise participation and asked Stephen if there are plans on the way. Stephen confirmed that things are being planned at the moment and that he will share a written report, when he receives it. The RC Chair highlighted the Regional Hubs’ importance, aiming at giving a stronger regional presence to the conference and be really inclusive.

6.2 Regional Council Session at WLIC

RC 23-06-6.2

Alejandro Santa presented the RC Session at WLIC, which aimed to communicate to our colleagues the importance of the RC and the RDCs. The aim is to share first-hand what we do in a simple but practical way. The RC Chair thanked the Subcommittee members for putting this together and Despina for her support in uploading the relevant information on WLIC’s scientific platform.

7. Learning Lessons

7.1 Preparing the 2023-25 Action Plan Template

RC 23-03-7.1

Stephen Wyber asked for written feedback by the RC members about the template for action plans 2023-2025, based on their experience in 2021-2025. Feedback is to be submitted by the Chairs till the 31st of July so that then IFLA HQ prepares a draft Action Plan template to be approved in the next RC meeting during WLIC. The final new template will be for the next RC to approve. Imad Bachir
mentioned that he received feedback by the MENA RDC members about the Action Plan template and that he will submit these to the IFLA HQ staff.

7.2 Evaluating the work of the Regional Council in 2021-2023

RC members were encouraged to share reflections in general on how the Regional Council has worked in 2021-2025. Comments were welcome between now and the next meeting in order to allow for a deeper discussion then.

Barbara thanked the RC Chair for taking care of the new Council. The RC Chair noted that she was proud of all of the people, the RC members and also thanked HQ staff for all the great support that they provided.

At this point, Barbara Lison and Sharon Memis left the meeting at 14.30 CEST.

7.3 Draft RC Welcome Guide 2023-2025

Despina shared that this is a result of the subcommittee work, comprised of Stuart, Winston and the RC Chair, thanked them for their review and comments and noted that the Welcome Guide is based on the PC Guide format, but the content is RC-focused. This is the first RC Welcome Guide, therefore it’s an important moment and document to be approved. As many visuals as possible have been used to enhance its comprehension by as many people as possible (e.g. non-native English speakers or those who better comprehend complex information in a visual way). She asked for comments from the RC members. Alejandro asked to put all possible hyperlinks inside the Welcome Guide - all possible links, for example links to the RDC webpages (main, news, events etc.). RC members approved the Welcome Guide 2023 and agreed that it’s shared with incoming RC and RDC members.

8. Regional Priorities

8.1 Preliminary Results from the Regional Advocacy Priorities Survey

RC members were encouraged to note and make comments on the results of the 2nd Regional Advocacy Priorities Survey. Stuart noted that once again this is an excellent piece of work from IFLA HQ. Despina shared her screen to shed light on page 18, explaining that this is a great example of a new chart style that clearly shows where regions can collaborate - similarities or differences can form the basis for cross-regional collaboration in the next term. She also noted that this time there were fewer survey responses to the ones in 2021, so there needs to be more communication about this next time (which will be in 2025) - this is something that the new RC and RDCs should keep a note of and communicate more heavily around this so that we have more voices heard for more inclusive survey results.

8.2 Gathering evidence about priorities to support action planning

RC and PC members were encouraged to suggest ways in which regional priorities can be identified in order to help other IFLA units in their action planning. It would be on the agenda at a future meeting.
8.3 Update on the Regional Council and Division Committee transition planning

RC 23-06-8.3

RC members were encouraged to note the update on the Regional Council and Division Committee transition planning, especially page number 2 with all important tasks for the incoming period.

9. Update on SDG and Internet Governance work
9.1 SDGs and Internet Governance Update

RC 23-06-9.1
RC 23-06-9.1.1
RC 23-06-9.1.2

Stephen Wyber noted that the first paper provides an overview of the latest work around the SDGs and Internet Governance, including plans for the coming months. It is accompanied by the results of two surveys, looking respectively at the engagement of library associations and IFLA committees with the Goals. Both offer suggestions for actions to take, but also provide material that we can use in advocacy to demonstrate how far our own field has engaged with the SDGs. These papers are for noting and commenting.

9.2 Towards a revision of the Internet Manifesto

RC 23-03-9.2

Stephen mentioned that a call has taken place between those who have expressed an interest in taking this work forwards, and a proposed plan was put together. This includes a series of actions between now and May 2024, with an emphasis on opportunities for engagement. Then, Maria De Brasdefer introduced herself as the new Digital Affairs Officer at IFLA HQ. The plan for revising the Internet Manifesto was approved by the RC Members. IFLA HQ would reach out shortly to RC members to seek members of the steering committee, and to gather information.

10. Elections Updates
10.1 Regional Council 2023-2025

RC 23-03-10.1

The RC was invited to note the results of officer elections, and so the composition of the 2023-2025 Regional Council. The RC Chair read out loud the names of all the new Regional Council members and congratulated them, highlighting that there are now new officer positions for Information Coordinators for each region.

10.2 Regional Diversity Update

RC 23-03-10.2

The RC was invited to note the paper that indicates levels of regional diversity across IFLA committees and units. Stephen Wyber mentioned that there has been improvement in regional diversity in general, although more progress could be made.

11. AOB

There was no other business discussed.