



**Report of the Working Group on South Africa to  
the Executive Board of the International  
Federation of Library Associations (IFLA)**

**IFLA, Spring 1990**

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### *Background and Findings*

1. The IFLA Working Group on South Africa met in the Hague 25-26 January 1990. Members appointed by the IFLA Executive Board included:

- Ms. Patricia Berger: President of the American Library Association (ALA); Director, Information Resources and Services, (US) National Institute of Standards and Technology;
- Mme. Antoinette F. Corréa: Conservateur des Bibliothèques, Assistante, Ecole des Bibliothécaires, Université de Dakar, Senegal; Staff Member, IFLA Regional Office for Africa;
- Ms. Stephney Ferguson: President of the Commonwealth Library Association (COMLA); National Librarian of Jamaica; Member, IFLA Advisory Committee on Preservation and Conservation; Member, Standing Committee of IFLA Section on Conservation; Member, Standing Committee of IFLA Section on Regional Activities, Latin America and the Caribbean;
- Mr. Michael Foster: (retired) Librarian, Commonwealth Institute, London; Past-Chair, IFLA Section on Library Services to Multicultural Populations; Editor, Journal of Multicultural Librarianship; and
- Mr. Bart Nwafor: University Librarian, University of Jos Library, Nigeria; Chair, IFLA Section on Regional Activities, Africa.

The Group elected Ms. Berger its Chair. Ms. Carol Henry of the IFLA Staff served as the Working Group's Rapporteur.

2. The Terms of Reference provided to the Group by the IFLA Executive Board were as follows:

- To check the information provided by the IFLA members in South Africa, via questionnaires, etc., between 1987 and 1989 on their attitudes towards apartheid;
- To check the criteria upon which the current Executive Board policy concerning the IFLA membership in South Africa has been based; and
- Based upon the outcome of the evaluation, to recommend to the Executive Board what further action should be taken by IFLA.

### Respectfully submitted:

#### Members of the Working Group, March 1990

- Antoinette F. Corréa (Senegal)
- Stephney Ferguson (Jamaica)
- Michael Foster (UK)
- Bart U. Nwafor (Nigeria)
- Patricia W. Berger (USA), Chair

3. The Working Group examined the questionnaires and documentation circulated by IFLA and also noted the action taken by the Executive Board and the Secretariat over the past 5 years. There was no evidence of "criteria" upon which current IFLA policy regarding its South African members is based, except that implied in the 1985 Resolution, which IFLA Council passed at the Chicago, Illinois, Conference, and the responses to the questionnaire.
4. From their responses to IFLA's questionnaire, the Working Group noted that there was a strong desire on the part of the South African respondents to remain within IFLA, indicating their fear of isolation from the rest of the world. The Working Group was heartened by the evidence of the strenuous efforts made by some institutions to provide service to the entire community in spite of the legally entrenched apartheid policies of the Government of South Africa.
5. Nevertheless, the Working Group concluded that overall, neither the questionnaire nor the responses to it were particularly useful in evaluating either the situation in South Africa, or in shaping recommendations for further action by IFLA, for the following reasons:
  - a) the ways in which many of the questions were framed influenced the answers given;
  - b) the questions asked were insufficiently searching to elucidate answers from which a true picture of the answering organization could be derived;
  - c) the intimidating environment in which the institutions operate is not conducive to eliciting the information required, nor can such information be adequately verified; and
  - d) in some cases considerable further assessment would be needed, but in any event, objective assessment would be well nigh impossible.
6. The Working Group has noted the Executive Board's statement, in its meeting of April 1989, "that IFLA in the first instance is a professional, and not a political organization."\* Accordingly, the Working Group confined itself to a consideration of the professional aspects only, i.e., the ways in which the political decisions and statutes of the South African Government have affected the provision of effective and responsible library services and librarianship in that country.

\* Letter of Paul Nauta dated 3 May 1989 to IFLA's South Africa institutional members

### Recommendations

1. While it welcomes recent developments in the Republic of South Africa which are indicative of the desire for change to a more equitable society, the Working Group recommends that IFLA should indicate its position by promulgating immediately the following statement on South Africa:

*IFLA deplors the various laws and regulations of the Republic of South Africa generally known as the "apartheid laws" and the continuing State of Emergency, which have limited and inhibited the work of librarians in freely making available all forms of information, and have further limited the provision of appropriate and positive library services to all members of South African society. IFLA commends the librarians and institutions in the Republic that have sought ways of overcoming the legal and administrative obstacles to their professional obligations of providing reactive, positive and effective library and information services to all members of their communities, some with a marked degree of success, despite the difficulties experienced.*

2. Members of the IFLA Working Group on South Africa were unanimous in their opinion that, because IFLA is an important international professional association, it is imperative that IFLA should take a strong, unequivocal public stand on:
  - a) human rights, including freedom of expression and freedom of access to information;
  - b) the ethics of librarianship
3. To this end the Working Group recommends that, as quickly as possible and before April 1991, IFLA should draft two policy statements which enunciate:
  - a) IFLA's support for freedom of expression for all persons everywhere; IFLA's firm and resolute condemnation of the policies and bases of apartheid; IFLA's resolve to investigate and to take action on violations of freedom of speech, censorship, or other information access restrictions whenever they threaten or thwart the practice of librarianship.
  - b) The obligation which all IFLA members bear to discharge their library responsibilities fully, fairly, equitably, justly and evenhandedly; and the moral imperative for all librarians to resist attempts to apply partisan political pressure, from whatever source, to librarianship, library services or library resources.

4. Because explicit statements of policy and policy positions are uncommon in IFLA and therefore may prove uncomfortable for some, the Working Group on South Africa recommends that a new Working Group be established to:
  - a) develop the two policy statements described in Recommendation 3 *supra*
  - b) coordinate both statements with IFLA's Executive and Professional Boards in time to circulate both to IFLA's Members and Council in April 1991
  - c) assure that both statements be included on the Agenda of the 1991 IFLA Council meeting; and, if one or both is approved, ensure that IFLA's Statutes be changed accordingly to reflect Council's approval.
5. If these policy statements are passed by IFLA Council in 1991 and if, at that time, the apartheid laws and regulations of the South African Government remain substantially unchanged, the Working Group recommends that IFLA revoke the membership of its South African Institutional Members. While the Working Group recognizes that many South African libraries have struggled to overcome the chilling, stultifying aspects of apartheid, we believe that no institution in South Africa can be free of its pernicious effects. This being the case, we are obliged to recommend that IFLA condemn apartheid in all of its institutional manifestations.
6. The Working Group remains sensitive to the efforts of those South African librarians who have laboured hard and long to provide competent, effective library service to all South African citizens. It therefore recommends that Personal Affiliation be extended to all such persons, including those South African librarians who are now Personal Affiliates of IFLA.
7. The Working Group believes that a seminal problem in South Africa is the lack of black librarians and the lack of educational opportunities for black library students. We recommend that IFLA use its good offices to assist in establishing and sponsoring an international scholarship programme to increase the number of black librarians in South Africa and to increase the number and kinds of educational opportunities open to South Africa's black library students.

- International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions
- Fédération Internationale des Associations de Bibliothécaires et des Bibliothèques
- Internationaler Verband der bibliothekarischen Vereine und Institutionen
- Federación Internacional de Asociaciones de Bibliotecarios y Bibliotecas

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