## Libraries@the Heart of the Information Society
### IFLA Issues from World Summit 10-12 December 2003
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**On this Thursday**, the national delegates made their statements about the Information Society, lining up for the final discussions. The whole day long, ministers from all sorts of departments (economics, education, foreign affairs, research) stressed various aspects of developing the information society: trade agreements, human rights, but first and foremost the necessity of bridging the information gap between the rich and the poor. The key issue of financing equitable access remains unsolved: a Digital Solidarity Fund -- www.cbronline.com/todaysnews /84f6f75b8baaf46680256df8001e4364 -- proposed by the developing world or the trade agreements and public-private partnerships as defended by e.g. the European Union.

After those formal speeches, flocks of dignitaries and media people went to the large exhibition, where many countries have impressive stands, showing their ICT-projects and national strategies -- www.wsis-online.net/project-list

- The exhibition features a wealth of displays by governments, international organizations, commercial entities and NGO's. It demonstrates the keen interest of business firms, such as Microsoft, Nokia, and Hewlett Packard, to take part in developing ICT facilities in the developing world, inviting the public sector to partner with them. Civil Society doubts whether these interests are going beyond creating new markets. Therefore, in many other stands the social and cultural aspects, including poverty reduction are in focus.
- For instance, the Mali stand displays the creation of a broadband internet service to Timbuktu (900 km from Benako) which is now being used to link a school in the desert at Timbuktu to one on a mountain in Switzerland. It also features a project to digitize ancient manuscripts, dating from the ninth century on Arabic and European law, medicine, environmental matters and other topics.
- The exhibition is also a true global meeting place. Surrounded by large paper walls depicting colourful marketplaces from Asia, Africa and Latin America, Finnish colleagues had a wonderful surprise. They met with Nonkululeko Woko and Felicity Nxumalo whom they had trained in the late eighties at a Finnish project in Tanzania for South African exiles. Both gained their library science degrees through the programme and are now members of the South African Government delegation to the Summit!
- Four Round Tables -- www.itu.int/wsis/geneva/roundtables/index.html -- are organized to provide participating governments, the opportunity to share the vision of the Information Society along with leaders from intergovernmental organizations, civil society and business sector entities. One of them addressed 'ICT as a tool to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (UN)'. The main idea is to change the digital divide into digital opportunities for poverty reduction, job creation, capacity building and sustainable development. Examples are Bangladesh with a special task force for ICT development in schools, and a major online service project in Rumania, which proves that national

E-strategies can work.

- The IFLA-delegation also attended the Civil Society meeting where the Declaration 'Shaping Information Societies for Human Needs' was adopted. This joint action stresses the need of shaping a people-centered, inclusive and equitable information society.

We would like to conclude our reports from Geneva by repeating Kofi Annan's quote from Robert Oppenheimer: ***"The open society, the unrestricted access to knowledge, the unplanned and uninhibited association of men for its furtherance -- these are what may make a vast, complex, ever growing, ever changing, ever more specialized and expert technological world, nevertheless a world of human community."***

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**Read more:**

- www.itu.int/wsis/geneva/newsroom/press_releases/un_1roundtable.html -- First Round table of WSIS Discusses Creating Digital Opportunities
- http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/3306767.stm -- 'Cyber Oscar' for landmine project
- http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/3310493.stm -- Iranian bloggers rally against censorship