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IFLA FAIFE – placing freedom of access to information and freedom of expression at the heart of libraries

Library services of have long played a vital role in ensuring free access to accurate information and knowledge, challenging censorship, and supporting privacy. Today, we live in a world where censorship is growing, where »fake news« is increasingly widespread, and surveillance, privacy and the right to be forgotten are live issues. These provide our profession with enormous ethical and practical challenges as we work to meet the needs and demands of our users and citizens.

IFLA

For nearly a century the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) has provided a focus for supporting the library and information profession across the world. Today, it is the global voice of libraries and at the heart of its core values lie freedom of access to information and freedom of expression. Leading its work in this area is the Committee on Freedom of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (FAIFE). This is an advisory committee whose role it is to identify and address emerging issues on freedom of access to information, freedom of expression, ethics – in essence all matters concerning human rights – on behalf of IFLA, and engage in long-term advocacy on these matters.

Libraries and Human Rights

The United Nations defines human rights as »rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status.«¹ Wikipedia expands on this: »Human rights are moral principles or norms that describe certain standards of human behaviour, and are regularly protected as legal rights in municipal and international law. They are commonly understood as inalienable rights to which a person is inherently entitled simply because she or he is a human being, and which are inherent in all

human beings regardless of their nation, location, language, religion, ethnic origin or any other status.«²

Being »inalienable« and »rights to which a person is inherently entitled«, human rights are vital to work of libraries and librarians. Human rights must underpin our professional ethics, and so they must also underpin our work as librarians.

Human rights are expressed through a number of international declarations and treaties, backed by international and national legislation. The longest standing of these is United Nations Declaration on Human Rights (UNDHR) which was agreed by the United Nations in 1948.

Whilst it can be argued that every part of the UNDHR applies to libraries, the core values of IFLA specifically refer to Article 19 as being pertinent to libraries. Article 19 reads:

»Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; 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.«³

However, Article 12 which guarantees privacy is also relevant:

»No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.«⁴

Within the European Union, the UNDHR is supported by two other treaties – the European Convention on Human Rights, and the European Charter of Fundamental Rights. Whilst these use different wording and phrases, the rights of freedom of speech and freedom of expression, and privacy, are broadly similar.

FAIFE – A Short History

It has been argued that the establishment of FAIFE reflected a growing awareness of IFLA members that – in addition to professional and technical matters – the international library community had to take a more activist approach and address matters of principle, including intellectual

FAIFE

Freedom of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (FAIFE) is an initiative within IFLA to defend and promote the basic human rights defined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. FAIFE provides advice to the Governing Board and Secretary General on these issues in relation to IFLA's strategic direction, and works in consultation with other relevant IFLA professional programmes and sections.



The core purpose of FAIFE is to defend and promote the basic human rights defined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Foto: elenabsl / Fotolia

freedom. As Alex Byrne writes in this context »Librarians must stand for the principle that every individual and all the peoples of the world have the right to access the information they need to live and prosper and the inseparable right to express their ideas and opinions.«⁵

FAIFE was set up in 1997 with a mandate based around Article 19 of the UNDRH. The following year the FAIFE Office opened in Copenhagen, generously funded a number library associations, institutions and Governments

In its first five years FAIFE did much work to raise the principle of freedom of access to information and freedom of expression amongst the profession, and also develop a wider understanding of the role that libraries play in supporting this right. FAIFE also developed a number of important IFLA position statements.

The Internet Manifesto (2002) showed that IFLA had, by then, clearly moved into the area of principles. The Manifesto made clear statements concerning the right to access information, saying »Unhindered access to information is essential to freedom, equality, global understanding and peace... Intellectual freedom is the right of every individual both to hold and express opinions and to seek and receive information; it is the basis of democracy; and it is at the core of library service.«

The Manifesto declared that libraries were the global gateways to the Internet and advocated for equitable access to the Internet for all. It also argued that librarians had a responsibility to help ensure that everyone had the skills needed to use it to most effect.

Also, in 2002, FAIFE prepared the Glasgow Declaration on behalf of IFLA. This was approved by the Governing Board, and proclaimed by the IFLA Council in Glasgow marking the 75th anniversary of the organisation. The declaration also demonstrates a clear move to taking a more activist approach addressing matters of principle, stating that:

»IFLA and its worldwide membership support, defend and promote intellectual freedom as expressed in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This intellectual freedom encompasses the wealth of human knowledge, opinion, creative thought and intellectual activity.«

FAIFE has continued to build on its work and issue a range of position statements and guidance for librarians and libraries on matter of current and strategic interest.

However, within a few years, separate funding for FAIFE had declined, and the office in Copenhagen closed in 2006. From 2007, FAIFE's work was co-ordinated and supported by IFLA's headquarters as part of an effort to consolidate the organisation's advocacy work into a small focused and specialised unit at its HQ in The Hague.

In 2015, the IFLA Governing Board carried out a review of both FAIFE, and the Committee for Copyright and other Legal Matters (CLM) which was also established in 1997. The aim was to develop a structure that would enable both committees

to identify and address emerging issues, as well as engage in long-term advocacy in support of IFLA's objectives.

It was agreed to move the committees to a structure with an advisory focus to the IFLA Governing Board. FAIFE was re-established as an Advisory Committee with a continued emphasis on the involvement of experts from across the library community and beyond, with input from and outcomes in IFLA's regions. FAIFE would continue to support and co-operate with relevant international bodies, organisations or campaigns.

The full terms of reference of the Advisory Committee are included as an Appendix below.

Current role and responsibilities

The core purpose of FAIFE is currently defined as:

»an initiative within IFLA to defend and promote the basic human rights defined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.«⁶

However, this purpose is widely defined, and covers not only all aspects of freedom of access to information and freedom of expression, but also ethics and human rights, including privacy.

FAIFE has continued to build on its work and issue a range of position statements and guidance for librarians and libraries on matter of current and strategic interest. These statements are developed using a broad input from experts, as well as those with a particular interest in the subject. They are published on the IFLA website and widely promoted. The statements are not only aimed at advising IFLA and its Governing Board, but also provide support for the profession worldwide. By providing well informed, strategic briefing papers FAIFE aims to provide a valuable resource for libraries, librarians and professional associations wherever they are based.

The statements that have been developed in recent years include:

- IFLA Internet manifesto (revised 2014)
- IFLA Statement on Privacy in the Library Environment (2015)
- IFLA Statement on Net Neutrality and Zero Rating (2016)
- IFLA Statement on the Right to be Forgotten (2016)
- No Development Without Access to Information: We Need

1 www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/human-rights/ (retrieved 15.3.2018)

2 Human Rights, Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_rights (retrieved 15.3.2018)

3 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, Article 19 www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf (retrieved 15.3.2018)

4 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, Article 12 http://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf (retrieved 15.3.2018)

5 Alex Byrne: Promoting intellectual freedom globally through libraries: the role of IFLA. in *Libri* 50 (2000), pp. 57-65.

6 IFLA: About FAIFE www.ifla.org/about-faife (retrieved 15.3.2018)

Alternatives to Internet Shut-Downs; together with background note of further resources (2017)

FAIFE has also been responsible for developing a model Code of Ethics for Librarians and Other Information Workers and has brought together a growing collection of national Codes of Ethics from countries across the world.

More recently IFLA has supported the Turkish Library Association in expressing concern at the level of censorship being applied in libraries across the country.

FAIFE also advises IFLA on areas where freedom of access to information and freedom of expression are particularly at risk, and in such cases IFLA may take action directly, or in support of the national professional association. During 2015 – 2017 FAIFE lead IFLA's action in support of Natalya Sharina – the Librarian of the Library of Ukrainian Literature. Natalya was arrested on charges of inciting hatred or animosity towards a social group by having banned books in the Library. She claimed that these books were planted. After an initial period in prison, she was subjected to house arrest for over a year before being found guilty. IFLA campaigned that her treatment was neither proportionate or necessary, and advocated for her release from house arrest and that she should receive a fair hearing.

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FAIFE also continues to collaborate with other international bodies which have a commitment to fight for intellectual freedom and is continuing to build a collaborative approach with organisations such as PEN International, Article 19 and Electronic Frontier Foundation. At the same time, it is enhancing its advocacy activities, and raising awareness of the important role of libraries in the area of intellectual freedom with organisations including the United Nations.

FAIFE's Priorities

Freedom of access to information and freedom of expression, and human rights, are central to the work of every library and librarian. And yet they are increasingly under attack across the globe, on every continent.

FAIFE has a role to highlight issues affecting libraries and librarians wherever they may be, supporting IFLA's work to advocate for these rights, as expressed in UNDHR. Librarians cannot be passive about intellectual freedom but must be active in working to help support everyone's human rights.

FAIFE's ambition is to expand its capability to provide advice and support, challenge and advocacy by developing a FAIFE Network across the world – a community of practice and interest where information can be shared, and awareness

raised. We want to harness the enthusiasm, commitment and energy of librarians everywhere to help ensure that libraries and librarians play their role in supporting human rights, and ethical library services.

To help establish the Network FAIFE re-activated its Facebook and Twitter accounts at the start of 2018, and established a new blog entitled »SpeakUP!«. We are also keen that everyone interested in freedom of access to information and freedom of expression to join the new FAIFE Network (see <http://infoserv.inist.fr/wwsympa.fcgi/info/faife-n>) to build this community of interest and practice.

As censorship increases, and the right to free speech is increasingly threatened in both the print and the digital worlds, the voice of the librarian is needed more than ever. The FAIFE Network can help provide this and make a real difference to people's lives.

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Martyn Wade (Photo: Malcolm Cochrane Photography) has spent his career in library and information management becoming Head of Libraries, Archives and Learning (including community education) in Glasgow from 1999 – 2002. He was appointed National Librarian and Chief Executive of the National Library of Scotland 2002 – 2014.



Martyn has a Bachelors Degree in Librarianship and a Masters Degree in the Management of Library and Information Services. He has been a Visiting Professor at Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen since 2011 and is an Honorary Fellow of the Department of Information Sciences, Aberystwyth University. He is also a Visiting Scholar at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow.

Martyn is active in the library and information profession and has Chaired IFLA FAIFE since 2013. He holds a several executive roles with library and information organisations, and is a member of the Board of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, having been Chair 2014 – 2016. He also chairs the Board of the Scottish Poetry Library. He became an Officer of the Order of the British Empire for services to culture in Scotland in 2016, and was awarded the IFLA Medal in 2017.

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