



International Federation of  
Library Associations and Institutions

## **IFLA General Assembly**

**25 August 2022, The Hague, Netherlands**

### **Text of Item 12 - the Address by the President, Barbara Lison**

And now we come to the Agenda item 12. This gives me the opportunity to expand on the issues that members have raised and give you more information on the Governing Board's response and plans.

In this context I would like to address concerns raised by members and volunteers in an open letter to the Governing Board, dated 18 July 2022.

These concerns were also discussed on 28 July at the Out in the Open session at the World Library and Information Congress in Dublin which was recorded and is available on the IFLA YouTube channel.

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge and thank members and volunteers for raising their concerns directly with the Governing Board. The Governing Board is always keen to hear from IFLA members and volunteers.

Like many of you, we are also volunteers who are committed to ensuring that IFLA is a strong federation representing the global library and information sector.

Today, I will share with you the Governing Board's Response to the key concerns that have been raised. Further details will be shared via the IFLA website in the coming days and will be updated regularly.

In summary, the letter of the 18 July 2022 and the discussion in Dublin raised concerns in relation to issues at IFLA HQ, and the decisions and actions taken by the Governing Board in 2022. The specific concerns related to:

- The circumstances related to decisions around the Secretary General's contract
- The relationship between IFLA and Stichting IFLA Global Libraries – SIGL
- The working arrangements and culture at IFLA Headquarters
- Financial arrangements and IFLA's financial sustainability

To address the issues raised by members, as well as to further strengthen IFLA on the basis of priorities identified by the Governing Board itself, a comprehensive Plan has been developed by the Governing Board. The Response and plan articulate

- key activities that have been implemented and will be undertaken,
- who will be responsible for ensuring the activities are progressed,
- milestones and timeframes for those activities, and
- the reporting arrangements.

Today, I will provide an outline of the key activities to be undertaken to address concerns.

I will now walk you through the key work that has been done already and what activities will be progressed. Additional detail will be provided on the IFLA website.

### **IFLA Strategy**

The IFLA Strategic Plan 2019-2024 sets out a bold program of work. The Governing Board regularly receives reports on all 16 Key Initiatives at its Meetings. At the April 2023 Governing Board meeting, there will be a comprehensive review of the progress against Key Initiatives since the launch of the IFLA Strategy in 2019.

The proposed approach for the IFLA Strategy 2025-2029 will be discussed at the December 2022 GB meeting. It is important that we commence our planning so that we can involve members and volunteers as we did in the development of the Strategic Plan 2019-2024.

### **IFLA HQ Work Environment**

In an extraordinary Meeting on 4 March 2022, the Governing Board decided to terminate the contract with the Secretary-General due to irreconcilable differences between the Governing Board and the Secretary General.

This decision was made following two independent reviews undertaken in December 2021 and January 2022. These independent reviews did not support allegations of bullying, harassment or fraud.

The findings did identify problems in management style.

The Secretary General has disputed the dismissal and a court hearing is scheduled for the beginning of October.

Following the decision about the dismissal of the Secretary General, the Governing Board immediately put in place interim leadership arrangements.

Governing Board member and MLAS representative Halo Locher agreed to take on the additional contract role of Governing Board Delegate from 1 April 2022. Halo's service contract concludes on 31 August 2022.

From 1 September 2022, the Deputy Secretary-General Helen Mandl will assume the role of Acting Secretary-General. The Governing Board will ensure that Helen is supported in her acting role.

I would like to acknowledge and thank both Halo and Helen for stepping up to these roles.

One of Halo Locher's key responsibilities was to improve the IFLA HQ work environment.

Regular staff meetings have been implemented, and more regular meetings with the Employees Representative Body (ERB) have been established.

A new organization structure is being trialled.

I acknowledge these are initial steps in improving the IFLA HQ work environment – there will be ongoing work to ensure an effective and safe working environment is fostered and maintained.

The recruitment of a new Secretary-General can only commence once the legal proceedings with the outgoing Secretary-General have been resolved.

The Governing Board has appointed a search committee to oversee the recruitment process.

A recruitment agency will be engaged to support the recruitment of this pivotal role.

IFLA staff will be kept informed of the recruitment process through regular updates.

### **Relationship between IFLA and SIGL**

I would now like to address the relationship between IFLA and SIGL.

Stichting IFLA Global Libraries (SIGL) is an independent public benefit foundation which was established in 2016 to support the work of IFLA as a legacy partner of the Global Libraries initiative of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

The object of the foundation, which is exclusively charitable and educational, is to strengthen the library field and to empower public libraries to improve people's lives and support growth of sustainable societies.

Under Dutch law a "stichting" is a legal entity and translates to "foundation" in English.

IFLA, together with the Public Library Association of the American Library Association and TASCHA – the Technology and Social Change Group at the University of Washington Information School, were named as the three legacy partners of Global Libraries.

Since 2016, SIGL has provided funding to IFLA for a range of projects that support the objective to strengthen the library field and empower public libraries to improve people's lives and support the growth of sustainable societies. Some of these projects are the Global Vision, IAP – The International Advocacy Programme, and Library Map of the World. The implementation of the IFLA Strategy through regional workshops, the Development and Access to Information (DA2I) project, work with young and emerging leaders and projects on community engagement, impact measurement and storytelling for advocacy.

Additionally, under a special legal agreement between IFLA and SIGL, SIGL contributes funds for the salaries of IFLA staff to enable specific projects to be implemented and a 67 percent contribution to all IFLA office costs.

Going forward, IFLA's funding requests to SIGL will be primarily project based. The projects will align to IFLA's Strategic Plan and SIGL's objectives.

The IFLA Governing Board will regularly meet with the SIGL Board to discuss the future funding arrangements. A meeting took place in Dublin, and the next meeting will be in December 2022 in The Hague.

The IFLA GB will propose the projects it wishes to progress, and what funding is being sought from SIGL.

The SIGL Board has underlined that it is committed to supporting the work of IFLA.

### **IFLA's Governance**

The IFLA Statutes and Rules of Procedure are the documents which establish how IFLA is structured and how decisions are taken. A comprehensive review was undertaken of the Statutes and Rules of Procedure in 2019-2021. There was extensive consultation with Professional Units, stakeholders and legal advisors.

The revised Statutes and Rules of Procedure were approved by an Extraordinary General Assembly in February 2021, to be effective from August 2021.

To support the practical work of the Statutes and Rules of Procedure, a Handbook providing an easy guide to IFLA's structures and processes needs to be finalised and approved as a priority.

The Governing Board proposes a Working Group be formed to progress this important work for the Handbook. The Governing Board will seek representatives from the Professional

Council, Regional Council and the IFLA Management of Library Associations Standing Committee to work with IFLA staff and a Governing Board representative.

This work will begin immediately to ensure that the Handbook is ready for implementation for the 2023 election cycle. The aim is to approve the Handbook at the December 2022 GB meeting.

The IFLA Code of Ethics for the Members of the Governing Board and Officers needs to be reviewed to ensure consistency with the Statutes and Rules of Procedure. This review will be led by the President-elect. Representatives from the IFLA Governing Board, IFLA Management of Library Associations Standing Committee, and an Honorary IFLA Fellow will be invited to join the working group to review the Code of Ethics.

We will seek to have the revised IFLA Code of Ethics approved at the Governing Board's February 2023 meeting.

IFLA's administrative policies ensure good governance and inform and provide guidance to staff in doing their work. An audit of policies will be undertaken by December 2022.

A gap analysis and schedule for policy review and development will be considered at the December 2022 Governing Board meeting. Updates on this work will be considered at each Finance and Risk Committee meeting.

With IFLA moving to a project-based funding approach with SIGL, it will be important to have strong project management in place. The Acting Secretary General will work with the Treasurer to implement a project management framework by April 2023.

### **IFLA's Financial Arrangement and Sustainability**

Like IFLA's members, the Governing Board is committed to strong financial accountability and ensuring the sustainability of IFLA long-term.

In accordance with best practice, a new auditor was appointed in June 2022 to review IFLA's financial accounts.

As an incoming auditor, they will undertake a full review of finances, governance, human resources, and information technology policies and practices.

A key task will be to confirm compliance with applicable laws, accounting standards, policies and procedures by reviewing these against observed practice.

The audit process includes the interim audit in October 2022 and the annual audit process is scheduled for April – June 2023.

The auditors will make observations regarding risk and recommend improvement measures. Their report, with recommendations, will be presented to the Finance and Risk Committee and the Governing Board.

The external auditor will also undertake an internal audit process. This audit process is a risk mitigation strategy that provides assurance that frameworks, policies, practices, and processes are effective. The audit will also review internal controls.

Quarterly reports on progress against Recommendations will be provided to the Finance and Risk Committee and the Governing Board.

IFLA's Risk Policy was reviewed in 2021 and it will be reviewed by the Finance and Risk Committee in December 2022.

A revised Risk Register will be discussed at the February 2023 Finance and Risk Committee meeting and approved at the April 2023 Governing Board meeting.

### **World Library and Information Congress and General Assembly**

There are several other key matters that require the Governing Board's attention.

Prior to COVID-19, the General Assembly was scheduled to coincide with the annual Congress.

In 2020, due to COVID-19 restrictions, the General Assembly was held as a virtual event, based on an exception in a COVID related ruling by the Dutch Government.

In 2021, based on the new Statutes that allowed online participation and online voting the General Assembly was held as a hybrid event. There was the option for attendance, but this was limited to those members who could travel, and it was feasible to do so.

In 2022, the General Assembly is being held as a hybrid event. This decision taken in November 2021 was based on the reduced Congress program of 3 days which did not offer time for the scheduling of the General Assembly.

The Acting Secretary-General will be asked to prepare an options paper on the format of the 2023 General Assembly, for the Governing Board's consideration at its December 2022 meeting. This will enable a decision for the format of the 2023 General Assembly.

There have also been suggestions from members that the format of the World Library and Information Congress needs to be reconsidered.

In recent years, the format of the WLIC has been adjusted due to COVID-19 restrictions:

2021 – virtual conference

2022 – 3 day programme, onsite

2023 – 4 day programme, hybrid (virtual and onsite) delivery

The Expression of Interest for the 2024 congress as a hybrid conference closes on 12 September 2022.

It has been suggested that a biennial or triennial conference may be appropriate– to reduce resourcing, address financial risks and carbon footprint etc.

The Board will discuss options for the future years at its April 2023 GB meeting.

### **Communication**

I now move to communication.

The Governing Board accepts that it needs to improve its communication with members and volunteers.

I hope what I have already shared with you today indicates that we are listening to our members.

I received a lot of positive feedback on the format of the Out in the Open session at the Dublin Congress. Members and volunteers valued the opportunity to meet with members of the Governing Board and ask questions on a range of topics.

I agree – this is a good format. A similar session will be scheduled at the WLIC 2023 in Rotterdam.

From today's update, you can see that the Governing Board and IFLA staff will be progressing many significant initiatives over the next 12 months.

I make a commitment to you today, on behalf of the Governing Board, that we will provide regular updates on the progress of these initiatives. We will also provide updates on key decisions and discussions following each Governing Board meeting.

As I said earlier, details of what I have outlined today will be posted on the IFLA website shortly. You will be able to see what the Governing Board has already done and what we have planned. As a living document this will be updated regularly.

Looking forward, there is much work to be done – but I am confident because we have a plan.

Now we have some time, and I would be happy to hear any feedback. I also invite members and volunteers to stay in contact with me or members of the Governing Board in the future and be part of an exchange to continue the conversation.

Thank you.