

Intervention of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) at the High Level Meeting on the safeguarding of Syrian heritage- December 2014

Dear Mr Chairman / Madam Chair,

I speak for IFLA, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, representing libraries and their users worldwide. One of IFLA's core missions is the protection and preservation of documentary cultural heritage.

The *IFLA Principles of Engagement in library-related activities in times of conflict, crisis or disaster* outline IFLA's position and what actions can be taken on behalf of IFLA when confronted with a disaster. One of IFLA's strategic focuses is also dedicated to disaster reaction. In our Key Initiative 4 'The cultural heritage disaster reconstruction programme' IFLA aims to create a risk register which gathers data on documentary heritage collections in countries and regions at risk world-wide. Both strategic strands feed into the work UNESCO is doing with regards to disasters. IFLA has a dedicated and highly skilled library network which is able to assist with information and data on disaster regions.

When documentary heritage is threatened by conflict, IFLA primarily works through the International Committee of the Blue Shield. The mission of the Blue Shield is closely related to IFLA's aim to safeguard documentary heritage collections and together with the other main Blue Shield organisations (ICOM, ICOMOS and ICA) IFLA tries to raise awareness and involvement in countries affected by conflict.

The civil war in Syria over the last four years and the recent threat in Iraq have led to more libraries being destroyed and documentary heritage collections being either destroyed, looted or displaced. Information on both countries is very difficult to obtain as often our library contacts have had to leave the area or are very restricted on what information can be shared as they otherwise might not be able to guarantee their own safety. Human lives and the safeguarding of librarians and information professionals in the area is always the first priority for IFLA.

IFLA will further expand the risk register in order to guarantee more detailed information in crisis situation and support cultural aid initiatives. Furthermore IFLA strongly supports the UNESCO action plans on both Syria and Iraq and will engage and further UNESCO's mission and implementation of these as much as possible.