**International Federation of
Library Associations and Institutions**

IFLA at the Internet Governance Forum
Webinar, 14 December 2017

1) Introduction

Thank you for joining us here today to talk about IFLA's work with the Internet Governance Forum. We're going to try and summarise five days of meetings, and about a billion webpages, and leave time for questions at the end. This is ambitious. You'll be glad to hear, I hope, that this presentation, as well as the recording, will also be available on our website after we finish.

2) Why the Internet matters for libraries

The fact that you have dialled in to this webinar suggests you don't need to be convinced that the Internet – and the way it works – is important for libraries.

It can be argued that libraries are the original Internet. A network, sharing and giving access to information, for the benefit of all. Indeed, libraries were early pioneers in connecting up information and computers for services such as inter-library loan.

Today, the Internet is increasingly indispensable for access to information. Not just because a growing share of information is digital, but because newspapers and journals that used to be printed are now online-only. Information is held in the cloud, or on someone else's server, not in the library. Without a connection, there is no access.

The importance of connection to the Internet, and of the ability to use it, was highlighted in the Development and Access to Information report. This was produced by IFLA, in partnership with the Technology and Social Change Group at the University of Washington, earlier this year.

The report underlined that meaningful access to information is essential to delivering development across the board, but that, as you can see from this table, we are far from even ensuring connectivity.

3) Who Governs the Internet?

So libraries have a major stake in ensuring that the Internet works, and is accessible for all. Who decides how it works?

It's important that we're talking about governance, not government. States do have an important role – they can set regulations, build – or cut – cables, promote education, and of course fund and support libraries.

But given that the Internet works across borders, other actors are also important. The biggest Internet businesses have a greater market value than many countries. The way they act – and make others act – can have a huge impact.

A subset of business – Internet Service Providers – have a particular power, given that they have the potential to control what comes through cables, or signals, to our homes.

But civil society – and of course users – are also vital. The Internet was designed to empower people, and make them producers rather than just consumers of information. While some worry that the Internet has lost sight of its original mission, others continue to look for ways to make the Internet into an enabler of personal growth and development.

The [Internet Governance Forum](#) was set up in 2006, following a decision of the UN General Assembly. Over the years, regional IGF meetings have emerged, national ones also.

Its goals are to bring together all relevant stakeholders – including all of the ones I've mentioned here. It is a forum, each year, for discussion, not negotiation, leaving people the space to share their experiences and ideas.

While there other organisations that discuss the Internet, none do so as broadly, and as inclusively, as the IGF. It is a great opportunity for us to keep up to date, build alliances, advocate for libraries, and influence the thinking of those who make decisions.

4) What Do They Talk About?

With the Internet playing such an important role in all aspects of our lives, it is not a surprise that Internet Governance Forum meetings cover an ambitious range of subjects.

There are technical specialists, discussing regulation and standards. There are those looking at the economics of the Internet, and how it can help create new businesses and facilitate trade.

Cybersecurity and dealing with criminal content remains a major priority, both in order to protect people, but also given that security is all too often used as an excuse to apply tough restrictions on the web. Others take a more positive outlook, thinking about how the Internet can help achieve social objectives, and give strength to marginalised groups.

Finally, there are discussions about governance – how decisions are taken, at all levels, about the way the Internet works.

All of these issues are up for discussion at the IGF.

5) What Is The Library Angle?

In line with the key themes set out already, IFLA comes at the Internet governance debate from three different angles – connected libraries and communities, open Internet infrastructure, and empowered users. The next three slides will look at each of these main areas of engagement.

6) Connected Libraries and Communities

The first is all about getting libraries online, and in doing so, helping communities do so also. As highlighted above, the costs of being unconnected are growing. The digital divide risks, all too easily, becoming an economic, a social and even a democratic divide.

Connecting libraries to the Internet is therefore a vital first step. As the [IFLA Library Map of the World](#) shows, rates of connection vary strongly. It will also tend to be the hardest libraries to connect – those that are remote, or in poor areas – that will be last. At the same time, technology is improving rapidly. New techniques are emerging – dedicating un-used radio spectrum, for example - which offer new means of giving people access.

Once libraries themselves are connected, they can in turn serve the community – both through providing public access and relevant training, but also as hubs for community networks.

The [Principles on Public Access in Libraries](#), agreed in 2015, set out some key points to consider. In addition to getting the right infrastructure, policy, copyright laws, accessibility, skills development, and content provision all needed to be borne in mind.

Working with partners at the Internet Governance Forum provides an opportunity to encourage governments and donors to see providing public access through libraries as a cost-effective means of getting the next billions of people online.

7) Open Internet Infrastructure

However, connection isn't everything. As mentioned above, both governments and private players can influence what you can see online.

This stretches from simple blocking or censorship of sites – and in its most extreme form, shutting down the Internet altogether – to more subtle strategies. Changing the order of search results, or hiding certain ones, showing particular posts on Facebook to influence moods, limiting what users can do with the content they find.

IFLA has already made statements both on net neutrality and Internet shutdowns. We've argued that that blocking or slowing access to information, in a disproportionate and or unfairly discriminatory manner, is wrong. In the case of net neutrality, it is smaller firms, individuals, and of course libraries who won't be able to pay for their own content to be prioritised. In the case of Internet shutdowns, the costs to general welfare are likely to be much greater than any gains.

IFLA also defends the human rights of free speech and free access to information, notably through the work of our Advisory Committee on Freedom of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression. When people are not allowed to express themselves online, or fear that they may be under surveillance or at risk, there cannot be the free debate and sharing of ideas that the Internet promises.

Finally, and connected with the importance of free expression is copyright. The digital transition has both created new possibilities to create, share and apply content, and new ways of preventing this. Technological protection measures and use of contract terms to take away possibilities created by exceptions and limitations are serious issues.

For IFLA, the Internet Governance Forum is an opportunity to make sure that the rights of library users are reflected in broader debate. Security and economic factors are important, but for the Internet to realise its full potential, all voices must be heard.

8) Empowered Users – developing digital literacy

Finally, library users. Even in those countries where there is good connectivity, and rich content in the local language, too many people aren't online, or making the most of it. Libraries, by providing public access, clearly have an important role. But so too do the skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours necessary to become a confident and proficient Internet user.

As set out in our statement on digital literacy earlier this year, libraries can be a key player here. In many countries they are providing vital help to people who may not have other options. They offer everything from the most basic computer skills, to developing more sophisticated capacities, such as the ability to spot fake news. They do this through formal courses, informal drop-ins, and simply by providing a welcoming environment.

The IGF is a great opportunity to connect libraries with the many other actors and programmes out there developing tools and practices on digital literacy. It is an important moment too to underline that this literacy must be provided in a way that allows people to develop as whole citizens, and thrive online. Digital literacy is also the only sustainable response to many of the challenges encountered online today. No regulation will be quick enough, or filter accurate enough, to deal effectively with misinformation or other harmful content online. Only skilled, empowered users can do this.

9) **IFLA at IGF 2017**

We have a busy programme then at this year's IGF. And we already have been busy, with IFLA representatives attending all regional meetings – in Latin America, Africa, Asia-Oceania and Europe.

We'll be organising a session of the Dynamic Coalition on Public Access in Libraries, talking not just about how important this is, but also about the policies that are needed to make it work. We'll have speakers who'll discuss the experience of the Pacific, Latin America and Africa, drawing out lessons that we'll be sharing at a plenary session.

We'll be talking public access and digital literacy in an event organised by the IEEE on Sunday, brainstorming with major NGOs, businesses and aid agencies. We'll be looking at how libraries can help develop digital literacy in young people.

And we'll be at many other sessions, talking copyright, free speech and, of course, libraries!

10) **How to follow us**

You can follow us! You can register yourself to watch the IGF on the website – here's the link. We'll also be on social media, and producing blogs every day. We look forward to your questions, comments and involvement!

11) **Questions?**