Access to Government Information in the Post 2015 United Nations Development Agenda

A Statement from the Government Information and Official Publications Section (GIOPS), International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA)

The Lyon Declaration on Access to Information and Development outlines how access to information assists governments in achieving their development goals, and enables citizens to make informed decisions to improve their lives. It recognizes access to information as a fundamental element for strengthening sustainable development, and acknowledges the important role of libraries and librarians in supporting it. The IFLA *Government Information and Official Publications Section* (GIOPS) endorses the declaration and offers the following supporting points on how unfettered and equitable access to government information furthers the Post 2015 UN Development Agenda.

Equitable and unfettered access to government information is a prerequisite for citizens to make informed decisions about development programmes across all sectors and at all levels. The Post 2015 process must also ensure that communities and individuals have access to government information. Government information librarians and government libraries play a crucial role in assisting with these objectives by providing government information sources in all formats to citizens, and offering expert guidance in the following areas:

- Helping citizens find the information they need to develop their communities, build businesses, find jobs, discover economic opportunities and contribute to the well-being of their communities.

- Helping citizens develop information literacy skills to effectively seek, access, understand, and use government information in all formats.

> **What is government information?**
> Government information is information produced by governments and non-governmental organizations at all levels – international, national, regional, local, etc. Governments produce information on many subjects and in many different ways including research reports, laws, policy, statistics and data, and in many formats. Increasingly governments are making information available electronically.

- Assisting national and local governments to achieve their development goals by helping them better understand citizens' information needs.

- Providing local and distributed government information services and advice and the technology to use them that governments could not otherwise offer.

- Educating current and future generations of public servants through the provision of government information collections and government information literacy.

- Preserving government information regardless of format as the historical record of a jurisdiction for use by future generations.

Libraries have long played a pivotal role in informing citizens and supporting governments through systems of local, federal and international depository libraries. In the future as government information evolves into a primarily digital format, libraries and librarians will continue to play an important role by offering expert guidance and technology facilities to assist citizens in finding government information, fighting poverty, and preserving government information and the historical record for use by future generations.

In recent years, much has been made about the importance of open government and in 2012 the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs published its *E-Government Survey 2012: E-Government for the People*. The report is full of information, graphs and charts, but nowhere in the text does one find any mention of the word "library." This is clearly an oversight. For the benefits of open government information to be fully realized, it is not enough to simply mount government information on web servers. Intermediation from qualified information professionals, including librarians, remains crucial.

> **What is Open Government?**
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> The OECD, in *Modernising Government: The Way Forward* describes open government as: "The transparency of government actions, the accessibility of government services and information, and the responsiveness of government to new ideas, demands and needs".
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> **What is Open Government Data (OGD)?**
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> The two main elements of OGD are normally defined as follows: *Government data* is any data and information produced or commissioned by public bodies; *Open data* are data that can be freely used, re-used and distributed by anyone, only subject to (at the most) the requirement that users attribute the data and that they make their work available to be shared as well.
> Source: OECD

Recommendations:

That access to information, including government information, be an integral part of the Post 2015 United Nations Development Agenda

That the contribution of libraries and library staff including those with facilities and expertise for furthering the mandate of open government and providing access to government information be recognized and documented as an important element in achieving the goals of the Agenda

That countries be encouraged to continually develop and maintain a strong network of libraries with government information expertise to assist the public in accessing, using and applying government information to achieve sustainable development goals