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Executive Secretariat
U.S. National Commission for UNESCO
Department of State
2121 Virginia Ave.
Suite 6200
Washington DC 20037

Sent via e-mail : DCUNESCO@state.gov

Dear Executive Secretariat:

We are writing on behalf of the Medical Library Association (MLA) to encourage your support for adoption of the UNESCO IFLA Multicultural Library Manifesto at the October 2009 UNESCO General Conference in Paris.

The Manifesto, which was endorsed by UNESCO's Information for All Programme (IFAP) in April 2008, calls for "libraries of all types to reflect, support and promote cultural and linguistic diversity at the international, national, and local levels, and thus work for cross-cultural dialogue and active citizenship." MLA supports endorsement of the Manifesto and believes that it is an important resource for the development of library programs and information services to serve the diverse cultural and linguistic needs and interests of a global society.

As a professional association of health information professionals with more than 4,000 members worldwide, MLA has a long history of working with the international library community. Some recent initiatives include MLA's Librarians without Borders[®] program which was established in 2005 to provide training in the field of information retrieval and library information assistance to people anywhere in the world, namely training in the use of computers used for library research and general training on how to effectively conduct research using a library. To date, more than 20 workshops have been held in 15 countries around the globe. The Librarians without Borders[®] initiative also helps provide medical information for healthcare personnel responding to epidemics and natural man-made disasters anywhere in the world.

MLA works with the association's International Cooperation Section (ICS) on projects such as its Sister Libraries Program, which promotes awareness of international issues, provides a mechanism for addressing and responding to the needs of international members, and fosters communication in the international library area.

Our experience with these and other initiatives affirms that there is a real need for libraries to be actively engaged in the development and implementation of library services that serve the diverse needs and interests of our increasingly diverse global society. Today, more than ever, libraries and librarians have unique opportunities to serve society by ensuring that all individuals have access to the information they need to make informed decisions that will further the quality of life for themselves, their families, communities, and the institutions they serve.

The Internet provides quick access to information for everyone who might need it, including scientists, physicians, educators, and citizens at home, in school, and in a library. Unfortunately, quick and ready access does not mean free and equal access to online information. Oftentimes, individuals experience barriers and restrictions when trying to gain access to needed information for purposes of education, research, and healthcare. For this reason, the Medical Library Association expresses its willingness to work with the National Commission in its efforts to secure free and equal access to digital and print information for all.

MLA supports UNESCO's role in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), and its efforts to work with all stakeholders towards implementation of the outcomes of WSIS. A critical goal in this implementation is the development of National Information and Knowledge Strategies that will serve as the key to the collection, storage, and dissemination of national and local information and knowledge. In order to successfully achieve this goal, it is crucial that librarians be engaged as central players in the development of these strategies.

We appreciate your consideration of our thoughts on these issues and welcome the opportunity for further dialogue.

Sincerely,



Connie Schardt, AHIP
President
Medical Library Association



Carla J. Funk, CAE
Executive Director
Medical Library Association

CS/CJF/mml