

## **STATEMENT AND RESOLUTION TO THE IFLA CONFERENCE, MOSCOW, AUGUST 1991**

**Adopted by the Library and Information Workers Organization (South Africa) at its first AGM, Pietermaritzburg, 27 July 1991**

### **Background**

Since late 1989 certain important changes have taken place in South Africa. During that year organizations of the liberation movement, through mass protest and presence on the streets of South Africa's towns, declared themselves unbanned. The response of the South African's government to this action and to international economic and political isolation, and its inability morally and militarily to rule, resulted in further changes to the apartheid scenario. Today some of the legislative basis of apartheid has been removed, and locally and internationally people speak of a "new" South Africa.

As far as libraries are concerned, the Separate Amenities Act, which barred blacks from using public libraries established and funded by white local authorities, and sanctioned the occasional establishment of inferior facilities in townships, has been removed from the statute book. As a result, many librarians have claimed that libraries are now freely available to all. Eloquent supporters of this view will make themselves heard at this gathering of the international library community. Many librarians, with the best of intentions, will want to believe this. The international community, along with the majority of South Africans, want to wipe the scourge of apartheid from the record of humanity at the earliest possible opportunity.

It is important to point out that apartheid is nowhere near dead. At the national level only the whites have a meaningful voice. Increasing numbers of black South Africans are moving into what were formerly white towns, but they are not permitted to vote in local authority elections; nor are those people formerly classified "Coloured" and "Indian". A new constitution, drastic overhaul of local government and the election of a democratically based government will not be achieved quickly. We have yet to see legislation which extends *rights* to all the people of South Africa. In our sphere of interest, for instance, there is no right to quality education, any more than there is a right to information. If the present situation remains unaltered it will be perfectly possible to maintain the apartheid status

quo without the help of legislation. The death of apartheid will not be in sight until the people of South Africa are empowered politically, legally and economically.

Those of us living in South Africa, who have witnessed and experienced the deprivation of apartheid know that its effects *cannot* be wiped out at will, nor overnight. Apartheid's racial discrimination permeates the ways in which South Africa society is ordered in every dimension—political, social, economic, religious, etc.—producing a social system which involves amongst other injustices, structural poverty and deprivation. This will take decades to remove. The legacy of Bantu education ensures that millions of black children continue to struggle for an education with inadequate schools, and without teachers, books, pens, pencils, paper, laboratory equipment, playing fields and sports equipment, and libraries.

Likewise, years of separate amenities leave us with public libraries in white residential areas, in the centre of towns and cities, far from the township where most blacks live and go to schools. In most cases this means that people cannot borrow books from these, even if they raise the busfare to travel to them, for residents of townships are not ratepayers in municipal areas and in terms of by-laws are not entitled to free membership of the public library. If libraries have been established in black townships they are often housed in inadequate buildings, have inferior bookstock, and most importantly, may be seen to be part and parcel of government structures and thus viewed with suspicion by black residents. Having said this, it is important to remember that the legislative picture is complex and the precise situation will vary from place to place.

Given this context, LIWO *notes with concern*

1. IFLA's difficulty in the light of insufficient information in arriving at a decision on South African libraries' institutional membership of IFLA both now and in the past;
2. the fact that while some South African librarians have opposed apartheid structures, some of whom have been detained or deported, many have supported the apartheid regime;
3. the continuing existence of a well-entrenched system of censorship, both formal and informal.

**LIWO requests that IFLA**

- 1. recognize the fact that apartheid is far from dead;**
- 2. acknowledge the need for massive political, economic and social reconstruction in South Africa;**
- 3. support through contact, encouragement of research, and training programmes those librarians, libraries and resource centres and their associations (LIWO, Transvaal Resource Centre Network, Natal Resource Centre Forums [Durban and Pietermaritzburg], and Cape Resource Centre Forum) which clearly support a democratic South Africa;**
- 4. withhold recognition from those institutions and associations which have upheld white privilege in the past and continue to do so using tactics such as privatization;**
- 5. to implement the conclusions of the IFLA working group on South Africa's report.**