The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) is the most important international professional organization for librarians. As the name implies, members are not individuals but library associations (such as ALA) and institutions (such as individual libraries). Although there is an annual conference, the governing body, the IFLA Council, meets only every two years at the annual conference. 1995 was a Council year.

In its early years, IFLA was mainly an elite European club, but more recently it has expanded to the point where most countries of the world are represented. Of course, it still takes money to travel to meetings so participants still form a privileged group. Furthermore, the IFLA Executive Board continues to be predominantly (but not exclusively) from Europe and North America. In addressing the needs of new members, the most recent "core program" established was Advancement of Librarianship in the Third World (ALP). In addition, meetings are more often held outside of Europe and North America. For example, since 1990, the meetings have been held in Stockholm, Moscow, New Delhi, Barcelona, Havana, Istanbul, and next year's meeting will be in Beijing.

As the organization has become more diverse and has met in more countries, new issues have confronted the established power structure. For example, the IFLA Executive could not prevent the IFLA Council from passing a 1985 resolution excluding South African apartheid institutions from membership. But the IFLA Executive was able to negate the central point of the resolution by failing to
implement it. Even though an international delegation protested this inaction at every subsequent meeting until the majority-rule election, the IFLA Executive Board always found another way to delay implementation by doing another survey or establishing another study group. Nevertheless, an important human rights provision was official IFLA policy, and this did have an effect on the library situation in South Africa. It was precisely these kinds of actions worldwide that, taken together, speeded the end of the apartheid government.

Most readers of this journal may wonder how the IFLA Executive could oppose and then not implement an anti-apartheid policy that became quite mainstream during the end of the 1980s. After all, freedom of expression is supposed to be one of our most sacred beliefs as librarians. Furthermore, IFLA official policy includes a statement of support for Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. There seems to be a contradiction between policy and practice.

Moving to a more controversial issue, how should we react when IFLA meets in a country known for its official human rights violations such as Turkey? The Turkish Government is fighting a brutal war against its Kurdish population. Although Turkey depends on tourism for much of its income, the Kurdish area is off limits for travel. Kurdish villages have been emptied, people disappear, torture is routine, newspapers are closed down and regularly censored, and Turkey has more writers in jail than any other country. Large numbers of Kurds have been displaced and they are now spread throughout the country. Repression is not limited to the traditional Kurdish area. For example, a senior library school faculty member from Istanbul told me that it was impossible for her to speak out for fear of torture.

Istanbul is a wonderful place for tourists and relatively inexpensive. It is truly exciting to experience the magnificent architecture and art, the beautiful Bosphorus, the fascinating Grand Bazaar, the vibrant street life, delicious food in grand or small friendly restaurants, the castles, the mosques, and the Topkapi Palace. It would be very easy to lose oneself in tourist pleasures, attend to the usual conference concerns, and go home happy. The majority of conference attendees probably did that. On the other hand, a large minority were ready to raise the issue of human rights. The IFLA Executive knew that the issues would be raised and announced the formation of a committee to address the question of freedom of expression and report back in two years. In addition, the Director of the Article 19 organization was invited to give a talk.

Not satisfied with the two year wait, the Scandinavians debated the human rights issue for months before the conference. In the end, the Swedish, Norwegian, and Finnish Library Associations in coordination with other small associations developed a compromise resolution that reaffirmed IFLA's commitment to human rights and called for the repeal of Article 8 of the Turkish Anti-Terrorism Law and the release of prisoners held under its provisions. This resolution was seconded by the Library Association (UK) and supported by the Article 19 organization in London. All this was accomplished before the meeting, so the resolution was submitted to the IFLA Executive for publication in the conference newspaper, the IFLA Express, for consideration of the IFLA Council.

Not knowing about the Scandinavian activities, three US librarians (including this writer) developed a strong resolution regarding human rights in Turkey and submitted it in the same way. We also began to distribute the resolution to our colleagues in Istanbul, and especially at the talk given by the director of the Article 19 organization. She gave an excellent talk on the need to act with
examples in many countries, but she did not speak about Turkey. However, this writer was able to ask about the Turkish situation and she gave an excellent factual reply. As a result of these activities, I was summoned to the IFLA Executive and asked to withdraw our resolution within two hours. After finding out about the Scandinavian resolution and its very solid support, our group decided to support that resolution and we withdrew our own the next day. In the meantime, the IFLA Executive decided against publishing all the resolutions, and also prevailed upon the Scandinavians to delete all mention of Turkey from their carefully developed compromise language. In return, we tried to amend what was left by restoring the Scandinavian's own language on Turkey on the floor of the IFLA Council. A large minority supported our amendment, but it was defeated.

The question remains. Where does our responsibility lie while we are enjoying the hospitality of the host country and our local colleagues? And what if most of our local colleagues support their Government's repressive policies for one reason or another? If courageous local colleagues must remain silent to protect their health and lives, and if we can speak with only relatively minor consequences, how can we justify remaining silent?

DOCUMENTS

RESOLUTION ON THE IMPORTANCE OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND FREE ACCESS TO INFORMATION

passed by IFLA, August 1995

The 1995 IFLA General Conference in Istanbul affirms its commitment to Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as stated by the 55th IFLA General Conference 1989.

The IFLA General Conference is deeply concerned about increasing infringements on free expression and the free flow of information in many parts of the world, and the mounting cases of abuse and even killing that are being recorded. Attacks are often directed against writers, journalists, publishers and editors, and those responsible may be governments, groups or parties representing extreme political or religious views.

The IFLA General Conference firmly condemns all violent and other restrictions on freedom of expression, access to information and free debate. These are fundamental rights that enable people and societies to protect and enhance democracy and culture. The IFLA General Conference will call upon all governments to ensure the right to freedom of expression and the free flow of information for their citizens and to protect them from violence, intimidation and threat of punishment.