

**REPORT OF
THE IFLA MISSION
TO SOUTH AFRICA
June, 1993**

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INTRODUCTION

Events are unfolding in South Africa at such a pace that any reporting of the current situation can only succeed in capturing one moment in the rapidly changing scene. To illustrate this point, shortly after the Mission Chairman was briefed by the President of IFLA about this proposed fact-finding mission following the joint Professional Board/Executive Board meeting at the Hague in April 1993, the tragic news of the assassination of the prominent Black leader Chris Hani shocked the world. That event was clearly a major set-back to the on-going constitutional negotiations and seemed at the time to move the country once again to the precipice of disaster. Yet, just before members of the mission set out to commence their assignment early in June, the announcement of April 27 1994 as the provisional date for the first non-racial election once again renewed hopes for a peaceful transition to a new multi-racial South Africa.

Any decision to send a fact-finding mission to South Africa under the current situation is therefore in a sense an act of faith. But it is also in our view consistent with a careful reading of the trends in the last three years which have seen, on the part of the South African Government, an incremental dismantling of the statutory infrastructure supporting the apartheid system of government and the resulting review of the policy of isolation by the international community. It is also justified by the need to ensure that library and information services are not marginalised in the on-going preparations for a New South Africa.

That the facts presented here and the recommendations arising from them are based on our findings from a sampling of institutions in the three leading regions of South Africa, within a period of nine working days during the period June 7 to 18, 1993. In spite of the limited time available to the mission however, it is satisfied that its visits to a cross section of LIS institutions and discussions with a wide variety of individuals and associations gave it a comprehensive overview of the current situation. The institutions visited included the State Library and the Department of Education and Training in Pretoria, the Municipal libraries in Johannesburg and Pietermaritzburg and the Transvaal Provincial Library in Pretoria. Others were university libraries in Pretoria, Cape Town, and Durban and Technikons in Durban and Cape Town. We also visited Resource Centres in townships outside Johannesburg and Cape Town and READ libraries in Soweto. Finally we had discussions with the leaders of the various LIS professional organisations in the three centres visited.

Our information gathering methods took a variety of forms: site visits and briefings by library authorities, discussions with groups representing individual professional associations as well as brain-storming sessions with mixed groups representing various libraries and professional associations in particular localities. In many instances we found we were not just collecting information but were counselling, offering encouragement or facilitating communication among various professional associations. Members of the mission also received many documents from which further valuable information was derived. In this connection we were particularly fortunate to receive copies of the NEPI report which contains useful background information on the current state of library and information services in South Africa. We found that the subject of our enquiry was a matter of great sensitivity as our respondents were often not willing to dwell on inequalities deriving from past policies. Perhaps for this reason, we were generally not able to get the racially disaggregated statistics we required on membership of professional associations, library use and employment and had therefore to settle for rough estimates and data from published sources.

We would like to acknowledge our indebtedness to the British Council for financial and logistical support and to John Armstrong for his competent, if unobtrusive, coordination of the logistical and other arrangements for our mission. Further thanks are due to Prof. John Willemse of UNISA, Nick Smart of British Council, Cape Town and Jenni Karlsson of TransLis and other prominent local librarians in the Universities of Natal, Cape Town and Witwatersrand who assisted in various ways with our programmes in the three regions visited. Finally we acknowledge other assistance, hospitality and courtesies received from the authorities of the various institutions visited. We were much encouraged by the enthusiasm and support received everywhere we went and were flattered by the number of individuals and groups who protested their non-inclusion on our programme. We sincerely hope that this report will, as expected, "be a significant contribution toward understanding the prospects for change within the South African library community".

