

TRIP REPORT
VISIT TO UNESCO HEADQUARTERS, PARIS, FRANCE
May 2-4, 2001

Prepared by Forest Woody Horton, Jr. as an unofficial working report.

1. Purpose of Trip

NCLIS Executive Director Bob Willard and NCLIS Consultant Woody Horton visited UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, France, May 2-4, 2001, for four purposes:

- To discuss the adaptation and adoption of a Sister Libraries type of program by UNESCO, using the U.S. Sister Libraries Millennium Project as a model, but adapted as necessary to the unique UNESCO Associated Libraries (UNAL) programme;
- To discuss the National Forum on Information Literacy/NCLIS proposal for the "First International Leadership Conference on Information Literacy;"
- To discuss other specific UNESCO programs, projects, or other initiatives in the library and information science arena in which the United States has an interest, including the Memory of the World programme and the Alexandrina Library in Alexandria, Egypt; and
- To discuss the overall U.S. involvement with UNESCO programs, including the prospects of the U.S. rejoining UNESCO.

The opportunity to meet for the first time the new Assistant Director-General for Education, Sir John Daniel (UK), Hillary Wiesner (USA), Executive Officer in the Office of the Director General, as well as Alexandra Draxler (USA), Director of the Task Force on Education for the Twenty-First Century were also very valuable opportunities. Shirley Hart (USA), the U.S. Observer to UNESCO, and her staff, especially Stephanie Mulet, provided the usual excellent backstopping assistance which the Commission has come to depend on the during its visits to UNESCO the last several years.

2. Schedule of Meetings (key topics discussed follow name):

- Mr. Moshen Tawfik
Director, Unit for Special Projects
(Alexandria Egypt Library Project)
- Mr. Philippe Queau
Director, Information Society Division
Communication and Information (C&I) Sector
(Information Literacy Leadership Conference Proposal)

- Mr. John Rose
Programme Specialist
Information and Informatics Division
C&I Sector
(Information Literacy Leadership Conference Proposal)
- Mr. Axel Plathe
Information Society Division
C&I Sector
(Information Literacy Leadership Conference Proposal)
- Mr. Yves Courier
Programme Specialist
World Information and Communications Report
Information Society Division
C&I Sector
(Information Literacy Leadership Conference Proposal)
- Mrs. Joie Springer
Program Specialist
United Nations Associated Libraries (UNAL)
Information Society Division
C&I Sector
(Sister Libraries Project)
- Mr. Abdelaziz Abid
Program Specialist
Memory of the World Programme, Libraries
Information Society Division
C&I Sector
(all programs and projects discussed)
- Mrs. Hillary Wiesner
Executive Officer
Office of the Director General
(all programs and projects discussed; U.S. rejoining UNESCO)
- Mrs. Alexandra Draxler
Director
Task Force on Education for the 21st Century
Education Sector
(Information Literacy Leadership Conference Proposal)

- Sir John Daniel
Assistant Director-General/Education
Education Sector
(Information Literacy Leadership Conference Proposal)
- Alexander Sannikov
Regional Education Adviser for Europe
Education Sector
(Information Literacy Leadership Conference Proposal)
- Shirley Hart
U.S. Observer to UNESCO
(all programs and projects; U.S. rejoining UNESCO)

3. Sister Libraries Project

Although Mr. Abid, a Tunisian, is the senior UNESCO official directly in charge of UNESCO library programs in general, because of his heavy commitments to the Memory of the World programme, he defers to Ms. Springer in day-to-day activities, especially matters pertaining to the UNESCO Network of Associated Libraries (UNAL). Horton and Willard had a very cordial meeting with Ms. Springer, who is quite interested in the U.S. Sister Libraries project and looks forward keenly to receiving the NCLIS evaluation report in August. Three key items agreed to are:

- Matching of UNAL and SL Membership Lists. NCLIS will forward to Springer a copy of the current list of Sister Libraries partners (both U.S. and the partnered non-U.S. library) so that she can cross-match the list with the UNAL member libraries. NCLIS will do the same thing, and for that purpose, Springer gave NCLIS a copy of the latest List of Members publication (dated 1998, to which some minor changes have been made). NCLIS and Ms. Springer will then compare results. Hopefully there will be at least a few UNAL libraries that are also Sister Libraries. Unfortunately, however, there are only two U.S. libraries that are UNAL libraries: the Durland Alternatives Library at Cornell University, and the World Partnership Library in Bahama, NC. Despite there being only two U.S. UNAL member libraries, Springer said there was no reason why there could not be more than two, and this is a matter NCLIS may wish to pursue, quite apart from the Sister Libraries project.
- NCLIS August Evaluation Report. Springer looks forward to receiving a copy of the final NCLIS Sister Libraries evaluation report as soon as

it is published, and asked if it might be possible for the report to specifically address the question of whether NCLIS believes that there were any "lessons learned" in the Sister Libraries project that are especially relevant to the question of "adapting and adopting" the project's format to the UNAL library context. Horton and Willard assured Springer that her request would be addressed in the NCLIS report. Springer demurred on the question of trying to "advance guess" how the Sister Libraries project format might be adapted and adopted by the UNAL programme, preferring instead to await reading the final report, and perhaps discussing the matter with a few libraries and librarians whom (we hope) turn out to be both UNAL member libraries and Sister Libraries partners.

- Boston/IFLA Meeting. Springer will probably not go to the Boston/IFLA meeting in August 2001, but Mr. Abid will go. Willard mentioned that NCLIS was reserving a room in Boston for a special meeting of "interested persons" in the Sister Libraries project, including non-U.S. attendees at the IFLA conference. Certainly Mr. Abid will be advised of the date and time of the meeting so that he can plan to attend. Should Ms. Springer's plans change and she is able to come to Boston, she is cordially invited to that meeting as well.

4. Alexandrina Library and Memory of the World Programmes.

With respect to the Alexandrina Library in Alexandria, Egypt project, Mr. Mohsen Tawfik, Director, United for Special Projects, is the senior UNESCO official in charge of liaison between UNESCO and the Egyptian Government. Mr. Tawfik was quite candid and forthcoming about the problems encountered, some of which have delayed the planned formal opening ceremonies several times. Still, he indicated that the current planned formal opening date was "sometime later this year," without being held to a specific date (following the UNESCO visit, Willard and Horton were advised by Washington D.C. sources that the new announced opening is April 23, 2002). Mr. Tawfik was at one time the Egyptian Ambassador to UNESCO, but later he was hired onto the UNESCO permanent staff, and has been responsible for liaison between UNESCO and the Egyptian Government ever since.

Tawfik said that a new Director General of the Alexandrina Library has now been appointed, Dr. Ismail Serageddin, who spent 28 years at the World Bank. Hopefully, Abid said, Dr. Serageddin's appointment augurs well for getting things back on track. Other interesting facts that emerged from the discussion with Abid pertaining to the Alexandrina Library project included:

- \$200 million in total has been budgeted for the project;

- There is a "Friends of the Library" international trustees group which acts as a sort of steering committee (approximately 22 members currently);
- One half million books have been collected so far;
- In Egypt, the library is "housed" (organizationally) in the Office of the President himself, not a ministry as it formerly was; it should be understood that the project primarily is an Egyptian government project, not a UNESCO project, although the latter institution is quite interested in and supports it, as do many other institutions world-wide;
- The library in the broadest sense will contain a conference center, a library, an international school of information studies, a small science museum and planetarium, and a laboratory for manuscript preservation studies; and
- Mrs. Mubarak is quite interested in the library, as was and still is Mrs. Anwar Sadat.

Perhaps the most significant matter Mr. Tawfik raised with Willard and Horton was the possibility of finding technical American assistance to help with the design and development of an "information system" for the library. Tawfik reviewed the unfortunate history of prior efforts to develop such a system, which have essentially collapsed. The absence of such a system may well have delayed the opening of the library. Technical assistance is needed both in the information system design and development process, as well as in the digitalization of materials process area. In the latter regard, Virginia Tech. University in the U.S. has been involved in digitalizing university dissertations and there was a meeting with that institution addressing the Alexandria Library needs at a recent ARL meeting. Willard promised NCLIS would review possible assistance alternatives in this regard, after consulting with the appropriate U.S. players which have already been involved, and/or who could be interested in helping.

Horton mentioned to Tawfik that the American Society for Information Science (ASIS, but now called the American Society for Information Science and Technology, ASIST) and the International Federation for Information and Documentation (FID) had begun planning in 1998 an appropriate international conference in Alexandria that would have taken place soon after the inaugural ceremonies. But the conference idea has had to be postponed until a firm opening date is established. Tawfik suggested that Bahaa El-Hadidy (for ASIS) and Shawkey Salem (for FID) keep him informed of plans to go forward with such a meeting once the opening has taken place. Along the same lines, IFLA had also planned a major conference for the Alexandria Library opening, in partnership also with FID at the time, but slippage of the opening date has caused these plans to be put on hold as well.

Abdelaziz Abid is the UNESCO senior official in charge of the Memory of the World project, but he discussed the Alexandrina Library project, the Sister Libraries project, and the Information Literacy Leadership Conference proposal as well with Willard and Horton.

Messrs. Tawfik and Abid both shared several documents relating to the Alexandrina Library and the Memory of the World project with Horton and Willard, including a document which describes the first (and only) meeting of the International Commission on the Alexandrina Library (on which former Librarian of Congress Daniel Boorstin serves). Tawfik also provided a document dated April 2001, "The Bibliotheca Alexandrina Project: Past History and Recent Developments," which is being mailed to Mrs. Gould and Dr. Joan Challinor, and will also be sent to the other members of the NCLIS International Committee. Tawfik said the library-planning group has met several times, with Winston Tabb of the Library of Congress representing the United States. He invited NCLIS to recommend the names of U.S. individuals who might be interested in attending the opening ceremonies, and Chairperson Gould and Vice Chairperson Challinor should both be approached in this regard. If interested, their names can be forwarded to Mr. Tawfik, along with other recommendations.

Abid mentioned that he has been in contact with Deanna Marcum of CLIR on matters pertaining to preservation of materials, and perhaps NCLIS should discuss the project with her.

5. International Information Literacy Leadership Conference Proposal

The guiding inspirational driving force behind the idea of holding the first international information literacy conference has been the National Forum on Information Literacy, spearheaded by the Forum's head, Patricia Breivik, Dean of the University Library at San Jose State University in San Jose, California. The Commission agreed to serve as a facilitator to begin a dialogue with UNESCO for the purpose of ascertaining whether or not that institution might be interested in playing a key role in helping to sponsor, plan for, implement, and then evaluate the results of such a conference.

Toward that end, NCLIS raised the idea of such an international meeting informally at the staff level with several UNESCO Communications and Information sector people as early as last year, following the Commission's meeting in Los Angeles. It was at the Los Angeles meeting that Dean Breivik first formally broached the idea of an international information literacy leadership conference in the presence of the full Commission.

Upon learning that Abdul Khan was to become the new Assistant Director-General of the Communication and Information Sector programs at UNESCO, Horton sent a brief e-mail message to him some weeks ago, congratulating him on his appointment, and raising the possibility of UNESCO interest in and support of such a conference. In his positive reply, Khan congratulated NCLIS for exploring this opportunity and promised to look into the matter.

Following conversations with the U.S. State Department in Washington, and the U.S. Observer Mission to UNESCO in Paris, the May 2001 dates for a visit to UNESCO headquarters in Paris were firmed up, and additional e-mail messages were then sent to the CI and Education sector staffs suggesting that appointments be set up between the visiting NCLIS officials and appropriate UNESCO officials. Additionally, a brief four page working paper outlining the concept of such a conference, in draft form, was sent in advance for the UNESCO officials to review.

Both UNESCO C&I sector and Education sector officials were visited, and all warmly endorsed the idea of UNESCO interest in and support of such a meeting. As expected, the specific views and interests of the two sectors were somewhat different, but were complementary. Each of the two sectors agreed that the interests of the other sector should be solicited since both sectors would ultimately collaborate in the articulation of a plan outlining a UNESCO role.

Willard and Horton first met with the C&I sector staff, including Messrs Queau, Plathe, Rose, and Abid. Mrs. Hart also attended this meeting. These officials were aware of our e-mail exchange with their new Assistant Director General, Mr. Khan, and had received from Mrs. Hart's office the draft four-page conference proposal.

The staff warmly supported the idea, and indicated the "format" would probably be for Mr. Khan to discuss the matter with Sir John Daniel as soon as the two could conveniently put the matter on their agendas, probably in the "July/August timeframe," and UNESCO would then be back to NCLIS with decisions and recommendations.

Here are the other highlights of this meeting:

- The G8 Digital Opportunities Task Force is also interested in the information literacy area, and NCLIS may wish to coordinate with them;
- We should be more specific in identifying expected outcomes from both the Expert Meeting (the first meeting) and the larger conference (the second meeting);

- We should make sure the meeting has practical values for developing countries, not just developed countries, nor not just for academic or theoretical purposes;
- The role(s) of the private sector in information literacy should be identified, not just the public sector's role(s); Mr. Queau was especially interested in the relative benefit:cost values and burdens of implementing any information literacy recommendations, as, for example, between the taxpayers and the users; in this regard Horton promised to send him the Public-Private Sector NCLIS republished report; and
- There is periodically held a world summit on education, and we should review its relationship to the information literacy conference idea.

Willard and Horton next met with Alexandra Draxler, Director, Task Force on Education for the Twenty-first Century, which was chaired by Jacques Delors, former President of the European Commission. Ms. Draxler was very interested in the information literacy conference idea, and agreed that the format of two series of meetings, first the Expert Meeting, to be followed by the larger meeting, was quite typical of the kind of conference format that UNESCO was comfortable with. Here are the highlights of the points discussed with Draxler:

- She is prepared to devote a modest amount of "time and budget" to the project;
- She advised Willard and Horton that they could convey her personal endorsement of the worthiness of the meeting when they met with Sir John Daniel;
- She likes the idea of invited papers prepared by professional experts which would be exchanged in advance, since there are so many facets to the subject, and it is, indeed, a complex topic;
- NCLIS should be aware that there are no more "big traditional UNESCO types of meetings" which tended to be comparatively unstructured, and difficult to assess findings and conclusions from, and identify concrete recommendations; her inference was that the information literacy meeting should therefore be carefully planned and structured, expected outcomes specified in advance so that results could be measured and evaluated, and the invited participants should be very carefully selected;
- She emphasized that the traditional "information gatekeeper role" was breaking down in the Information/Internet Age, and one of the areas the conferees should address is the impacts, consequences, and what to do about that shifts in the definition, location, and responsibilities of the information gatekeeper role;
- She stressed her concerns about the lack of common understanding between educators and technologists, and how this failure to

- communicate effectively was complicating and frustrating realizing the values of the Internet Age;
- She also stressed her concerns about the many implications and consequences, both positive and negative, of the "image process" (document images, information images on computer screens) as part of education (teaching and learning) processes; and
 - She emphasized (as did John Rose from the CI sector staff), that we should pay special attention to the information literacy needs of the developing countries, not just the developed countries, and the practical value of such information literacy expertise/skill enhancement to the individuals, organizations, and institutions in those countries.

Finally, discussions were held with Sir John Daniel, Assistant Director-General for Education, and Alexander Sannikov, Regional Education Adviser for Europe. Sir John was very enthusiastic about the idea, and agreed that the preliminary decisions that had been reached so far seemed quite appropriate to him. That is, that he and his staff, as well as Abdul Khan's staff, both need to study the proposal carefully, NCLIS and NFIL need to specify the outcomes with greater clarity, and he and Mr. Khan would discuss the proposal at an appropriate time "later in the summer." He indicated that whereas he understood the proposal was still in the category of an "informal proposal," it now needs to be transformed to the status of a formal proposal. Willard indicated he would be discussing the proposal further with Dean Breivik, and with the NCLIS Chair and Vice Chair, and with the U.S. Department of State and Department of Education, and would be back to the U.S. Observer and UNESCO with a formal recommendation in this regard as soon as practicable, given the coordination requirements.