

## **Report of the 28<sup>th</sup> IFLA Pre-Conference and the 78<sup>th</sup> IFLA General Conference and Assembly held in Helsinki, Finland**

I was nominated to attend the 28<sup>th</sup> IFLA Pre-Conference of Library and Research Services for Parliaments from 8-10 August 2012 and the 78<sup>th</sup> IFLA General Conference and Assembly from 11-17 August 2012. Both the Conferences were held in Helsinki, Finland.

### **I. The 28<sup>th</sup> IFLA Pre-Conference of Library and Research Services for Parliaments, 8-10 August 2012**

The theme of the 28<sup>th</sup> IFLA Pre Conference of Library and Research Services for Parliaments was “Parliamentary libraries- empowering parliaments and citizens”. The venue for the three day Pre-Conference was the Auditorium in the Little Parliament which stands adjacent to the main Parliament Building. The *first day* programme included registration and a guided tour of the *Eduskunta*, the Parliament of Finland for which we were divided into three groups. Later in the evening the Vice- Secretary General of the Finnish Parliament hosted a welcome reception in the Little Parliament Restaurant.

The next day Session began with welcome addresses from the Secretary-General of the Finnish Parliament; the Chair, IFLA Section on Library & Research Services for Parliaments; and the Director of the Library of the Finnish Parliament. The presentations made by different speakers basically introduced us to the Finnish Constitution and political system, their Parliament research services and library network. They included informative topics such as the ‘Introduction to the Library of the Finnish Parliament’, ‘Introduction to Research Services’, ‘The role of the Library of Parliament in providing access to knowledge’, ‘Parliamentary Decision Making and the Politics of Knowledge’, and ‘Committee for the Future’. Each presentation was followed by a brief interactive question and answer session. We assembled in the evening at the Parliament Building Main entrance for a group photograph. The Secretary General of the Finnish Parliament then hosted a dinner in the Hall of State, Parliament Building.

The presentations on the third and final day touched wide ranging subjects under the themes of ‘Innovation in research services that support

MPs' and 'Innovation in library and information services for citizens'. Some of the interesting presentations included topics on 'Developing MP research areas to enhance democracy', 'The status of iPad and tablet use in Parliaments', 'Introducing newly elected Members of Parliament to the Services Available', 'New ways to reach and meet the public', 'People and Parliament: connecting with communities' and 'Strengthening research services as Parliaments evolve in different parts of the world.' The post-lunch session focused on Regional networks wherein a representative from each regional network gave a brief presentation. The Pre- Conference was formally closed with an overall review and an outlook for the Main Conference by the Chair.

Presentations in these Sessions were followed by discussions in small groups wherein each group was asked to consider and report back on questions of what could be the most important future direction for parliamentary research services that support MPs and for parliamentary library and information services in reaching out to citizens. Some of the participants revealed interesting practices to find ways of connecting Parliament with people –

1. Publicizing archival material, such as handwritten documents from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.
2. Organizing Book fairs including a day of interaction with students and Members of Parliament and Genealogy days.
3. Organizing limited tours with large activities including lectures on themes connected with Parliament.
4. Making short films.
5. Displays and exhibitions
6. Putting on video tapes of talks and public lectures on You Tube.
7. Maintaining Face Book accounts which does not cost much or take much time.
8. Maintaining a Twitter account as a way of reaching out to new users.

I enthusiastically participated in the group discussions and mentioned the pro-active and anticipatory research that we have been doing in our Service, for example, on subjects likely to be raised in the House before Parliament Sessions, how we produce precise and factual information on procedural and topical issues to respond to the information needs of the Members and the use of various Information and

Communication Technologies (ICT) tools for communication in the Parliamentary sphere though the use of social media is still limited. Though we are now in the digital age, we agreed that mobile libraries, radio and television were still relevant mediums for reaching out to citizens in remote constituencies of MPs or far-flung areas.

It was interesting to note that the Parliament library in Finland is a **public library open to all citizens** and most of the material found in the Library can be borrowed freely. In their view, Parliamentary libraries have a multi purpose utility of serving Members of Parliament in performing their parliamentary responsibilities effectively; to improve the knowledge base of parliamentary decisions; to support democracy; and to raise awareness among the citizens. A survey conducted in 2010 by the Hellenic Parliament, Greece on the issue of offering services to the general public found it to be a good public relations tool of Parliament, contributing to scholarship and research, and supporting transparency and participatory democracy. However, it was concluded that partial openness or access by specific groups is the preferred option. In any case, new technologies and the internet have made physical presence almost redundant. The notions of time and space are infinite and security problems are eliminated with the use of ICT tools.

Regarding use of new technology by Members of Parliament, iPads were distributed to Members of Parliament at the Storting, Norway in October 2011. The Members of Parliament, Rajya Sabha have been slightly ahead of their peers in Norway as they got their financial entitlement enhanced to purchase Apple iPad2/ Samsung Galaxy Tab for the first time in April 2011 and an Orientation Programme on Tablet Devices and other Customised Software had been organized for them in August 2011.

I understood that the Research Services of the Finnish Parliament is undergoing a big change from the traditional general research and information service to an **expert support for Members** and other clients. Members' needs have changed along with the nature of requests which have become more complex, European and global oriented with more demand on economic impact analysis. The small service has met these challenges by creating a division of economic analysis and recruiting persons with economics background and wider fields of expertise and analytical ability.

The Finnish Parliament has sixteen Standing Committees with the most unique one being the '**Committee for the Future**'. The Chair of this Committee, Ms Päivi Lipponen, Member of Parliament and an erudite Speaker, said that the Committee was basically a Parliamentary Think Tank. The Committee serves as a link between research and decision-making by making use of the results of research for policy-making. It envisages a national foresight system and recognizes the importance of science and technology, the creation of new concepts and ideas and the revitalization of institutions. The Committee initiates an active dialogue with the government on major future problems and means of solving them which traditional committees are not equipped to do through traditional parliamentary procedures and work methods.

I found '**crowd sourcing**' a notable concept as it implied enabling everyone within a network to participate in open projects. That way people's competence, knowledge, skills and experience are brought together in a form of collective intelligence. Crowd sourcing advocates claim that the process encourages transparency, produces better decision-making and fosters a sense of affinity between citizens and decision-makers.

Chile has a **Congressional Advisory Service (CAS)** that supports Committees, Senators and Deputies on legislative oversight and representation matters. It was interesting to know that the CAS has contributed many journalistic articles on Parliament, legislative and oversight work in the Chilean Press.

The popular use of social media or **social media management** for connecting Parliament with people featured in many of the presentations. The Finnish Library has maintained a Face Book Site for the last four years. The Library of the National Congress of Chile had 12.5 million visitors to their library website in 2011. They have four Face Book and three Twitter Accounts, 2745 photos in Flickr, 1574 videos on You Tube (short interviews of MPs and replies to specific questions). The CRS of the United States has 15,000 subscribers to its blog with a team of bloggers writing four to five blogs a week. They have an app for iPhone too to access congressional records. You can follow the US legislative information at their tweets @ THOMASdotgov and @LawLibCongress.

The wide use and acceptance of social media was noticeable in the pre-Conference. WiFi-network was available at the venue and you could tweet using hashtag **#iflaparl2012**. Even as we held discussions, many participants were tweeting conference updates.

The Pre-Conference acknowledged the **need to strengthen research services in Parliaments**. Three questions were found to be relevant in shaping the kind of library and research service we should have: what does our Parliament need? How does our Parliament want to develop? What kind of research service will support the development of our Parliament?

In the light of greater use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and changing needs of Members, it was concluded that research, library and information services have to be innovative and constantly develop their services to provide that added value to Members and other users.

## **II. The 78<sup>th</sup> IFLA General Conference and Assembly, 11-17 August 2012**

The theme of the IFLA General Conference was “Libraries now! – Inspiring, Surprising, Empowering.” Libraries are the repositories of knowledge and culture which can be found on the shelves, accessed through the net, or via media. However, today’s information age challenges libraries to create new content and to interact in new ways with users. Hence, the theme that to survive successfully in this new challenging era, libraries need to inspire, surprise and empower. During the General Conference, the programme included over 200 Sessions on the following five sub-themes called Congress tracks - Open access and digital resources; Policy, strategy and advocacy; Users driving access and services; Tools and techniques; and Ideas, innovations, anticipating the new.

There were 15-25 sessions held simultaneously in a day on the five sub-themes. Participants could choose to attend the sessions relevant to their work and interest. The following themes and subjects formed the main research related sessions:

1. Knowledge Café: driving access and services knowledge management with Library and Research Services for Parliaments.

2. Usability and accessibility – the mobile challenge – Information Technology with Library and Research Services for Parliaments.
  - Complex legislative repository- Parliament of Thailand- development of mobile access
  - House of Lords Library- looking to a mobile future
3. Parliamentary Libraries: strengthening democracy – Library and Research Services for Parliaments.
  - Defining effective knowledge management to empower citizens and Members of Parliament
  - The Great East Japan Earthquake disaster and the National Diet Library’s Research Services for the Diet
  - How parliamentary library can empower citizens: lessons from the development of the Outreach Service, Houses of Parliament, United Kingdom
  - Information needs among Malaysia’s Members of Parliament
4. Libraries for the law and for law-makers – Law Libraries with Library and Research Services for Parliaments.

There were some salient topics in the discussions out of which I found the **Parliamentary Outreach Programme** of the UK Parliament most remarkable. In collaboration with Sheffield University, the UK Parliament has introduced a new **‘Parliamentary Studies module’** in the University in the 2012-13 academic Session. Owing to its popularity and demand from other Universities, the module is expected to be introduced in at least seven other Universities with the support of the Speakers of both the Houses of Parliament. The course material has been written by senior officials of the Parliament. The students get a detailed knowledge of how the Parliament works in the UK with senior Parliamentary officials delivering seminars apart from teachers from their own institution. The Houses of Parliament provide information and other services regarding parliamentary procedure, business of the House, etc aimed at University students and staff delivering them through its Parliament Outreach programme. This programme has been found useful, among others, in changing the youth’s perception of Parliament, increasing levels of public

engagement, raising awareness of the work, procedures and relevance of Parliament, and preparing young citizens for a future career in politics.

In Information technology, the aspect of the use of **mobile device technology** was interesting. According to a speaker, it was the future mode of interface with Internet and Information. It would enable a “Global village, library anywhere”. The House of Lords Library presentation stated that mobile technology was the latest innovation for accessing the Library’s services and publications. Members of Parliament in the UK were beginning to use this technology to access Parliamentary papers as well when abroad. However, while the library is developing mobile friendly services, the UK Parliament web and internet department is continually evaluating access to parliamentary information for users through mobile technology.

**E- lending** and new forms of access to information are a major emerging trend. More information is going online than ever and digitization is helping to make information more and more accessible. Such a trend is changing the traditional role of a librarian in a society. Libraries are looking for a new business model and are feeling the need to explore funding from the public and new publishing methods. With new kinds of content, knowledge and forms of access, there were new issues to deal with. For instance, how **copyright laws** should be created and how appropriate international regulations should be passed to address change, balance profit with public interest and boost creativity were issues of a significant concern. Continuity in the face of **digital disasters**, disaster planning and recovery for digital libraries were also topics of primary discussion.

Among other items in its agenda, the Standing Committee for Library and Research Services for Parliaments highlighted the question of how **social media** is changing the way Parliaments are working. Facebook, e-mail, etc are seen as part of the IT innovation. The Committee noted that for many Members of Parliament and parliamentary administration, the use of social media is at an experimental stage, yet it is increasingly being used by Parliaments all over the world. Because of the need, despite its gaining importance, for further exchange of experience and discussion of the risks and benefits of social media, and how to contribute to its effective use by Parliaments, the Committee looked forward to the IPU Conference which was to be held in Quebec in October 2012.

A refreshing event of the Conference was the **'Poster Sessions'** in which presenters tried to tell the viewer a story through multi-media wall presentations. The posters were not wall posters as we normally know. There were about 200 posters put up in two Halls with eye-catching but serious themes such as 'Action now! Library's approaching the countryside!' (China), 'Prison Library now!' (Germany), 'Kirjastoradio/ Library Radio' (Finland), etc.

I received a certificate of attendance at the end of the Conference.  
(*Photocopy enclosed*)

I am obliged to mention the courtesy and guidance that the Embassy of India in Helsinki extended to me and other fellow delegates from India to the IFLA Conference. I am grateful to H.E. Shri A. Manickam, Ambassador of India to Finland and Mrs. Manickam for their warmth and ensuring that we faced no difficulty during our stay in Finland.

Last but not least, I am grateful to the Secretary-General for nominating me to attend this Conference; officers of LARRDIS for their support and encouragement; and the officers and staff of the Training Unit and Conference and Protocol Section who have been most courteous and efficient in extending all help to me. The IFLA Conference gave me a wonderful opportunity for learning, discussing and experience- sharing with researchers from other Parliaments. It was inspiring and exciting to see how libraries and research services have adapted, evolved and moulded themselves to change, new demands from Members of Parliament and new technologies. I hope every officer of LARRDIS will get a chance to attend and share research experience in an international forum like the IFLA Conference to gain a better perspective of parliamentary research and boost excellence at work.

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