

IFLA CONFERENCE IN SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO FROM 12 -18 AUGUST 2011

I was nominated to participate in the IFLA 27th Pre-conference for Library and Research Services for Parliaments and World Library and Information Congress: 77th Session of IFLA General Conference and Assembly held in San Juan from 12th August to 18th August 2011. Both IFLA Pre-Conference for Library and Research Services for Parliaments and IFLA General Conference were held in San Juan, Puerto Rico. The theme of Pre-Conference for Library and Research Services for Parliaments was 'Responding to Parliament's needs', while the theme of General Conference of IFLA was "Libraries beyond Libraries: Integration, innovation and information for all".

The Conference had the following major areas of presentations and discussion:

1. Experiences in the implementation of Congressional Advisory Service;
2. Analysis of the information needs of Parliamentarians;
3. Innovative approaches to delivering information products and services to Parliaments and citizens
 - E-Skills for Progressive governance
 - The Law Library of Congress concept for a "one World Law Library"
 - Digitization as a means of preservation
4. Meeting the legislative information needs of curious and concerned citizens
5. An assessment of responses to reference and research questions from parliamentarians
6. Communicating Parliamentary History to the Public

7. Managing budgets in the time of economic constraints

The participants from different Parliaments made presentations on broad themes and also discussed their experiences in implementing various schemes and projects in their own parliaments. Powerpoint presentations, interactive information sharing along with focused discussions anointed the sessions.

The Office of Legislative Assembly of Puerto Rico and IFLA Section on Library & Research Services for Parliament co-ordinated the Pre-Conference. There was very active participation from Latin American and Caribbean Parliaments. A special session was dedicated to assess and discuss the progress made by these participating Parliaments in strengthening their networks. Regional experiences and its achievements were discussed and Global Centre for ICT in Parliament under the aegis of United Nations coordinated and cooperated with IFLA in discussing the areas of strength and improvement in networking and cooperation among different Parliaments.

There was a very informative session on innovative approaches to delivering information products and services to Parliament and Citizens by Sonia L'Heneux from Library of Canadian Parliament. The essence of responding to the information needs of the Parliament and that of citizens was discussed at length. It was emphasised that analysts must provide value neutral advice/suggestions to the Members of Parliament. There is a need to be proactive and coordinate with Members coupled with patience. Analysts need to be motivated and biases of any should be kept to minimum. A culture of analysts and reference people is highly desirable for assisting and keeping the legislators informed which will help them in progressive legislations for the benefit of the society.

The subject taxonomy is the missing link. It is a backbone for innovative products and services. While citing the example of the Canadian Parliament, it

was maintained that this method ensures better access to subjects. They also provide mobile access to subjects and texts. Most of the searches of the subjects are in bilingual form. The Parliaments require wide subject taxonomy and frequent updates. To preserve important documents and database, it was emphasized that digitization is a very important means of preservation. It automatically presents a case of digital parliamentary library accessible to the parliamentarian. They should be able to use it even while not in parliament precincts.

An interactive session was held in the building of Legislative Assembly of Puerto Rico wherein the participants were divided into small groups and every group was asked to select a problem and colleagues from other Parliaments gave advice and proposed solutions. The group/participants having the problem and representatives of the group were asked to move to another table which has solved its problem. The common problem identified was that the parliamentarians are not using the library, its archives and resources while the library is serving outside people. It was proposed that regular workshops with Members should be conducted and they should be motivated to use the available resources. There is a need to motivate them to use electronic gadgets and use the library books in person. An idea was suggested that food conferences be organized in the library to motivate Parliamentarians to use books and references. Parliamentarians should be made aware of the fact that books do exist irrespective of internet and research staff catering to their needs.

Another interesting discussion was centered on the assessment of responses to reference and research questions from Parliamentarians. It was maintained that a proposed checklist of references be made and a procedure of recording sources be made. The structure of research analysis be framed and there should be factual accuracy without biases. The reliance should be on the existing materials and a similarity index be made in this regard. There should be more use of headings, titles, conclusions, rather than it being too academic.

There should be ample use of short sentences to make the analysis more meaningful. The right skills should be identified and members as well as staff be trained to deliver it.

Another interesting dimension was added by the management workshop conducted wherein a plenary discussion was conducted by Cynthia Jordan of Law Library of US Congress. It was pointed that the focus of the mission is to provide timely and authoritative research material to the legislators. It provided services to the US Congress, Federal executive, US Supreme Court and also addresses need of the Members on request. CRS library provides its services to Members of the US Congress only while the Law Library provides services to Members as well as others. GLINN and THOMAS are their domain networks providing online services and guide to law and legal monitor. In THOMAS, they developed book-marking and sharing toolbox, top Bills /e-mails, RSS Feed, bills presented to the President. THOMAS has Bills summary, words & phrases and bill numbers on its pages.

Another innovative way of keeping in touch with Members and various important institutions is maintaining blogs. It's a part of social media management that provide update to Law Library Services and website. It also provided RSS feed of the tweets. On receiving a specific request, reference material or merely a reference is being provided. In the wake of shrinking budget and shortage of staff, there is an increasing need to digitize so as to provide better access to the people. Increased cost in the realm of digitization and updating THOMAS in real time is an issue assuming serious dimension and it warrants an action.

The management workshops dealt with issues of providing Parliamentary Library and Research Services to the Members and the policy makers in real time. Updating of books and records, digitization of important publications and

records and easy accessibility of information and records in different form of media including social media were discussed.

A special session of Knowledge Management Section in the form of 'Knowledge Café' was also attended by me. The topics of Knowledge Café spanned from professional issues to matters of strategy. The issues raised by a participant were kept in focus and probable solutions from the other participants were sought. The issues were dealt from different perspectives as raised by the participants. It helped me to gain a comparative understanding of the issues involved and provided invaluable experience in viewing professional situations from different perspectives. These short sessions were thought provoking and innovative. It aimed at providing real time information to target group.

I also attended and participated in Standing Committee Meetings. It was discussed that new model of CONGREX will be taken up in the next meeting. The issue of increasing the budget and its integration with the main conference was also discussed. The issue of affiliate membership and creating more membership was also discussed. It was also discussed that more papers should be made available in English. It was also suggested to the Standing Committee that Legislative research should be given more focus. A chapter on regional interaction session was also discussed. It was also emphasized that more experience sharing sessions of providing legislative research to Members be included in the programme.

In IFLA General Conference and Assembly few sessions were beneficial to Library and Research Services. Experience sharing by participants from different parliaments was highly useful to me. It gave me an understanding of my comparative standing and process of functioning. It brought a new dimension to the fore and enhanced my understanding of their functioning and it provided me an impetus to adopt their good practices to make my working more substantive and purposeful.

I enthusiastically participated in all sessions of the Conference and made purposeful interventions and observations during workshop sessions, knowledge management sessions and knowledge café. I am grateful to the Secretary-General for nominating me to attend this Conference. I am also thankful to Training Unit, Conference and Protocol Section and Accounts Section for extending help to me. This conference has broadened my world view and exchange of ideas and view points with participants from other Parliaments engaged in Library and Research Services has increased my professional understanding of Parliamentary research. It was a great opportunity to learn from the professionals engaged in Parliamentary research of different parliaments of the world.

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