

Co-operation on the African Continent Birth of the African Access to Knowledge Alliance

In 2003, whilst browsing through the IFLA Journal, Mrs. Denise Nicholson, the Copyright Services Librarian at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa, came across an article on the reform of the Ugandan Copyright law, written by Mr. Dick Kawooya, a Ugandan postgraduate student at Tennessee University (USA). She emailed Dick to discuss his paper and copyright issues in Africa in general. This was the beginning of a special friendship and co-operative working relationship across two continents, which would eventually lead to the establishment of the African Access to Knowledge Alliance.

In 2004, Mrs. Nicholson, a keen activist for better access to knowledge in Africa, recommended to the SADC Head Office in Botswana that a Forum be established to address copyright and access (or lack of access) issues in Africa. Later that year, she made this recommendation to the Standing Conference of Eastern, Central and Southern African Library and Information Associations (SCECSAL) in Kampala, Uganda. Delegates present unanimously agreed that such a Forum should be established. Mrs. Nicholson and Mr. Kawooya undertook to make this dream become a reality.

Also, as a result of an exchange of emails between Mrs. Nicholson and Mr. Paul West, COL's Director, Knowledge Management and Information Technology, Mrs. Nicholson was appointed a member of the Commonwealth of Learning's Virtual Copyright Group and was invited to participate in COL's collaborative copyright project for developing countries. Mrs. Nicholson discussed the desire to hold an African Copyright Forum in Kampala in 2005 with Mr. West. COL offered to co-sponsor the event.

Through the diligent efforts of the staff of the National Library of Uganda and the National Library Association of Uganda, IFLA/Africa Section kindly provided the remaining sponsorship. As a result of this co-operative effort, the African Copyright Forum was held in Kampala, Uganda, from 28-30 November 2005. Speakers from WIPO, Africa and various countries abroad addressed the issues of copyright and problems with access to knowledge on the continent. The finale was the establishment of the "African Copyright and Access to Information Alliance" (ACAIA) (www.nlu.go.ug/acfc.htm)

Unfortunately, there were difficulties in registering the Alliance as a pan-African body. With the assistance of the elected Interim Board members, chaired by Dr. Elisam Magara, in Uganda, the Alliance was registered as a Ugandan Chapter in 2006, under the name of "The African Access to Knowledge Alliance" (AAKA).

In January, 2007, the pan-African body of this Alliance was registered as a Trust in Botswana, with the assistance of representatives of the Southern African Development Community Centre for Distance Education (SADC-CDE), the Botswana College for Open and Distance Learning (BOCODOL), the University of Botswana and Botswana

Accountancy College. An Interim Board has been elected, with Mr. Thulaganyo Thutoetsile as Interim President. The Alliance's inaugural meeting will be held in March 2007.

This establishment of the Alliance and its registration as a pan-African organisation are the result of excellent co-operation, support and dedication amongst the following individuals and organisations (in alphabetical order) in Africa and abroad.

1. Africa Section of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA). IFLA's former President, Mrs. Kay Raseroka, and the current President, Mr. Alex Byrne, strongly supported the establishment of this Alliance.
2. Botswana Accountancy College
3. Botswana College for Open Learning (BOCODOL), Dr. D.R. Tau, Director.
4. Commonwealth of Learning, Mr. Paul West
5. Mrs. Denise Nicholson, Copyright Services Librarian at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, and co-founder and Interim Board member of the Alliance.
6. Mr. Dick Kawooya, Doctoral student at the University of Tennessee, co-founder and Interim Board member of the Alliance.
7. Electronic Information for Libraries Network (eIFL.net), Ms. Teresa Hackett.
8. SADC-CDE, Mr. Thulaganyo Thutoetsile, Co-coordinator.
9. Uganda Library and Information Association

Individuals from abroad who presented at the conference and who strongly support the Alliance are:

- Mr. Cory Doctorow, Electronic Frontier Foundation, UK
- Ms. Teresa Hackett, Electronic Information for Libraries Network (eIFL)
- Prof. Tom Lipinski, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee and Fullbright scholar, has offered to do research for the Alliance on a pro-bono basis.
- Mr. Sisule Musungu, South Centre, Geneva
- Mr. Achal Prabhala, Access to Learning Materials in Southern Africa Project. (He is based in India)
- Prof. Douglas Raber, University of Missouri
- Ms. Barbara Stratton, Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, UK
- Mr. Paul Whitney, Vancouver Public Library, Canada

Several international funding agencies have expressed interest in the work of the Alliance. Co-operative discussions between the Alliance and International Research Development Centre (IRDC) are taking place. A number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Southern Africa have indicated that they would like to collaborate with the Alliance in the future.

The existence of this new Pan African organization on Copyright is a credit to those hard-working copyright enthusiasts in Africa, especially Mrs. Denise Nicholson and Mr. Dick Kawooya. The Copyright Group has helped COL in its role in Copyright:
www.col.org/copyright