

Two go to Puerto Rico

Adjoa Boateng and **Christiana Ikeogu** share their experiences of attending the IFLA World Library and Information Congress as first timers in Puerto Rico last year. Inspired? Apply for CILIP's grant for first timers and attend this year's conference in Helsinki (see p. 12 this issue).

THE conference was attended by more than 2,300 delegates from every corner of the world.

The newcomers' session was a useful, informal introduction to the congress, and to IFLA. It gave me the opportunity to meet other first time attendees, as well as more experienced delegates.

Highlights of the sessions that I attended included the presentation by the committee on Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (Faife). Faife's presentation, 'How to fix the World' detailed the advent of Wikileaks

and discussed international policies on censorship. The popular Poster exhibition highlighted library and information projects and developments internationally.

The session that I found extremely

educational was the off-site workshop on audio visual collections for non-specialist librarians, organised by the Audiovisual and Multimedia Section. The workshop was held in Universidad del Sagrado Corazón in San Juan. We also had a tour of Radio Activa, a digital radio station produced and populated by students of the university and the local audio visual collection.

I was impressed by the innovative use of technology throughout the conference. Simultaneous translation allowed delegates to participate in sessions given in five languages. The congress theme: 'Libraries beyond libraries: integration, innovation and information for all' was enhanced by the cloud of activity on blogs, twitter feeds and podcasts that accompanied the daily conference debates and discussions.

Puerto Rico as a conference location was exceptional. The climate and people were warm and welcoming. I had the opportunity to visit Old San Juan and see the historic Fort San Felipe del Morro and taste some of the traditional

cuisine, including Mofongo, a fried plantain-based dish.

I returned to London (after a two-day delay caused by hurricane Irene!) feeling reinvigorated with the knowledge that I work within a sector which can contribute to the provision of quality library and information services to all. My sense of purpose and renewal was clearly shared by other delegates, as articulated by Ingrid Dors Anton de Kom (University of Suriname Library Paramaribo), a fellow first timer, who said: 'It convinced me again of the survival of librarianship in spite of all the technological developments in the world.'

During the closing session it was announced that the 2012 Congress will be held on 11–17 August in Helsinki, Finland, and the 2013 Congress will be held in Singapore. I have noted these dates in my diary and hope to find a more active role in IFLA. Attendance at IFLA is an event that I highly recommend to all information professionals.

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I CONFESS I didn't know that much about what is happening in the wider library world – until I attended the IFLA conference in Puerto Rico. My thanks to Ayub Khan, who nominated me to serve on IFLA's Standing Committee of Services to the Multicultural Population.

The highlight of the committee meeting was the announcement of the adaptation of the Manifesto for Services to the Multicultural Population by Unesco and IFLA. The manifesto is a toolkit for library authorities to use when planning and

implementing services to multicultural communities. It is extremely relevant for all library authorities in Britain.

I attended some fascinating presentations – too many to cover here. Highlights included a session about the importance of information literacy for

multicultural populations. We heard that the digital divide that the Maoris experienced exists in many in other countries. It was inspiring to hear about the work to attract and mentor university students in Mexico. We also heard about information literacy work in Kenya and Turkey. This session gave me a better understanding that libraries everywhere face the same issues and that they can indeed be agents of social change, helping to integrate immigrants with indigenous populations.

In the 'Rethinking the role of public libraries' stream, there were presentations from Berlin Library, explaining how they extended services to non-European communities; from Finland, showing how a daring approach to helped make libraries more accessible; from Helsinki City Library, looking at what libraries are for; from Sweden, calling for a new paradigm in library leadership and from Halifax, indicating the need for libraries to assess how socially, politically and economically sustainable their services are.

In a moving presentation, I heard

about a project working to bring literacy and reading to women prisoners in Uganda. We saw images of the squalor and dirty conditions in prison, but most fascinating was to see women's lives were transformed as they started to benefit from the literacy project.

At another key session, I heard about a Norwegian project to promote literacy and reading amongst immigrant women. Resources were provided in several languages and a forum was set up for them to meet share views. The project shows that immigrants are only to happy to use library services, if those services are relevant to their needs.

I left with hope for the profession and fresh ideas to take back to my workplace. It was great to see information professionals from other countries sharing quality times together. A little social time together really helps a group to gel, especially since we all came from different library backgrounds. I would like to thank Maria Cotera for her support and encouragement. For information about IFLA see: <http://ifla.org>

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