



XXXV CITRA, Reykjavik, Iceland, 9-13 October 2001

MEDIA RELEASE

The memory of the world is at risk!

What evidence of our lives and our work will we leave to future generations? How can we make sure that the archives truly represent today's societies in all their diversity? The archivist's mission is to bring together information sources which will ensure that as complete a picture of those societies as possible will be created. Moreover, society is undergoing constant change, records are over-abundant in some areas, yet practically non-existent in others; and electronic records produced by the new technologies of information and communication are very vulnerable.

These concerns were at the centre of the debates of the XXXVth International Conference of the Round Table on Archives (CITRA) held in Reykjavik, Iceland, from October 9 to 13, 2001. The CITRA is a body of the International Council on Archives (ICA), which each year brings together the directors of national archival institutions and the chairs of national archival associations to study a theme of professional interest. This year's theme was *Archives and Society: What to preserve? Acquisition and Selection*. The Reykjavik CITRA brought together 186 national archivists and chairs of national professional associations from 70 different countries.

The traditional modes of archival *acquisition* by public institutions remains essential. But, they alone cannot accurately reflect the diversity of the activities within contemporary society. Other bodies, from the private sector, should be covered: businesses undergoing continuous organizational restructuring in the wake of privatization and mergers, non-governmental associations and organizations dealing with the emergence of civil societies at both national and international levels. One of the final resolutions draws the attention of businesses, particularly the multinationals, to the need to make their contribution to the preservation of the memory of populations, by ensuring that taking steps to preserve their own archives within the framework of their policies for sustainable development. Participants also discussed the representation in archives of ordinary citizens and of those who are marginalized and forgotten by history, as well as the use of oral history.

Appraisal and selection has become imperative for reasons related as much to the growth of the mass of records created and to the redundancy and ephemeral nature of much information, as to the material and financial constraints. Appraisal and selection are very complex operations that result in the irreversible destruction of various categories of records. One of the features of the conference was a recommendation to clarify and make publicly available the appraisal criteria used by archival professionals. It was noted that a number of countries, such as the United Kingdom and Australia, arrange public consultations and receive suggestions from all interested parties: record creators, social science researchers, genealogists and the public at large.

Further resolutions were also approved as a result of the conference: the first is an invitation to all governments to ratify the 1999 Protocol to the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, adopted in The Hague in 1954. It assumes a new dimension in the current international context in which several conflicts pose obvious threats to archives that are essential to the history of both individuals and societies. The second resolution urges governments and UNESCO to support the draft resolution prepared by the European Commission on Preservation and Access on the preservation of the digital heritage which is at great risk.

This international meeting is one of a series of three conferences on the general theme "Archives and Society," organised by the International Council on Archives. The XXXVIth CITRA will be held in November 2002 in Marseille, France, under the theme: How does Society perceive Archives?

October 13, 2001