



Caracas, April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2001

## CIRCULAR LETTER

### Directors of National Libraries in Ibero America and the Caribbean

Dear colleagues:

Information Society poses the challenge of the Digital Library. Internet affords the possibility to store and retrieve information, regardless of the geographical location wherefrom either is performed. It is estimated that nowadays there are at least 70 million Web pages. However, the Internet's forte, which consists in handling an immense volume of information that is potentially available to a growing number of users, may actually embody its greatness weakness, whereas this information is neither screened nor adequately classified in a bibliographical sense. Moreover, the information available on the Net mostly originates outside our countries and chiefly contains information in English.

We therefore propose that thousands of our libraries, which have regularly proffered traditional services, assemble to create a kind of Consortium and follow certain rules with the aim to process the information they own and place it on the Internet. This would resemble an enormous public library made available on the Internet, the Grand Digital Library from Ibero America and the Caribbean.

On route to attain this ambitious project, we decided to start with National Libraries, whereas they play a multiplying effect within their own countries, are deemed methodological leaders nation-wide and are responsible for recording and safeguarding national bibliography. Moreover, the existence of the Ibero American Association of National Libraries (ABINIA) may further enhance co-ordination of the project with a significant number of institutions. This first phase was submitted and approved under the guise of the Ibero American and Caribbean Digital Library.

The development of a *General Methodology for a Digital Library* is already under way and we are working on the creation of an *UNESCO Regional Chair on New Information Technologies* at the University of Colima in Mexico. The latter will begin by training the staff involved in this project for those libraries that so require it.

The results expected from the execution of the project are the following:

1. **Compiling a collection of 5000 to 6000 works**, free of copyright fees and representative of the Ibero American and Caribbean cultures, from a selection of 150 to 200 works chosen by each National Library.
2. **Cataloguing and analytical description of a significant number of WebSites** from throughout the region (around 30 to 35 sites per country) according to the selection made by National Libraries.

3. Generating the **technical and methodological capacities** required to digitise documentary holdings, thus enabling the National Libraries of Ibero America and the Caribbean to become Digital or Virtual Libraries. We expect to train 144 specialists from National Libraries.
4. Develop the capacity building to enable National Libraries to generate a cascade effect towards other libraries, based on the application of the *General Methodology for a Digital Library*.
5. Produce a CD-ROM with the 5000 works selected to create the **Basic Digital Collection of Ibero American and Caribbean Culture**.
6. Develop version (V.2.0) of the **General Methodology for a Digital Library**.
7. Set up UNESCO's Regional Chair on New Information Technologies.

The project document contains a timetable showing projected activities, planned for execution in a term of 24 months. Further, it specifies the commitments that shall be adopted by UNESCO and participating libraries, herein attached as reference terms to facilitate their perusal.

As soon as we receive your consent or observations, as you may deem adequate, we shall issue the pertinent contracts that shall formalise your participation in the project.

UNESCO and ABINIA's Executive Secretariat urge the National Libraries of the Region to participate in this project, which shall undoubtedly signify a highly relevant advancement for the culture and librarianship of our countries and the region altogether.

Looking forward to your enthusiastic participation, we wish to avail of this opportunity to reiterate the expressions of our highest regard and esteem.

**Isidro Fernández-Aballí Maspons**  
**Executive Secretary**  
**INFOLAC**  
**Information Society Division**  
**UNESCO**



**Alfonso Quintero**  
**Executive Secretary**  
**ABINIA**



## **REFERENCE TERMS**

### **UNESCO**

- 1- UNESCO will be in charge of the overall co-ordination of the project.
- 2- Following ABINIA's guidelines, UNESCO shall suggest the selection criteria to be applied in choosing the works that will comprise basic collections from each country to be made available on the Internet and later edited on CD-ROM.
- 3- UNESCO shall be responsible for administering the funds allocated to the project and will draw up and sign a contract with participating libraries to guarantee the commitments subscribed by both parties
- 4- UNESCO shall monitor the project's progression for each phase, according to the established timetable, with ABINIA's co-operation whenever applicable.
- 5- UNESCO shall co-ordinate the International Experts Group's work to enhance the *General Methodology for a Digital Library* as required.
- 6- UNESCO shall effect the necessary steps to set up and ensure the operation of UNESCO's Regional Chair on New Information Technologies.
- 7- UNESCO shall perform the actions required to edit the *Basic Digital Collection of Ibero American and Caribbean Culture* on CD-ROM.

### **PARTICIPANT NATIONAL LIBRARIES**

- 1- Libraries shall subscribe a contract with UNESCO, thus committing to participate in the project's execution according to applicable reference terms.
  - 2- Libraries shall co-operate with UNESCO to carry out an inventory of the computer infrastructure (equipment and technical staff) currently available in each National Library of the region, which may be used to contribute to the project's implementation.
  - 3- Libraries shall select and register four professional specialists to receive distance training as trainers in the four subject matters identified in the project. Whereupon, they shall guarantee that the staff will enjoy the time required to complete the capacity building programme throughout.
  - 4- Libraries shall cover the cost of air tickets, taxes and/or air port fees corresponding to the travel expenses of selected specialists to Colima, Mexico, for five days to receive the on-site training phase of the capacity building programme. UNESCO, with the University of Colima's support, will cover the cost of registration fees and local expenses. The University of Colima will provide counselling services and technical assistance to all participant institutions whose staff were therein trained.
  - 5- Libraries shall select the works that will comprise the basic collections representative of their own country's culture, shall perform ensuing digitisation tasks and shall publish them on the Internet, according to the methodology specified in the project. Thereupon, they shall make them available to UNESCO for production of the *Basic Digital Collection of Ibero American and Caribbean Culture* on CD-ROM.
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- 6- Upon completion of the project, they are committed to create a cascade effect towards other libraries in their respective countries with the results obtained.