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Accart Jean-Philippe,

Interview with Laurel Dryden, Acting Chief, Bureau of Library and Information Services, International Labour Office, Geneva, by JP Accart

How large is your staff, and how many of them are librarians?

We have 22 permanent staff: 13 assistants (library assistants, finance clerk, IT assistant, and secretary), 8 professional librarians and 1 professional IT staff. We also employ 5 external collaborators on a more or less permanent basis to do indexing for our database Labordoc. We normally have some temporary staff and at least 1 intern. At the moment we have 2 interns and 3 short-term staff.

Our 22 permanent staff members cover 17 different nationalities. The ILO employ s 2,733 people – of whom approximately 1,000 are in Geneva. The rest work in ILO offices throughout the world (there are 51 ILO field offices).

Although 40 of the field offices employ information specialists, very few of the specialists have formal information science qualifications or work full time on information tasks. Usually their work assignments are a mixture of communications, publications and information work.

As the information centres are not under my direct responsibility, I have created an ILO Global Information Network to strengthen the ILO's information services and the dissemination of ILO published knowledge. Working through the Network, the ILO Library can coordinate information work, ensure that information standards are adhered to, and help all ILO staff to get the high-quality information services they need. All of the information specialists in the field offices are members of the Network. We publish a regular newsletter and hold regular workshops to help them upgrade their skills, keep them abreast of the information developments in the ILO, and to provide a forum where they can exchange ideas and meet their counterparts. I am a very strong believer in the power of knowledge sharing and the Network operates on that principle.

What are your main projects, what do you want to develop?

One of the main objectives of the ILO Library, and the ILO Global Information Network, is to promote ILO knowledge – and, by extension, ILO values and concerns – which we do in various ways.

The ILO's database Labordoc **www.oit.org/labordoc** or **www.ilo.org/labordoc** is one way. Although managing information through Labordoc is part of our routine work, it is still a major project of the ILO Library. Labordoc contains a huge wealth of knowledge which I want to exploit to the maximum. Developments in IT are providing us with new ways of doing that, and I am very keen to explore how we can use these developments to promote ILO knowledge more widely, more interestingly, and in a more user-friendly manner.

One important step we are currently taking is to merge all the ILO field library databases into Labordoc. By early 2010 most of the information specialists in the field will catalogue directly into Labordoc. Labordoc will provide a single access point to ILO and non-ILO knowledge on the world of work – finally, anyone who wants to find out what the ILO has published or collected on the world of work will only need to search one database.

Another way we promote ILO knowledge is by having an "open door" policy towards external users. Anyone can use the ILO Library – either by searching Labordoc (which also provides access to about 60,000 online publications), as a walk-in client, or by sending an e-mail to request information (the Library's website, see **www.oit.org/bibliotheque**, **www.ilo.org/library**, includes an "Ask a librarian" link so that clients can contact us easily). About one third of the work we do is in response to questions from external users.

Through our partner or depository libraries programme many libraries around the world receive ILO publications for free. One of our projects in 2010 will be to make sure that we have the best selection of relevant libraries.

As an extension of this idea, I encourage our information specialists in the field to offer information sessions on ILO knowledge products – especially the online products – to universities or relevant research institutions, and we are now developing brochures and online presentations to help them with this work.

And, finally, we also publish online information products such as resource guides on topics which highlight the ILO's values and concerns. This year the ILO celebrated 90 years and to celebrate that the ILO Library produced a web- based Chronology (**www.oit.org/histoire** or **www.ilo.org/history**) which recounts the major events in the ILO's history and links to the full text of the key documents and photos, and to possible videos that are related to each event.

Our biggest project this year was to develop the ILO Global Job Crisis Observatory **www.ilo.org/jobcrisis**.

This has been a huge undertaking which combines the traditional skills of librarians (finding and organizing information and providing easy access to information) with newer skills (e.g. web design, web publishing, editing, communication skills). The site provides a weekly alert service of the latest news and reports on the jobs crisis (we select the best resources for each week), feature articles by ILO officials (we work with ILO technical units to encourage staff members to write for the Observatory) and resource guides on how decision makers can recover from the jobs crisis. As well, we produce a fuller internal news alert service for ILO staff.

Another big project which will be completed this year is the digitization of all ILO published knowledge. Once we have finished the project we will start producing digital (multimedia) libraries as another way of making ILO knowledge more visible.

And in addition to the development and maintenance of more knowledge products, we are currently looking at how to improve the interface of Labordoc – and especially how we can do this by using open source software.

Do the library or the librarians have a key role in the organisation? Are they involved in projects?

More and more! Information technology has been a big help in showing how our skills are useful and relevant. The Observatory website is one example – we were asked to develop this website. The site is not attributed to the Library – it is published as an ILO product and I think this shows that there is confidence that our skills can be used to produce good products. Another example is a taxonomy we developed to help the ILO's Human Resources Department map the skills of ILO staff. I am also a member of the ILO's Research and Publications Committee. And a final example is our involvement in knowledge sharing in the ILO. We participated in the drafting of the ILO's Knowledge Strategy, we co-organize a regular knowledge sharing forum for ILO staff (which is held in the Library's Reading Room), we developed a website on knowledge sharing for ILO staff and we take an active role in knowledge sharing in the ILO in general.

Do you network with other libraries?

Yes – through the Geneva-based Association of International Librarians and Information Specialists (AILIS), the United Nations Knowledge Sharing and Information Management Group (KSIM) which is a semi-formal UN working group of UN librarians, and other professional associations such as ASLIB. I am also a convenor for the Information Management Working Group of the European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes.

What's your take on the current developments in librarianship?

Exciting, challenging, invigorating! The debate about how the Internet has "replaced" libraries, the constant change in how we communicate and send and receive information, and the speculation about the future of the publishing industry and even about the future of reading are wonderful opportunities for us. Lots of debate gives librarians lots of scope to show what we can do. One thing I am ardent about, in the ILO at least, is changing the perception of librarians as simply caretakers of knowledge and libraries as a place where people come to read, or, worse, a place where there are books – as if knowledge were only found in books. It is such a waste of our skills if our colleagues think of us in such a passive way. Helping people find information is much more than answering people's questions or providing them with books. I want us to be more proactive than that. We should help people find information, certainly, but we can also be agents for sharing knowledge and communicating the principles and values of the ILO.

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