Summary of UIA Secretariat Activities
for the period October 2005-October 2006

(Report for UIA Council, 19-20 October 2006)

Information project cycle and publishing contracts

- Yearbook of International Organizations (43rd edition): Successful continuation of the annual 5-volume cycle; information also made available on CD and as a web-based service
- International Congress Calendar (46th year): Successful continuation of the quarterly cycle; information also made available as a web-based service
- International Meeting Statistics: Successful continuation of the annual cycle despite concerns from various venues regarding their rankings and preoccupations with the coverage, given the resources available
- CD-Rom (organizations, bibliography and Who’s Who): Successful continuation of the annual cycle
- Web service: Regular monthly update. The interface and facilities for research and visualization continue to be developed, partially in response to requests from users (notably via Saur Verlag); associated administrative facilities have also been developed (in response to the needs of Saur Verlag)
- Quality and coverage: Considerable concern regarding the response rate by organizations to questionnaires, especially in electronic form; reversion to postal questionnaires despite the increased cost (posting largely abandoned since 2004 to cut costs). General concern about the decreasing editorial capacity to obtain and process information on increasingly larger numbers of organizations (who make some of it available on increasingly complex websites). In the case of meetings, the issue of coverage is reflected in the quality of annual statistics in comparison with those of ICCA. More general concerns regarding the capacity to obtain and process the increasing amounts of information appropriately

Data services

- Associate Members: Data extraction services continue to represent a source of income and a prime reason for Associate Membership, despite the competing facilities offered by ICCA
- Universities: Continuing requests from researchers for certain classes of data; complaints continue to be received regarding costs and availability of historical data
- Commercial initiative: Contract signed with Transform (Nadia McLaren) to explore and develop income-generating services with external sponsorship

Evolution of information market

- Sale of UIA publisher: The Munich-based publisher K.G Saur Verlag (originally independent, then bought by Reed Elsevier, then by the Detroit-based Thomson Group) has been sold to the Berlin-based publisher Walter de Gruyter – now the largest humanities publisher in continental Europe under the direction of Klaus Saur (with whom the first contracts were made with UIA in 1982). Whilst contracts with UIA are unaffected in the short-term, Klaus Saur has indicated that the contracts and products will necessarily be reviewed in the coming period.
Web 2.0: Past concerns regarding the impact of the web on the information market have now extended to the financial press concerned by emerging preferences for new participative styles of “open source” information generation and dissemination. (Wikipedia, blogs, MySpace, etc). It is expected that participative free reference sites, like Wikipedia, will create increasing challenges for high-priced reference services since they now cover international organizations. This is now recognized by K G Saur Verlag

Marketing of information services

- Unit sales: Other reports will note the problematic decline in sales of publications and information services, notably despite the efforts of Thomson/Saur
- Online usage: Despite the publisher’s marketing efforts, the number of subscription users has not significantly increased and the actual usage by a subscriber is relatively modest (a phenomenon typical of many subscriptions databases).
- Free services: These are the many Encylopedia databases (problems, strategies, values, human development, etc). Developments to the database have rendered many entries indexable by Google (ie “visible) with the expectation that this will increase user access
- Unsold copies: This regular phenomenon (both at Saur and at UIA) remains an embarrassment because of the cost of transportation should it be decided to donate them

New and potential projects

- Data dissemination via Public Interest Registry (PIR): Contract signed following negotiations by Nadia McLaren; PIR has been slow to follow up on technical issues, possibly because the facility has become a lower priority for strategic reasons relating to the forthcoming rebidding process for .ORG management.
- Calendar project: Proposals made in this respect could not be implemented as envisaged due to lack of personnel and financial resources; the external efforts of Transform may lead to a complementary initiative
- Civil society glossary with Europhil: Contract signed after significant delays associated with the death of Frits Hondius as prime motivator; early stages of the work are now underway with a view to completion by the end of 2006
- Transnational Associations: Proposals in this respect could not be developed further due to lack of personnel and financial resources
- Historical publications: No further action on these possibilities, although some scanning experiments on past Yearbooks have been undertaken
- Living Library and Dropping Knowledge: Following contacts with the German Research Centre for Artificial Intelligence (DFKI), on behalf of the NGO Dropping Knowledge, a question-based Living Library was launched by them as a free web service on 9 September in Berlin at a major media event. Since this used UIA problem data, without formal consent (after warning protests), a UIA press release was disseminated entitled “Enabling a Living Library”. Subsequently communication has been established regarding the intellectual copyright issues, notably relating to distribution of UIA content by DFKI under a Creative Commons licence. DFKI has admitted downloading large portions of some UIA databases and are now making significant reference to UIA in their promotional publications (see below).
- Questions database: As an early response to potential collaboration with DFKI, a database composed of one million interconnected questions has been generated experimentally from
the databases on world problems, strategies and values. It is proposed to integrate this into the existing set of free UIA databases to which it provides links

- Netmap visualization: As a further step in the occasional collaboration with the Australian company producing this network visualization tool, a copy of their software has been obtained on loan for an experimental period. It is initially intended to be used to provide images for inclusion in vol 5 (part 2) of the *Yearbook*.

- NGO jobs database: Consideration is being given to operation of a financially self-supporting web service through which job-seekers and NGOs seeking personnel can be matched.

**Associate Members**

- Associate Members meeting: Following lengthy discussion, and a survey of Associate Members, it was decided on balance not to hold the annual Associate Member meeting in October 2006 (breaking a long-standing annual cycle), principally because of resource constraints on its organization. Concerns regarding comparison with similar initiatives were also a factor.

- Associate Member newsletter: Following the unresolved conflicting issues associated with responsibilities for this proposal in relation to other tasks, it was decided to suspend further action on this initiative.

- Visits of Associate Members: In the absence of any member of staff specifically responsible for Associate Members in Brussels, a number of such visitors have been received by the Secretary-General and/or the Assistant Secretary-General, assisted by other members of staff or associates.

**Promotional activities**

- Redesign of UIA website: This process (outsourced to Tómas Fülöpp, *Vacilando*) should be completed by the time of the Council meeting. It has notably required reviewing some thousand pages relating to the UIA and its activities.

- Brochure: The brochure on information activities of the UIA has been photocopied for distribution to meetings and visitors on a number of occasions.

- Press release: Exceptionally a press release was disseminated, via the UIA website and manually in Berlin (by an associate), on the occasion of the launch by Dropping Knowledge of a Living Library. The press release was structured to imply a degree of ownership of that project by UIA, given the manner in which UIA content had been appropriated for it. The initiative has evoked promotional coverage of the UIA reinforcing the implication of UIA involvement.

**Computer facilities**

- Secretariat workstations: The set of workstations, vital to most Secretariat tasks, continues to be upgraded as resources permit or breakdowns necessitate, partly to ensure compatibility with remote access facilities.
  - Maintenance: The long-standing policy of avoiding external assistance for maintenance was reversed because of the pressures on those in-house with such skills and the stressful disruption to work patterns. A weekly maintenance contract is now operating successfully.
Remote access: Use of low cost software to enable access from home to Secretariat workstations is being explored to increase the flexibility of work patterns, to facilitate remote maintenance and to reduce data reconciliation costs

- In-house server (located at the Secretariat):
  - Breakdown: This vital and costly device, normally operating without problems over long periods, was partially damaged in July as the result of an electrical storm. A temporary repair by contractors (OPNS) allowed insurance and replacement possibilities to be explored.
  - Repair/Upgrade: The breakdown was used as an opportunity to complete an upgrade process scheduled with OPNS since 2003 in anticipation of workstation conformity. Unfortunately the estimated 3-5 days work had to be extended into some 3 working weeks due to difficulties not foreseen by OPNS.
  - Financial implications: The breakdown and repair have resulted in unexpectedly high additional costs, to which must be added the unforeseen downtime and associated frustration of all concerned. It is as yet unclear how these extra costs will be shared or discounted. It as yet unclear to what extent the insurance will intervene.
  - Backup: One of the purposes of the upgrade was to improve the backup facility. This has been done.
  - File reconciliation: Significant resources have in the past had to be allocated to the weekly tasks of reconciling editorial work done at different locations. The upgrade is designed to avoid this.

- Main website (now located in UK): This is the location of www.uia.org providing an image of the UIA and its activities to the world:
  - Maintenance challenge: This has posed severe editorial and layout maintenance problems because of the many pages produced over many years and the lack of resources to update them as necessary and to detect unfortunate errors.
  - Upgrade: As noted above, the website is being converted into a content management system to facilitate update by those responsible for different pages and to improve its presentation.

- Database website (located in the UK): This is the location of the databases to which access is provided by subscription or freely. Users are normally transferred to it from the main website:
  - Instability / Maintenance: These issues have been of considerable concern, especially given the contractual commitment to subscription users via Saur. Problems have notably arise in holiday periods.
  - Upgrade: Because of the above factors and slow response times, notably indicated by some Associate Member users, this service has been transferred to more powerful computer at a different supplier. A specific reason was the maintenance support provided. This facility is however costly.
  - Sharing costs: The immediate possibility of sharing this facility (by marketing space on it to other users) has been suspended, notably because of the contractual commitment it would be necessary to make to others at a time of uncertainty for the UIA.

- Security: Security against hackers and viruses remains an important concern despite the many protective measures implemented. The experience with the university-based
researchers at the German Research Centre for Artificial Intelligence (DFKI), and their subsequent use of UIA content without consent or public acknowledgement, is indicative of the challenge.

**Evolution in UIA personnel resources and responsibilities:** Various issues should be recognized in a context of increasing financial constraints:

- **Trend to outsourcing to independents (or organizations):** This is notably the case with regard to statistics (Nadia McLaren, *Transform*; Helena Smalikova *Delphi*), CD-ROM production (Christian Sylvestre, *Okami*), Workstation maintenance (*LFT*), website development (Tómás Fülöpp, *Vacilando*). The contractual arrangements do not necessarily guarantee continuity for annual production commitments.
- **Trend to working remotely:** This is the case with regard to Cecile Denet (Brussels), Joel Fischer (Kentucky), Jacqueline Nebel (London), Nancy Carfrae (Leuven), Helena Smalikova (Poprad), Nadia McLaren (Adelaide). Irrespective of its efficiencies or deficiencies, this process constrains the capacity of those at the Secretariat to respond to certain issues.
- **Impact of transitions to retirement and/or contract termination:** This is the case with regard to Jacqueline Nebel and Anthony Judge, following the recent departures of Genevieve Deville, Paul Ghils, Ghislaine de Coninck and Nicole Maes
- **Backup in the event of absence (holidays, illness, etc):** This is notably the case with respect to certain computer facilities and applications (Anthony Judge, Tómás Fülöpp).
- **Trend to dissociate from direct involvement in the Secretariat:** This affects capacity to respond to certain issues (as in the case of Nadia McLaren).
- **Trend towards higher levels of illness / absenteeism**
- **Trend towards more complex patterns of part-time work:** Only 3 of the 12 in-house staff are now present full-time during Secretariat working hours.
- **Reconciliation of operational responsibilities/obligations with appropriate compensation under conditions of restricted financial resources**
- **Unresolved issues regarding operational responsibilities/obligations:** This is notably the case with respect to production services, computer facilities, Associate Members, marketing, and external relations (institutions, universities, information requests).
- **Trend towards minimal secretarial and other forms of assistance**

**Secretariat building**

- **MAI:** Immediate threats to dispose of the building have been postponed.
- **Storage capacity:** The Secretariat continues to make extensive use of MAI cellars for storage; further rationalization has been achieved.
- **Office use:** The pattern of usage of Secretariat offices remains problematic, partly due to varying hours of personnel presence, partly to the architecture of 38 rue Washington, and partly to the condition of the offices.

**Operational vulnerabilities:** A checklist of these was provided on the occasion of the UIA General Assembly (October 2005) as one of the documents identified in *Secretariat Checklist of Documents for the Direction of the UIA* (October 2005).