

Development and implementation of the International Council on Archives' *Universal declaration on archives 2007–2011*

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This paper outlines the events which inspired the creation of the Universal declaration on archives, a statement of archival purpose and solidarity which was adopted by the International Council on Archives (ICA) in September 2010. The development process spanned a three-year period, during which a team of people from diverse backgrounds, archival traditions and languages came together to write a statement about the importance and value of archives. The intended audience for the declaration is the general public: those not immersed in the archival endeavour. The declaration stresses the link between archives (on the one hand) and basic human rights and government accountability (on the other), and indicates that archives are a valuable inheritance passed from one generation to another. The declaration was always intended to be used as a powerful promotional tool for archives, archivists and the ICA itself, and is currently in the process of being adopted by UNESCO as one of that organisation's standard-setting instruments.

Introduction

This article traces the development of the *Universal declaration on archives* (UDA) between 2007 and 2010, when it was adopted by the International Council on Archives (ICA). The original purpose of the UDA was as a statement of the relevance and importance of archives to the general public; it is an articulation of the specific connections between records and archives and good governance, basic human rights and entitlements, cultural and community identity, history and heritage. The role of archivists as the skilled professionals underpinning access to and care of these records is also highlighted. A raft of promotion strategies was developed to ensure that the UDA was understood and embraced by the ICA membership, so that it could be promoted as widely as possible. An international collaboration, the working group that developed the declaration overcame language difficulties, differences in archival traditions and the tyranny of distance and time zones to create something which speaks to archivists – and the general public – all over the world. The drafters of the UDA never envisaged that the document would be the source of significant contention when it came to be adopted by the ICA membership. The controversy, linked to questions about the legal status of such statements and the possibility that the UDA's status could be further

enhanced by its adoption as a UNESCO statement, led to a delay in the adoption of the UDA, which finally came about in September 2010.

2007: Origins

The International Council on Archives Section of Professional Associations (SPA)¹ held its inaugural conference in Madrid, Spain, from 18 to 20 October 2007. The conference had been designed to bring together representatives of as many different archival professional associations from as many different countries and regions as possible. Presentations were given on various issues facing the profession, including the relationships between national associations and national archives, the challenges posed by digital recordkeeping, the base-line archival competencies required by the profession to deal with these issues, and the ways in which the associations were rising to these issues, including methods of reaching out to potential new members and new professionals.

An 'Associations Fair' was held in the course of one afternoon, at which those present could showcase the various products and services they offered to members. Shelley Sweeney, the Canadian representative on the SPA steering committee, presented the newly developed 'Déclaration québécoise sur les archives'² along with an invitation to sign a large leather-bound register indicating one's support. This was signed on behalf of the Australian Society of Archivists (ASA) by Kim Eberhard, then President of the ASA.

The following month, the ICA's annual International Conference of the Round Table on Archives (CITRA) was held, at which representatives of national archives, ICA sections and branches, and professional associations gathered for conference sessions and the ICA's annual general meeting. In order to accommodate the differing needs of those present, two parallel sessions were held, one aimed at the national archivists present and the other for the presidents of archival professional associations and Canadian archivists in attendance. This latter session focused on the different approaches taken by various professional associations on how to engage the public and persuade decision-makers of the importance and relevance of archives and archivists. In a panel forum, which included presentations by

Kim Eberhard on the recent publication of *Archives matter!*, Denys Chouinard of the Association des archivists du Québec presented 'La déclaration québécoise sur les archives', and the various ways in which it was being used to promote the profession in French-speaking Canada. The main objective of the declaration was to engage public interest by pinpointing the areas in which archives intersect with and support the public's rights as citizens, *and* capture and hold collective experiences and thus serve as the memory of a nation. The declaration had been developed into an attractive poster, and it was being promoted by asking supporters to attach their names as signatories either digitally (on the association's website) or in the same ledger which had been present at the Madrid SPA Conference.

It was a powerful session, with lively discussion ensuing between those on the floor and the panel. All agreed that a product or 'tool' such as this was of great potential value, and could be used as a hook to capture the imagination of the public. For too long the profession had been 'talking to itself' rather than focusing on external bodies that could, once persuaded of the value of archives, become ambassadors in support of institutions and professionals, especially when archives were under threat. Something like the Quebec declaration could be used by all members of the ICA, and indeed all professional associations, as a way to promote the value and relevance of archives and archivists. The discussion had a particular resonance, as the ICA was gearing up to its 60th anniversary in 2008 (to be celebrated at the congress in Kuala Lumpur) and there was a move to enhance the visibility of International Archives Day, an event scheduled for 9 June each year. It was resolved, as was customary at CITRAs,³ to present to the AGM the following day a resolution for discussion and possible adoption regarding the development of a universal declaration on archives. Critically, it was also agreed at this afternoon session that carriage of the creation of such a document should be assigned to a definable group within the ICA, and a timeframe for delivery be specified. As the afternoon session was principally dominated by members of the Section for Professional Associations, and the panel speakers (who led the ensuing discussion) were SPA members, it was agreed that SPA would be the appropriate body to assume the responsibility for the development of the declaration, if such a resolution was deemed

agreeable by the annual general meeting. Those present at the meeting eventually adopted 10 resolutions, one of which was this, directing SPA to develop a universal declaration on archives:

Considering the relevance of the initiatives that led to the formulation and publicizing of the 'Québec Declaration on Archives',

Propose that ICA mandates ICA/SPA to prepare a 'Universal Declaration on Archives' that follows this model'.⁴

From the beginning, it was acknowledged that the target audience for a declaration was the common citizen – that is, the declaration was an announcement of the fact that archives are relevant to everyone, not just a select few who know of their existence. Further, it would express the need for the public to recognise the vital role that archives play in every aspect of their lives. The Quebec declaration announced that responsibility for archives was universal: 'public decision-makers, citizens, owners or holders of public or private archives, archivists and information specialists'. It was clear that the resulting document was to be used to reach out to that audience. In effect, it was to be an ICA-endorsed tool for use in awareness-raising campaigns, and it was a statement of solidarity among the professions: 'this is what we, as archivists, hold to be true, and this is how that truth affects you'.

This became the starting point for the new working group, which had been appointed by December 2007. It comprised Diane Baillargeon and Denys Chouinard from Canada, Abdelkadar Kapadonou from Benin, Kim Eberhard and Colleen McEwen⁵ from Australia, and Didier Grange from Switzerland, President of SPA 2004–08.

2008: Collaborative effort

The UDA working group, which was managed by Colleen McEwen, worked quickly to produce an initial draft ready for consideration by the steering committee of SPA in March 2008. The language differences between the members of the working group, who worked principally in French and English, highlighted not only subtle nuances of meaning of words, but more significant differences stemming from divergent

archival traditions. The ensuing debates enhanced the quality of the final version, as the only solution to those subtle but vital differences was to be as specific and clear as possible. For example, of particular interest was the discourse regarding what constituted a record, and how different cultural practices surrounding record creation and ongoing archival care would be reflected in the final document. As the Quebec declaration had been developed in a region which was inclusive of different languages and different recordkeeping traditions – notably the oral traditions of indigenous peoples throughout Canada – there was an assumption that the new *Universal declaration on archives* would implicitly include the whole spectrum of potential records. To be too prescriptive would possibly exclude some cultures and practices; to be too open-ended would lessen the impact of the declaration. Therefore the approach adopted was to be as succinct as possible, focusing on higher level aspirations that could be equally applied in many different situations.

This robust process of working simultaneously in two languages while being aware of the different circumstances (cultural, historical, social and political) of archivists across the entire world also led to the clear distinctions apparent in the final format: the preamble, which sets out what archives are and how they are relevant to all people; the articulation of the characteristics of archives and the role of people in relation to them; and the final section, which is an expression of six principles towards which the efforts of the profession will be geared in a united global effort.

The SPA steering committee reviewed the draft, offering the first of a series of comments in a consultation process which was to span the remainder of the year. The revised draft was circulated in June 2008 to all category B members of the ICA (professional associations and organisations), effectively all the members of SPA. It was also made available to participants at the ICA congress in Kuala Lumpur later that month. The draft UDA was sent to the ASA Council for comment and approval, and also circulated to the archival community for feedback through the aus-archivists list in late August. Only a few comments were received by the closing date for submissions, all of which noted differences in archival traditions. Overall, it was considered that the

small number of responses reflected a level of satisfaction with the document.⁶

In October, the draft was presented to the Executive Board (EB) of the ICA by Christine Martinez, who was then President of SPA. The objectives of the UDA had been refined, and were stated as being:

to proclaim the purpose, value and scope of archives and to declare the essential role archives play in the recognition and respect of human rights, in establishing collective memory and in underpinning accountable and transparent administrative actions. The draft also outlines the unique characteristics and requirements of archives and declares actions needed to ensure appropriate management and access.

The declaration is aimed at encouraging, influencing and supporting creators, custodians, users of archives (including governments, non-government and business organisations, public archives and record offices, professional associations, archivists and all citizens), to actively participate in activities that will secure the world's archival heritage.⁷

The Executive Board recommended that a program of promotion for the UDA also be developed to 'publicise and marshal support for the declaration' in order to 'ensure engagement with the document and its survival'. Various means of promoting it were flagged, such as possible involvement (as yet unspecified) by UNESCO,⁸ and promotion throughout International Archives Day. The Quebec concept of developing a register which people could sign to indicate their support was also still under consideration.

2009: Gaining momentum

The UDA working group submitted an application to the ICA in February 2009 for funding in order to develop the declaration into something other than a text document: it was felt that a visual identity for the UDA would ensure its recognition and therefore enhance its uptake and use. The successful grant application allowed the working

group to engage an Australian-based graphic designer to create a signature 'look' for the UDA which would enhance its appeal and usefulness as a promotional and awareness-raising tool.⁹ The design was eventually printed as a poster, and exists in digital form for publication on the ICA website, as well as the websites of member professional associations. It was hoped that the UDA would have its own web presence, to be facilitated by the then impending re-development of the ICA website. The grant application and approval process further emphasised the need for a comprehensive promotions strategy to be developed for the UDA, acknowledging that a 'look' for the document was one element to be used in a broader series of activities by individuals, institutions and the ICA itself. In order to flesh out such a strategy, members of the UDA working group attended the Spring meeting of the SPA steering committee, which was held in Stockholm in March. A round-table workshop was held to gather new ideas for the promotion of the UDA among both the members of the ICA and the general public. It was noted that promoting the UDA would have several positive and interrelated outcomes, including:

- raising awareness of the UDA (and by extension, of the ICA);
- creating understanding of the nature and role of archives and archivists;
- ensuring the acceptance of the UDA by members of the ICA (a critical point which would surface in 2009); and
- encouraging the use of the UDA as a 'product' which would further promote archives and archivists.

A comprehensive strategy was developed, building on ideas that had been developed by the Association des archivists du Québec. This comprised a several-tiered approach based on what could reasonably be achieved by individuals, institutions, national bodies and internationally. The basic thrust of the plan involved gathering shows of support, by way of signatures in a ledger and online, from individual archivists and the general public. Additionally, it was envisaged that professional associations representing archivists and allied professions would 'sign' to indicate their support, as would archival institutions

at local, state and national levels. Further, institutions and associations were encouraged to petition their relevant tier of government to 'sign on' to the UDA, as an expression of *their* support. Within the ICA, it was hoped that the constituent branches and sections would individually adopt the UDA, and that motions of such support would be directed at the ICA Secretariat. At this stage, possible UNESCO involvement was limited to the expression of a hope that the ICA would invite UNESCO to endorse the UDA.

Ideas gathered from the SPA workshop in March 2009 were in many ways unique and very creative. International Archives Day (9 June) was seen as an ideal 'hook' on which to hang UDA-related events, such as asking for signatures that day, or using that day to begin discussions with local authorities, the media or related professions about the UDA. Other ideas included:

- developing sites for the UDA on social media such as Facebook, and further promoting the success of these by reporting on the number of 'friends' it develops;
- developing an e-postcard, T-shirts and other memorabilia;
- promoting the UDA at related conferences (for example, genealogy and history conferences);
- encouraging educators (archival and other) to develop teaching models based on the UDA;
- developing a 'grand tour' similar to an Olympic torch relay between ICA congresses (at four-year intervals) or CITRA events (held annually); and
- linking to existing UNESCO declarations such as that on human rights.

The outcomes of the Stockholm workshop were collated into a comprehensive set of promotion and marketing strategies for the UDA, which were presented to the ICA in November 2009.¹⁰ The report articulated a shift away from the individual-national-international approach, concentrating instead on a number of activities from which individuals or groups of people could choose as the most appropriate for their needs. It had also become possible to link the UDA to the

strategic directions of the ICA, which had been revised and adopted in July 2008. Strategic direction 4.1 'Raise awareness of the importance of records and archives, especially for good governance' was a perfect fit for what the drafters of the UDA hoped to achieve. As one tool with which awareness could be raised, the UDA:

- provides a statement to help persuade key decision-makers that archives matter for good governance, administrative transparency and democratic accountability;
- underlines the strategic importance of archives for administrative efficiency;
- provides an overview of the key requirements for good archival management which can be used by records managers and archivists to build a case for increasing their resource allocation, improving facilities and increasing staff; and
- improves public knowledge and interest in archives in ensuring the capture and preservation of individual and corporate memory and in supporting democratic rights.

Translations were sought with 10 different language versions available by mid 2009.¹¹ Given that the declaration is universal by name, scope and potential application, and that it had been developed simultaneously in two different languages, eventual translation into other languages had always been an objective. That this was to be undertaken sooner rather than later was emphasised through the process of developing the 'look'. Working through the design process highlighted some very practical issues, which speak to the heart of working in a truly multi-cultural, multi-lingual (and multi-script) environment. The fact is that other scripts (such as Arabic, Japanese or Cyrillic) may physically take up more room on the poster than English; further, the background (which is Latin text) may not be suitable for every different application across so many different cultures. Although developing a product that would immediately be able to incorporate so much difference was beyond the scope of the original design project, the thought remained that the UDA 'look' would eventually have to accommodate these differences, and more. As a result of the initial grant application, the UDA poster was developed and printed in three ICA languages – English, French and Spanish, and these versions were distributed at

the 2009 annual general meeting in Malta. Work will be undertaken in 2011 by the same designer to mould the existing UDA layout into a template that can be adjusted to suit local language and script.

2009: Obstacles at the ICA annual general meeting

By the time of the 2009 CITRA in Malta, it was assumed by the UDA working group, SPA and the Executive Board of the ICA that the declaration – and its aims and possible uses – were well known and understood by the members of the ICA, and that this would guarantee its fuss-free adoption by the members at the annual general meeting. This was not to be. Following a presentation by Kim Eberhard (representing the UDA working group) on the UDA outlining its development and coverage, a motion to accept the document was placed before the membership. Several objections were raised by members from the floor, the most difficult of which revolved around the level of compliance required by members should the UDA be adopted. What was the legal status of the UDA? To what extent was it binding on members? Clouding this issue was the suggestion that the UDA was to be developed into one of UNESCO's suite of statements, declarations and resolutions. It was understood that these 'instruments' were binding on members; to what extent would the UDA take on such characteristics? Vigorous discussion of these issues ensued, complicated by a lack of clarity in terms of the final motion being presented to the meeting and made urgent because the meeting had to make way for the next event scheduled at the conference venue. Delegates finally adopted the UDA *in principle* only, with the proviso that further research be undertaken to clarify the issues raised:

- What would adoption of the UDA mean to ICA members?
- To what extent are ICA members 'bound' by any of its statements?

And, in terms of adoption by UNESCO:

- Is there scope for an 'archival' statement within the UNESCO 'stable'?
- How are the statements applied, and how is compliance monitored?

- How have existing statements been developed?
- What level of instrument would/could the UDA become?
- How is adoption by UNESCO to be effected?

Kim Eberhard, as a member of the UDA working group and as President of the Section for Archives of Churches and Religious Denominations and a member of the Executive Board, was asked by the ICA Executive Board to prepare a report tackling these concerns for consideration at its March 2010 meeting. This was submitted in December 2009, and is known as 'The UNESCO report'.¹²

The delegates at the 2009 annual general meeting lost sight of the fact that the UDA has aspirational aims: its original purpose was to be a substantial statement of the undeniable value and relevance of archives and archivists to the human endeavour. Its original objectives were to:

- secure global acceptance of the purpose, value and scope of archives;
- highlight the role archives play in the recognition and respect of human rights;
- enhance understanding of the role of archives in establishing collective memory; and
- promote archives as underpinning accountable and transparent governance.

The UDA was never intended to be a standard against which compliance could or would be measured, nor was it intended to be a blunt instrument with which to bludgeon or punish archival institutions.

The UDA was and remains primarily a promotional tool. Its main purpose is to provide non-archivists – that is, the majority of the global public – with an understanding of the existence and power of archives. By articulating the concept that archives underpin a variety of basic human rights, the aim is to encourage 'buy-in' by non-archivists to various advocacy activities that the profession undertakes. This includes resource allocators, government bodies, and the average person whose only connection to archives comes through vehicles such

as the television program *Who do you think you are?* For those working in the archives sector it is a very deliberate statement of solidarity and mutual support.

In a related way, the ICA has recognised that such a promotional tool might also be useful for the ICA itself. Adoption and promotion of a statement such as the UDA proclaims much about archives and archivists; it also introduces the ICA as a living organisation to the wider public. This 'image' of the ICA as a positive and influential body would be further enhanced if the organisation was directly linked to a statement or declaration that had been endorsed by a body such as UNESCO. Hence there is a strong desire by the ICA to take the UDA up a level, to enjoy the same status as other UNESCO statements concerning cultural heritage.¹³ UNESCO terms such statements as 'standard-setting instruments', of which there are three levels with varying degrees of formality, legal status, compliance requirements and non-compliance implications. A UNESCO convention has international legal authority, with binding, enforceable regulations. One of the best known examples is the Hague Convention (1954) for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. A UNESCO *declaration* has no international authority, and sets out principles with no obligation for member states to sign. A UNESCO *recommendation* is less formal than a declaration, has no legal authority and is intended to influence the development of national laws and policies.

It is clear from this basic summary that even if the UDA were to be endorsed or adopted by UNESCO, it is most likely to take the form of one of the milder instruments, wherein legal requirements to comply do not exist.

The research also looked at whether there was scope for an archival statement to be included among those already in existence. The resounding answer is 'yes' as UNESCO has 72 standard-setting instruments relating to printed and published materials, the need to protect, preserve and share items of historic and cultural value, the need to protect the work of artists and copyright. One covers the need to share government information as required. None of the 72 clearly and succinctly covers the role of archives and archivists in protecting

and preserving the documentary heritage of all nations, or in possessing the skills to manage new forms of records and information being produced in the information age. *The charter on the preservation of digital heritage*, adopted in October 2003, is the instrument most closely aligned to the work of recordkeepers and archivists, but its focus is the need for preservation, rather than creation, management and use of records.

The process by which a statement is adopted or endorsed by UNESCO is highly political, and too complex for inclusion in this article. However, a sponsor is required to steer the statement through the adoption process, which requires discussion at a UNESCO General Assembly and then a vote by members. The mechanism by which this may happen is in the hands of the ICA Secretary-General and President, who jointly assumed this responsibility in May 2010. It is understood that negotiations with UNESCO have begun, the first tangible sign of which was a slight amendment to the wording of the UDA to better reflect the common UNESCO style for standard-setting instruments.

The concerns raised at the 2009 annual general meeting had been laid to rest. The UDA was to be put to the 2010 annual general meeting in Oslo for final adoption.

2010: Unanimous adoption

The UDA, incorporating slight linguistic changes, was adopted unanimously at the 2010 ICA annual general meeting in Oslo. Even with the minor changes, the UDA remains true to its origins: it is a statement of our professional aspirations. It is not legally binding, nor will there be any mechanism put in place to measure compliance or to punish in the event of non-compliance. In the event that it is formally adopted by UNESCO as one of its standard-setting instruments, it will not be legally binding on any of the signatories, or members of either UNESCO or the ICA.

What remains to be done is the promulgation of the UDA as the promotional tool it was designed to be. The various sections and branches of the ICA are charged with promoting the UDA. As two of the original UDA working group are Australian, and the next ICA

congress will be held in Brisbane in 2012, there is an expectation that our region (Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific nations and South East Asia) will be a primary area of activity in the coming months. As the promotions strategy is further developed, and as ICA moves towards enhancing the UDA, more detail will be released.

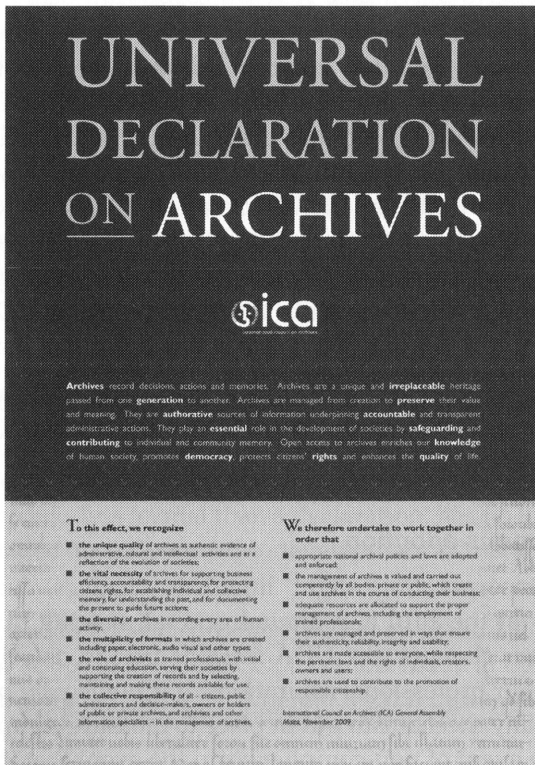


Figure 1. The original 'look' created in 2009 for the UDA. Work continues on refining the design as a template, to facilitate use across the world, regardless of language or text styles.

Appendix: Universal declaration on archives

[As unanimously adopted by ICA AGM in Oslo, 17 September 2010.]

Archives record decisions, actions and memories. Archives are a unique and irreplaceable heritage passed from one generation to another. Archives are managed from creation to preserve their value and meaning. They are authoritative sources of information underpinning accountable and transparent administrative actions. They play an essential role in the development of societies by safeguarding and contributing to individual and community memory. Open access to archives enriches our knowledge of human society, promotes democracy, protects citizens' rights and enhances the quality of life.

To this effect we recognize

- **the unique quality** of archives as authentic evidence of administrative, cultural and intellectual activities and as a reflection of the evolution of societies;
- **the vital necessity** of archives for supporting business efficiency, accountability and transparency, for protecting citizens rights, for establishing individual and collective memory, for understanding the past, and for documenting the present to guide future actions;
- **the diversity** of archives in recording every area of human activity;
- **the multiplicity of formats** in which archives are created including paper, electronic, audio visual and other types;
- **the role of archivists** as trained professionals with initial and continuing education, serving their societies by supporting the creation of records and by selecting, maintaining and making these records available for use;
- **the collective responsibility** of all – citizens, public administrators and decision-makers, owners or holders of public or private archives, and archivists and other information specialists – in the management of archives.

We therefore undertake to work together in order that

- appropriate national archival policies and laws are adopted and enforced;
- the management of archives is valued and carried out competently by all bodies, private or public, which create and use archives in the course of conducting their business;
- adequate resources are allocated to support the proper management of archives including the employment of trained professionals;
- archives are managed and preserved in ways that ensure their authenticity, reliability, integrity and usability;
- archives are made accessible to everyone, while respecting the pertinent laws and the rights of individuals, creators, owners and users;
- archives are used to contribute to the promotion of responsible citizenship.

Endnotes

¹ SPA is the ICA Section of Professional Associations. It was established in 1976 and has over 80 members (ICA category B). SPA aims at strengthening and uniting the archival professional globally, and helping members develop their organisations and increase their influence. It is managed by a steering committee comprising representatives from member professional associations.

² See 'La déclaration québécoise sur les archives' on the website of L'Association des archivistes du Québec, available at <<http://www.archivistes.qc.ca/declaration>>, accessed 20 March 2011.

³ The 2007 CITRA was the last at which resolutions were taken from the various sessions of the conference and debated (and, if successful, adopted) at the annual general meeting.

⁴ 2007 ICA Annual General Meeting Quebec City (Canada) 15–16 November 2007 Resolutions [Author's copy].

⁵ Colleen McEwen is the Australian Society of Archivists' representative on the SPA Steering Committee, a role she has held since 2004. Colleen is currently joint Secretary of SPA.

⁶ Archival practice and traditions differ between Europe, North America and Australia. For instance: Australian practice could be defined as following the continuum theory, where little distinction is made between records and archives; in North America, a strong differentiation between the two remains entrenched in the 'life cycle' approach to archives administration. European archivists focus on record groups, fonds or on

individual documents or manuscripts, where Australian archivists usually focus on the series system. A more obvious difference between 'old world' archives and those held by newer nations is the age of the records held, a fact which results in major differences in theory, training needs, management practice and use across the world. Email, working group, 5 September 2008.

⁷ Report on the Development of the International [sic] Declaration on Archives for the Executive Board Meeting, Vienna, October 2008.

⁸ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, established 1948.

⁹ The design was produced by Deborah McLeod, Double Up Productions Pty Ltd.

¹⁰ *Universal declaration on archives marketing and promotion strategies*, ICA Section of Records Management and Archival Professional Associations, November 2009.

¹¹ The languages were Arabic, Catalan, English, French, German, Hebrew, Polish, Russian, Spanish and Ukrainian, with further translations into Japanese, Italian and Croatian under development.

¹² Kim Eberhard, 'The Universal Declaration on Archives in a UNESCO context: process and implications', December 2009 [unpublished paper].

¹³ At the time the report 'The Universal Declaration on Archives in a UNESCO context: process and implications' was written, there were 28 conventions (15 of which affect culture, information and/or heritage); 31 recommendations (17 of which affect culture, information and/or heritage) and 13 declarations (7 of which affect culture, information and/or heritage).