

Summary of the Main Points of Shmuel Har Noy's Presentation to the Readers Association at the Annual General Meeting, 29 August 2008

Shmuel Har Noy, director general of the National Library, presented a broad overview of developments at the library. His informative talk addressed not only planned projects and improvements but also some of the thorny issues the library faces. In the course of the presentation, Mr. Har Noy made it clear that reader input on the future library and on current issues is welcome. Policies and priorities are currently being formulated by the academic director, the chief librarian, and members of the staff.

Acquisitions

The regular budget has been increased by 20%. Taking into account acquisition of special collections, the budget has doubled. However, due to the lion's share taken by periodicals and databases book acquisitions in particular are lagging behind.

Under discussion are what to purchase and whether preference should be given to print or to electronic media in order to best serve the ongoing and diverse needs of the readers' community.

Based on a survey of interlibrary loans, the library will determine what books are missing from its collections. The results of this survey will be made available to our association. (One of our committees will be drawing up book purchase recommendations.)

Recent, important purchases include the Wahrman Collection, a major collection of photographs and post cards of Eretz Israel. The library is also bidding for the Lazar Collection. With their acquisition the library will hold one of the largest collections of early photographs of Eretz Israel worldwide.

Building and Infrastructure

Although a new building is being planned (expected completion date in 7 to 10 years), Mr. Har Noy made it clear that the library must maintain, and institute improvements in, the present plant.

Some of the planned changes include:

Separation of public spaces from the technical services' areas (catalog, stacks, etc.). Access to the latter will be with magnetic cards and will be restricted to staff members only.

Installation of security cameras.

Both the passenger and book elevators will be replaced before March 2009.

The new building:

Various possibilities for the location of the new building are under discussion, as is the planned renovation of the existing plant. It appears likely that the new building will be in the vicinity of the Givat Ram campus and that the present building will continue to serve as part of the library.

Computerizing the Catalog

The process of computerizing the non-Hebrew card catalog has not yet been completed. The library has renewed its efforts but this conversion must be viewed as a long-term project.

Computers

Because of the increasing use of digital resources, the library will be replacing some 230 of its computers and more computer stations will be made available to the readers.

Digitization Projects

In the past, due to the limited funds available, digitization belonged to the realm of special projects and was carried out on a limited scale, with priority given to incunabula and rare books. This allowed the library staff to acquire expertise in this area. At present, additions to the digitized book repository are being made in response to reader requests/needs. Several larger digitization projects have been initiated.

The library has been in contact with Google Books regarding the digitization of books whose copyrights have expired. Because this would require at least partial waiving of the rights to the digital copies, national libraries, including ours, have been hesitant to cooperate with Google Books. At present, the National Library of Israel favors other solutions, even though this means a slower pace of digitization.

The library has received funding from the Legacy Fund for the digitization of the recordings housed in the National Sound Archives. This will conserve the rare recordings in the archive and will allow internet access to the recordings. In addition, there may be a joint project with the IBA for digitization and conservation of radio broadcasts.

The Historical Jewish Press Project, in cooperation with Tel Aviv University is digitizing early Hebrew newspapers. This project, part of which is already on line, allows full text search of the newspapers, an obvious advantage for researchers.

Another digitization project is that of the library's paleography project. The results of Professor Malachi Beit-Arieh's lifetime work will be made available on the internet and will serve as a major tool for the study of Hebrew manuscripts.

Additional storage systems are necessary to encompass all of these digitization projects. The library has purchased DigiTool to manage and provide access to these digitized resources.

Fundraising

The library is actively seeking new donors. Because the library is no longer part of the university, donations can now be made directly to the library without overhead charges to the university. The library cannot approach university donors because of the conflict of interests.

Parking

Readers attending the meeting raised the question of parking for readers. This is an ongoing problem because the parking spaces belong to the university. Mr. Har Noy promised to try to pursue the question with the powers at the university.

Issues concerning the readers

One problem the library faces is the tension between meeting the needs of researchers and of the general public. Thus, for example, some fifty readers use the Periodicals Reading Room on a daily basis, but about half come to read the daily newspaper. The library is rethinking the function of this reading room.

Other issues being discussed are the institution of access cards for use of library services, establishment of a minimum age for readers, and possible restriction of nonacademic uses of the library computers. The latter issue is under discussion by the library administration and would require changes in the computer infrastructure. With regard to the access cards, the computer infrastructure is not yet in place.

Theft

As reported in Ha-Aretz and the New York Times there have been thefts from music libraries all over the country, including from our Music Department. The thief has been apprehended and arrested. Some of the stolen documents may be recovered because he scanned the documents into his computer in order to sell these items on E-bay. This unfortunate incident illustrates the dilemma of conservation vs. free access to readers faced by every library. The library will be taking measures, including installation of security cameras, to better protect its collections.

The Readers Association thanks Mr. Har Noy for his willingness to share his thoughts on the library's future and to provide insight into the process of change at the National Library.