

**This resolution was ADOPTED by the ALA Council at its Council III meeting on
Tuesday, January 11, 2011, in San Diego, CA**

Resolution on Access to and Classification of Government Information

Whereas public access to information by and about the government is a basic tenet of a democratic society and crucial to the public's ability to hold the government accountable for its actions;

Whereas libraries are essential to the free flow of ideas and to ensuring the public's right to know;

Whereas a democratic society needs to balance the fundamental right to access government information with the necessity to withhold certain information essential to national security;

Whereas "the guarding of military and diplomatic secrets at the expense of informed representative government provides no real security for our Republic," (Justice Hugo Black, *New York Times Co. v. United States*, 403 U.S. 713 (1971));

Whereas current and former government officials estimate that 50% to 90% of classified information is either over classified or should not have been classified at all, making the administration of classified information ineffective and preventing the protection of real secrets (Statement of Thomas Blanton, Director, National Security Archive, George Washington University, to the Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. House of Representatives, Thursday, December 16, 2010);

Whereas President Barack Obama has pursued systemic reform and greater openness and transparency by ordering the declassification of hundreds of millions of records, prescribing a uniform system for classifying, safeguarding, and declassifying national security information, and directing government agencies to perform a Fundamental Classification Guidance Review "to identify classified information that no longer requires protection and can be declassified (Executive Order 13526 on Classified National Security Information (Dec. 29, 2009));

Whereas the American Library Association (ALA) has commended President Barack Obama for issuing, on his first day in office, the Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government;

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Whereas the ALA continues to support whistleblowers in reporting abuse, fraud, and waste in government activities (ALA 2007-08 CD#20.5 and ALA 2003-2004 CD 20.7) and opposes the misuse of governmental power to intimidate, suppress, coerce, or compel speech (Policy 53.4, "Policy on Governmental Intimidation;" Policy 53.6, "Loyalty Oaths"); and

Whereas wikileaks' ongoing disclosure of large numbers of classified and unclassified United States government documents has renewed debate about access to, and classification of government information; now, therefore, be it

Resolved that the American Library Association (ALA):

- (1) commends President Barack Obama for establishing the National Declassification Agency and issuing Executive Order 13526 on Classified National Security Information and supports and encourages expanded initiatives to reform the U.S. classification system;
- (2) urges Congress to pass legislation that expands protections for whistleblowers in the Federal government, such as the Whistleblower Protection Enhancement Act of 2010;
- (3) urges the U.S. President, Congress, the federal courts, and executive and legislative agencies to defend the inalienable right of the press and citizens to disseminate information to the public about national security issues and to refrain from initiatives that impair these rights; and
- (4) affirms the principle that government information made public within the boundaries of U.S. law should be available through libraries and the press without restriction.

Adopted by the Council of the American Library Association



Keith Michael Fiels
ALA Executive Director and Secretary of the ALA Council
Tuesday, January 11, 2011
In San Diego, California