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Asia-Pacific Internet conference calls for national coordination and regional cooperation

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The Asia-Pacific Internet Conference, convened by the ABA, brought together the delegates and observers from the Regional Informatics Network for South East Asia and the Pacific (RINSEAP)/Regional Informatics Network for South and Central Asia (RINSCA) Meeting. The conference was held in Bali, Indonesia, from 25 to 27 March 1999.

The ABA received funding from the Australian National Commission for UNESCO and AusAID to convene the conference.

Mr Gareth Grainger, ABA Deputy Chairman, chaired the conference and

the Chief Guest was Hon. Fiamé Mata'afa, Minister for Education, Samoa. Mr I G Manila, Secretary-General for the Department of Information, Indonesia launched the conference. M. Philippe Quéau, Director Information and Informatics Division, UNESCO HQ in Paris, and Professor Stephen Hill, Director and Representative, UNESCO Office in Jakarta made the opening remarks.

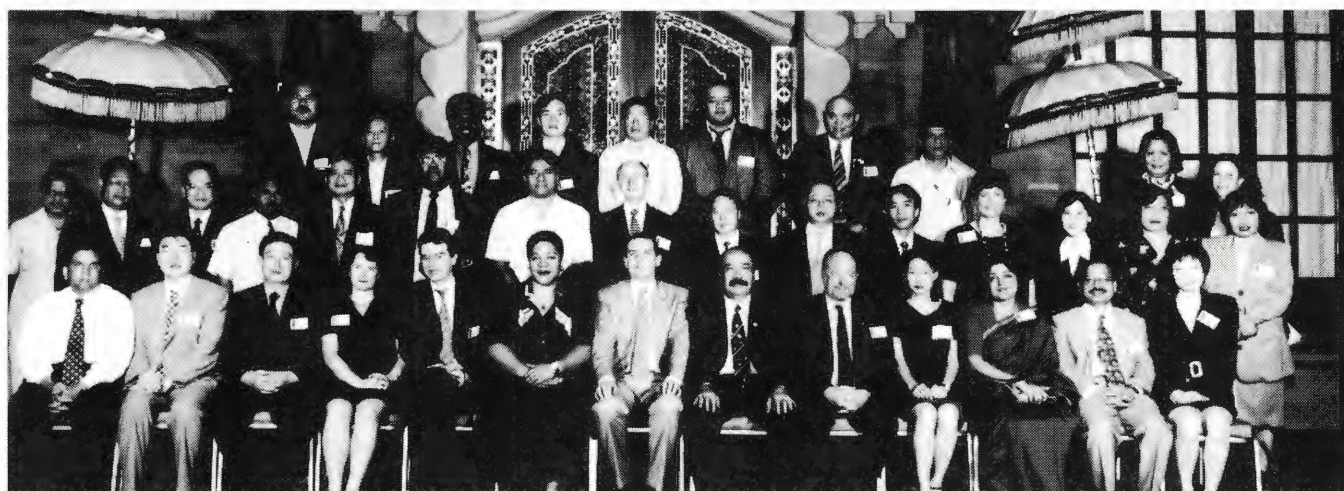
Senior policy makers and national Internet experts from Asia and the Pacific presented country reports and discussed issues on the main themes of access, content and education. With input from resource persons and discussion leaders, the conference also covered general issues that acknowledged the social, economic and techno-

logical differences within and among countries.

'A central issue for many countries was the need for government agencies to work together to ensure that decisions concerning Internet regulation were consistent, and this applied equally to the need for international agencies to coordinate their efforts to maximise efficiencies,' Mr Grainger said.

Resources

An overriding issue was the lack of resources and infrastructure and delegates looked to each other to share information and online material. They also looked to donor agencies to recognise countries' Internet needs as a key priority akin to those of other utilities.



Delegates at the Asia-Pacific Internet Conference in Bali

Access

Delegates acknowledged the desirability for universal access, but given resource and infrastructure constraints, universal access was seen in terms of one PC per community rather than one per individual. Many delegates considered that information in the public domain, such as government information, educational material, copyleft¹ material and cultural

ture is implemented, there would remain the ongoing concern of sustainability because of the resource-intensive nature of maintenance and the rapid rate of obsolescence.

Content

In terms of content issues, the conference recognised the importance of national sovereignty in determining what constitutes undesirable and illegal

national governments and Internet industry operators.

'Recognising the global nature of the Internet, delegates affirmed the importance of international dialogue and co-operation in dealing with illegal material sourced from other countries,' Mr Grainger said.

Undesirable material

Delegates discussed options for dealing with undesirable and illegal material, including labelling and filter software, content rating systems and the use of hotlines. While many delegates acknowledged that primary responsibility for illegal material rests with the content originator, they also acknowledged that Internet service providers have a responsibility to remove illegal and undesirable material that is brought to their attention.

Literacy

Several delegates raised the need to address illiteracy, including IT illiteracy, of parents and teachers so that they are better able to supervise minors' use of the Internet. Parents were seen as having the primary role of raising their children to have a healthy and responsible approach to use of the Internet, and if they needed to be equipped in playing that role, then education programs should be developed for this purpose.

Several delegates also saw the need to develop local expertise to help overcome the reliance on the import of expensive skills from overseas. A collaborative approach, drawing on the resources of government and non-government agencies within each country, was seen as a first step in this direction.

1 Material which producers wish to be made available rather than constrained by copyright restrictions, providing ongoing modification is also freely available.

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products, could be made accessible to the community through community networks, telecentres, mirror sites, Internet booths, libraries, schools and CD-ROMs.

Delegates explored ways of overcoming constraints by looking at possibilities for pooling resources and opportunities to achieve economies of scale through the use of regional hubs and non-proprietary software. If infrastruc-

ture is implemented, there would remain the ongoing concern of sustainability because of the resource-intensive nature of maintenance and the rapid rate of obsolescence. material. There was a range of views on what might be the most appropriate methods of addressing specific concerns with the Internet and examples ranged from self-regulation by Internet service providers to governments prohibiting harmful activities and specifying licensing conditions. Many delegates recognised the benefits of co-regulation which involved shared responsibility between

