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ALIA President

The fiery CD setting over the Arafura sea was a much appreciated feature of the RAISS conference. Social functions, including the opening and closing, were held where delegates from Australia could enjoy the sunset and mingle with our colleagues from countries to the north.

We built bridges. Bridges of understanding, friendship, and information. Electronic bridges such as the INTAN MAS Database the Northern Territory University launched during the week. Spiritual bridges such as the outpouring of warmth and empathy engendered by the final paper of the Conference, delivered by Rosemary Harbridge, ALIA member, Australian Volunteer Abroad and Resources Librarian with the Cooperation Committee for Cambodia in Phnom Penh.

To put her paper on information skills training needs of Cambodia in context, Rosemary drew a word picture so graphic that hardly a dry eye remained in the auditorium. She described the chaos that greeted the first member of the National Library of Cambodia staff to return after the Pol Pot time. The Library had been used as a piggery, the big tree in the garden had been used as an execution site, but it was neglect and carelessness rather than conscious destruction which had devastated the collection and building.

I asked Rosemary to tell me how we might help.

Her response was as poignant as her paper had been.

'I wonder if,' she said, 'in our attempts to 'cooperate' with our colleagues and counterparts in the region, we are placing too much emphasis, in information and services, on 'what have they got to offer us and what have we got to offer them' and in congratulating our-

selves that the wonderful achievements of the 'developed' world in the provision of information and technological innovation are being rapidly emulated by the 'developing' world.

'Food, Water and Power are all in short supply. People cannot afford to meet their basic needs. Libraries, and the resources and technologies we take for granted as minimum requirements for the provision of library services, start to sound like luxuries. Some of the urgent needs of Cambodian libraries are small and inexpensive. A recent brainstorming session with staff at the National Library of Cambodia resulted in a list of immediate needs which is detailed down to the level of titles and cost of Khmer books available in the local market, the exact length in metres, and the cost in US dollars, of the garden hose, and the cost of securing the building.'

I cannot imagine Eric Wainwright having to sleep overnight on guard duty in the NLA or Warren Horton on hands and knees cutting the grass out the front with a pair of hand shears. But that is the reality in the NLC and the enormity of the gap between what we have and they don't have.

People laughed when Rosemary said that a critical need was a lawnmower. But a lawnmower would greatly increase the productivity of the senior staff. Pat Layzell Ward has taken up the challenge, so I am hopeful that a lawnmower, adapted to run on solar power, will eventually.

If anyone is moved to offer assistance, be it advice, twinning arrangements, MONEY, or other forms of material assistance to any Cambodian library or librarian, Rosemary will be happy to do whatever she can to oil the paths of generosity, particularly by providing information or passing on mes-

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sages to relevant institutions through the Information Resources Sectoral Group.

Data collection for a Directory of Libraries and Information Resource Centres in Cambodia is finished and the directory should be available in September, but until then addresses and contacts would be difficult to find so Rosemary will pass anything on via the CCC driver or courier service. She stresses, however (and this was reinforced at the RAISS conference by Craig Boaden from AIDAB) that nothing should be done unless it has been asked for by the Cambodians.

The sponsorship of librarians to English classes is seen to be a worthwhile contribution. Two staff members from the National Archives of Cambodia have enrolled in an English language course run by the Australian Centre for English, in Phnom Pehn. The longer term aim of the Australian Society of Archivists is to have these students come to Australia to learn and practice archival principles.

When the cost of the course is only \$US90 a term, sponsoring a librarian's English course at ACE would seem both a worthwhile and affordable project for groups within ALIA.

Of Sarann Phanny, the Cambodian trainee with whom she works, Rosemary says, 'She is the main reason for my presence here. She will take over when I leave.'

This is the message for all of us. When we assist, and I urge you to do so, it must be out of recognition and acceptance of current needs as prioritised by the people we seek to help, not out of our own need, whatever that need might be.

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