

Australian librarians, global influence...



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I am writing this in Jerusalem at the IFLA 2000 conference where 'the people of the book welcome the keepers of the book' with the theme 'Information for co-operation: creating the global library of the future'.

In Jerusalem it is impossible to escape the past, present and the future. Over 3000 years of civilizations and Jewish, Moslem and Christian history blend into the present, not always co-operatively. The future is being fought for locally and globally and may or may not be determined on 13 September.

IFLA has some way to go yet before it is truly international. Like so many associations it is changing — this council (the members) has voted on a new governance model and there are extensive discussions on improving structure and communication. Palestinian, Arab and many other Moslem librarians are not participating in this conference for political reasons. Lesser-developed countries are under-represented for financial reasons. In a discussion on improving the participation of members from Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia and Oceania one delegate from Senegal very correctly said: 'the reason we cannot participate is financial not intellectual'. How to make IFLA more inclusive is a challenge for all its divisions and members.

ALIA is the Australian national association representative. In this capacity we hold a large block of votes, and we are able to nominate representatives for positions on or election to the various committees. It also places us in the major international library and information forum.

IFLA presents two opportunities to our sector: to raise the profile of Australian library and information services internationally; and to open our thinking of how we practise to include practices in other countries.

With Australian delegates making up only one per cent of the total delegates it is gratifying to see that their contribution and impact is far greater.

At the committee level Alex Byrne chairs the committee on Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression and Nick Smith (ALCC/ADA) is on the Copyright and other Legal Matters committee. Both these committees work with all IFLA divisions and report to the executive board. This representation places us at the forefront of international debate over matters currently of great significance to our sector — freedom of access to information, censorship, electronic filtering, copyright, intellectual property and licencing in the digital environment. The recent lobbying we undertook regarding libraries in for-

profit organisations and copyright exemptions under the Digital Agenda Bill has also been or is being undertaken in countries such as Canada and Scandinavia.

Australia is also represented on committees for national, parliamentary, public and art libraries, education and training, theory and research, Asia and Pacific region, and management of library associations. There have been a number of papers presented by Australians on a range of topics and commentary on the Australian situation from the floor.

It is a great opportunity for me to catch up on what is happening in other associations. As the Board of Directors is about to put together next year's budget I cannot help but envy the Swedish Library Association which set up a library supplies and services company many years ago and it now provides ninety per cent of their income.

The newly formed Library Association of South Africa (LIASA — also meaning 'dawn') is very keen to work with ALIA in setting up their association. The Indian Library Association is focussing on establishing an improved salary scale for librarians — a common theme around the world. In many respects, whether the 200 member Trinidad and Tobago Association (run by volunteers out of two filing cabinets) or the 60 000 member American Library Association, we share many issues. The Trinidad and Tobago Association managed to turn around a decision by a new government to not proceed with building the national library. All associations present are seeking ways to increase membership, attract younger members, encourage member participation in spite of competing demands for their time and focus on professional development. Library and information services are fundamental to democracy, literacy is a necessity to participate in a democracy. Literacy is as big an issue in developed countries as it is in lesser developed countries. As an African delegate stated 'advocacy is no longer a choice, it is essential to ensure the future of libraries in society'.

Standards are about to be finalised for public libraries and education. All this is just a slice of the huge IFLA agenda. The conference program and many of the papers are available on the IFLA website <http://www.ifla.org>

I have managed to catch up with several people who will be attending ALIA2000 and appreciated comments from a number of others who have seen the program and are very impressed. Australia may be a long way away for many but it is well and truly on the map! ■

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