

POSTCARDS FROM IFLA

JUDY BROOKER, ALIA's Director of Learning, and PATRICIA GENAT, Vice-President of the ALIA Board, give us a rundown of their experiences at this year's IFLA Congress.

The 2015 International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) annual World Library and Information Congress (WLIC) was held in Cape Town, South Africa, from 15 to 21 August. The theme was 'Dynamic Libraries: Access, Development and Transformation'. I was privileged to participate in and present at the congress, which is also the IFLA General Conference and Assembly. Over 3,500 delegates from more than 120 countries attended.

Before the congress proper took place, there were several satellite sessions, workshops, library visits and meetings on offer. I attended the three-day Continuing Professional Development and Workplace Learning (CPDWL) 10th World Conference. It was held in the public library at Milnerton, a suburb of Cape Town.

The pride our South African hosts had in their progress since the days of apartheid was evident from the beginning of the CPDWL Conference. While the local librarians were the first to acknowledge that they still had a long way to go, one slide in particular was very telling. It showed an image of Nelson Mandela as an older man with the quote: 'Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world'.

The papers presented were inspiring, stimulating lots of discussion. 'The power of one' was a homage to Beth Stone and her firebrand determination that established the CPDWL Section (formerly the CP Education Round Table). Beth had a prominent career as a library educator and was a president of the American Library Association (ALA). She truly lived the motto: 'If it is to be, it is up to me'. Our own West Australian Alissa Sputore delivered a paper on 'Strength through partnering: new professional development opportunities in academic libraries'. This highlighted the valuable professional development available to library staff who partook in non-library specific learning projects within their university institution.

Then it was on to my first Management of Library Associations Section (MLAS) standing committee meeting as a newly elected member. This meeting truly showed the international qualities provided by an IFLA gathering. All library associations have automatic membership of this section, so the room was packed with observers from all over the world.

The meeting went on to discuss the success IFLA has had in advocating at the United Nations on the post-2015 agenda. There were 585 international library association signatories to the Lyon Declaration, which was successful in supporting



the formal inclusion of goal 16:10 'ensure public access to information' being included in the agenda. For IFLA, the important statement in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2030 Agenda is: 'No one is left behind'. This is where libraries can contribute to universal literacy, access to information and access to culture.

The Marrakesh Treaty was discussed, as it still needs ratification at the national level. Nine countries are signatories; 20 are required for the treaty to come into force. Reports were also made on the Building Stronger Library Associations (BSLA) program and the beneficial results achieved in Africa.

All this before the official start of the Congress! The opening ceremony was spectacular and the conference venue impressive. There were more than 40 Australian attendees. What is exceptionally impressive is that at least 25 have roles on committees and two are on the new IFLA Board: Margaret Allen and Christine Mackenzie, both past ALIA presidents. We had an enjoyable Australian and Friends dinner followed a few days later by a successful Australian Business meeting held to determine support for the formation of an Australian New Zealand IFLA caucus. The ALIA Board fully endorsed this initiative at their September Board meeting. On the Wednesday at the Quality Assurance in LIS Education Session I delivered my paper, 'To LT or not to LT, that is the question: The Australian Library Association accreditation of library technician courses'. I was pleased with the response – lots of good questions.

All in all it was an exhilarating experience, lots of ideas and lots of sharing of information about ALIA's Professional Development Scheme and our accreditation processes.

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Patricia Genat on Robben Island



Delegates at the IFLA Cultural Evening



Two librarians from Cameroon enjoying the IFLA Cultural Evening

Patricia Genat, Vice-President of the ALIA Board and Managing Director ALS Services, also attended the Congress in Cape Town and used it as an opportunity to reconnect with the big issues in LIS. HEATHER WELLARD spoke to Patricia about her experience.

Returning from the week-long conference, Patricia said she was heartened to see so many Australians involved in international library governance.

'It's quite obvious to me that Australians are participating in a very deep and meaningful way in all the debates about governance that are happening at the international level. And all the ideas, from library design to education, are being reflected in the Australian LIS landscape. I felt so proud that Australia had so much to offer on the world stage.'

After a conference there is usually one presentation or a person who deeply impresses. But for Patricia it was a play, *The Hypatiad*, that brought to life the assassination of Hypatia of Alexandria in the year 415 CE. She was one of the great thinkers of Alexandria, studying and teaching mathematics, astronomy and philosophy. Some scholars link Hypatia's death to the downfall of the city's intellectual life and the burning of the Library of Alexandria – the largest and most famous library of classical antiquity. In the play, Hypatia's historic voice was contrasted with a contemporary voice, covering issues such as politics, science, belief, information and technology.

'It was amazing to see the ancient world of letters and thought brought to life on the stage. It placed libraries in their important historical context and made me realise that there were dedicated people back then trying to attain knowledge, protect it and fight for the written word. It seems to me that we are still fighting some of the same battles and that library and information professionals still have a very important role to play. While we have moved on from scrolls, physical and digital collections are still so important in our cultural lives today.'

Next year the IFLA Congress is being held in Ohio, USA, and Patricia will attend. Her advice for anyone attending for the first time is to first select presentations that align with your interests and also choose those that challenge your ideas.

'And be brave and speak to that stranger next to you. There is so much to learn and absorb, plus there's the added bonus of making new friends with people who are just as interested in LIS issues as you are. If you can get to IFLA, there is just so much to gain.'

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