

MY IFLA – THE WORK OF THE REGIONAL STANDING COMMITTEE FOR ASIA AND OCEANIA

JAYSHREE MAMTORA, *Research Services Coordinator at Darwin's Charles Darwin University and also Chair of IFLA RSCAO (Regional Standing Committee for Asia and Oceania)* tells us about her IFLA experience.

My first encounter with IFLA goes back to the 1990s when I went to New Delhi and presented a paper at an international professional conference for the first time. But it is only in recent years that I have become more actively involved. Being elected to the IFLA RSCAO (Regional Standing Committee on Asia and Oceania) in 2011 consolidated my commitment to contributing on a more regular and consistent basis.

Attending the IFLA Conference opens your eyes to the wider world – through presentations and meetings, and networking with colleagues from other countries. It has given me the opportunity to discover the innovations and initiatives that overseas counterparts are creating. Their perspective can often allow us to appreciate issues from a different angle from the ones we are used to in Australia. I also find that we often have the same issues and look to each other to share solutions and experiences.

Presenting papers both at the main conference and at the more specialised pre-conferences has allowed me to engage and collaborate with colleagues, even to the extent of writing joint publications with overseas colleagues.

My election as Chair of IFLA RSCAO marked the start of what has been a very busy and challenging period. The Asia and Oceania region covers a wide span of countries, from Syria and Lebanon in the west to China and Japan in the east. Australia and New Zealand are also members as part of Oceania. The RSCAO meets three times each year: two meetings are held during the annual conference, and the third is in February as a two-day, mid-term meeting rotated between member countries. A seminar that is organised jointly with the local library association follows, which affords the opportunity for the committee to network with the local professional community. In recent



Jayshree Mamtora with Elaine Ng, the CEO of the National Library Board (left). Jayshree Mamtora with Judy Ng, the President of the Singapore Library Association (right)



Jayshree Mamtora (centre) with members of the RSCAO Committee at the recent Singapore meeting.

years, mid-term meetings have been held in Tokyo, Kuala Lumpur and Auckland.

My term as Chair started at the end of the Conference in Cape Town in late August 2015, and within the first month I had to make some tough decisions. The 2016 mid-term meeting was set to be held in Beirut, Lebanon, but due to the deterioration in security, it was considered unsafe for foreigners to travel there. At short notice a new venue had to be found, and we were fortunate that our member in Bangladesh responded very quickly and offered a venue in Dhaka. Once all the initial arrangements had been made, however, the security there also worsened, and we were back to square one. The support of the local committee member in each case was naturally paramount, and we finally settled for Singapore as the third and final option, with the National Library Board of Singapore, where the IFLA Regional Office for Asia and Oceania is based, agreeing to host the meeting.

That was only the beginning. We immediately had to get down to work to meet two deadlines which were looming: the first, to develop a new strategic plan for RSCAO, and the second, to come up with a subtheme and prepare a call for papers for both for the RSCAO open session at the 2016 conference and for a pre-conference that had been planned. Two sub-committees were set up for each of the projects, and in each case, the committed and hard-working members worked with me to deliver on time, ensuring that we met IFLA HQ's deadline of the end of October on time.

In 2014, ALIA was one of several Australian signatories to IFLA's Lyon Declaration on Access to Information and Development. The aim of the declaration was to urge the UN to make an international commitment to ensure everyone has access to information, in order to promote sustainable development and democratic societies.

IFLA's efforts were rewarded when the UN's 2030 Agenda was recently released. The agenda, a framework of 17 sustainable development goals, includes access to information, universal literacy and the safeguarding of cultural and natural heritage. It has also been recognised that libraries are key public institutions that have a vital role to play in furthering development on every level of society. To this end, IFLA has developed a set of advocacy tools that can be used by all types of libraries. See ifla.org/asia-and-oceania for more information. 🌐

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