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In my first Front Line for 1994 I indicated that we have given inadequate attention and priority to ALIA's relationships with libraries and professional associations internationally, and particularly within our own geographic region of Asia and the Pacific. I also mentioned that the intended review of the Association's International Relations Committee (IRC) should provide us with an effective instrument with which we can address this situation.

General Council, at its meeting on 25-26 March, received a report on the future membership and role of the IRC. After some debate, it agreed on the membership and on a broad mission statement for the IRC. Council asked specialists on the committee to review this statement and recommend specific objectives and terms of reference for their future activity.

International relations, including professional relationships in our immediate geographic region, is one of those issues that has easy acceptance by most people whilst its meaning is vague and costs us little. This has been the case for many years—it is essentially seen as an altruistic activity, which gives us all a warm feeling. It may well be a different matter when we have specific and competing issues along with their necessary costs.

What is now required within ALIA is a constructive debate on the priorities for our international policy involvement, leading to the costing and commitment of funds for these activities.

There is a very wide range of interests that can be considered under the mantle of international relations. Without attempting to be inclusive, there is first the personal and professional interest and commitment of many of our members to appropriate support and assistance programs in the re-

gion and elsewhere. There is also the more formal strategic institutional alliances that ALIA has established with the National Library of Australia in its international activities and with the International Development Program of Australian Universities and Colleges (IDP) in the ALIIS (Australian Library and Information International Services) program. There is the long term and considered decision to strongly involve ourselves in the activities of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA). There is the internal involvement of our Board of Education in reviewing, accrediting and accepting overseas qualifications, or Australian professional programs provided off-shore. Finally, we have a particularly strong special interest group within the Association, APSIG, the Asia Pacific Special Interest Group.

All of these interests will, hopefully, play some part in determining the future role, direction and priorities in international relations for the Association. It is relatively easy to ensure that there is input from the institutional areas as given above—it is less easy to ensure that we obtain representative input from our individual members. It is my belief that more and more Australian librarians are developing an interest in international librarianship. It is certainly true that attendance by Australian librarians at international and regional conferences and seminars such as the Congress of South East Asian Libraries (CONSAL), IFLA, etc, has increased dramatically over the last five years. This would seem to reflect a more outward looking trend by Australian librarians, a genuine desire to learn more about international librarianship and to offer advice and assistance where appropriate.

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Australian professional library input into our immediate region and particularly into the ASEAN countries has a very good record of quality contributions. A variety of objective assessments by funding agencies have verified the benefit that has passed from country to country. It should be stressed however, that most of this professional assistance has, to date, been the result of aid programs. As the Australian aid budget shrinks and economies of many of the recipient countries dramatically increase (Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand are classic examples) more and more paid consultancy and contract work becomes available.

Marketing of library services into South East Asia is a relatively recent development for Australia and a number of avenues for cooperation, assistance and consulting are opening up in the region. These opportunities can be taken up by individuals, with appropriate expertise and contacts; and by institutions, such as the State Libraries of New South Wales and Queensland and the commercial arms of the Universities and TAFEs. There are also specialist agencies that facilitate consultancy and project work such as the Overseas Development Corporation of Victoria, SAGRIC (the South Australian equivalent) and by ALIIS, the Australian Library and Information International Services.

It is very important, if we are to retain our current high level of professional credibility in the region, that our market strategies and planning be ethical, calculated for the long term and based on cultural sensitivity and understanding. Australian librarians have played a significant role in library development in the region and I hope that we will continue to do so in the future. ■