

South African Constitution being shaped by librarians

Felicity Williams, Northern Territory library

South African cricketers have a team that is still largely drawn from the white population in South Africa, a recent news report tells of a white school in Potgietersrus being forced, by a court order, to integrate their students. Perhaps these groups would do well to take a leaf from the book of libraries in that country.

Twelve months ago I attended a library conference in Durban, South Africa, *Library and information services in developing South Africa (LISCESA): a working conference on libraries and information services for the reconstruction and development of South Africa*.

I felt very privileged to be a part of this gathering. As I am South African born — of so-called *coloured* heritage — the issues at hand were of personal consequence to me. I had not visited the place for twenty years and wondered if I would be considered, or would feel like, an outsider. However, I had fantastic support from former colleagues.

It was a fascinating conference which focussed on the role of libraries and information services in the Reconstruction and Development Program. Government literature heralded the Reconstruction and Development Program as an instrument for transforming both government and society so that government is more transparent and accountable to the people.

However the rhetoric did not link the provision of information with libraries! This conference was aiming to redress that and to highlight the roles that libraries and information services should have within Reconstruction and Development Program planning and implementation. With this end in mind the 300 conference delegates went into two days of brainstorming.

The first day was the normal setting the scene scenario; then the two days of brainstorming; finishing with a morning of summing up, evaluation and strategy setting led by Kay Raseroka from the International Fed-

eration of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA).

Groups of about 15 to 20 people were asked to consider how to provide library and information services to meet basic needs, develop human resources, build the economy, and to democratise the state and society.

It was a challenge to confront the impact of our biases, prejudices and varied backgrounds. For some participants it was first time that they were asked to voice their views about libraries and information services in front of another racial group. It was challenging and immensely rewarding.

Library politics was at the forefront of discussions: the major issue was the formation of a truly democratic library association.

The conference was a microcosm of the major issue in the country at the time: the development of a new constitution for South Africa. Hopefully librarians will continue to play a leading role.



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value of and access to patents for information providers and potential/current users of patents. Convenor: Jane Hiscock, Uni of South Aust Library, Ph: (08) 302 6279; Fax: (08) 302 6756.

8-11/9 Records Management Association of Australia 1996 National Convention. Theme: *Re-engineering — the electronic records future*. National Convention Centre — Canberra. Conference Secretariat: ACTS, GPO Box 200, Canberra 2600; Ph: (06) 257 3299; e-mail: acts@ozemail.com.au.

3-5/10 International Association of Music Libraries...(Australia) biennial conference — Call for papers. Theme: *More byte than Bach?* The impact of technology in music libraries.... Uni of Melbourne Conference Centre, Parkville Vic. Contact Georgina Binns, Ph: (03) 9905 3236, Fax: (03) 9905 9142; e-mail: georgina.binns@lib.monash.edu.au.

• 21-23/1/1997 Information on line & on disc conference. ALIA information science section. Sydney Convention & Exhibition Centre, Darling Harbour. Ph Wael Foda (02) 332 4622, fax (02) 332 4066.

• 12-16/10/1997 7th Asian Pacific Specials, Health and Law Librarians' Conference and exhibition - Perth. *On The Edge*. Venue: Duxton Hotel, Perth. Motive Conventions, GPO Box M973, Perth 6001, Ph: (09) 322 2666, Fax: (09) 322 1417.

CONFERENCE

• 6-11/10 4th biennial conference. World Congress Centre. *Reading the future*. Convenor, Ms Helen Tait. Convention Network, Ph: (03) 646 4122, Fax: (03) 646 7737.

• 7/10 Vic UCRLS Pre-Conference seminar & workshop on performance indicators. Venue: Terrace Pacific Inn, Spencer Street, Melbourne. Time: 9.30-4pm. Cost: \$75 ALIA members; \$95 others. Morning/Afternoon tea and lunch included. Contact: Colin Bates, Ph: (052) 272 713, Fax: (052) 272 000, e-mail: colinb@deakin.edu.au.

• 7/10 ALIA acquisitions national section: Current issues in collection management workshop. 10-4pm, Melbourne. Further details to be announced. Contact: Sue Clarke, e-mail: sclarke@rmit.edu.au.

• 7/10 ALIA acquisitions national section: Accessing information 2001 — the role of acquisitions librarians in the new millennium seminar and workshop. 9.30-4pm, Bridge Room 2, Centra on the Yarra. \$50 (section members), \$70 (others). Program and booking details to be announced in *inCite* Events and mailed to members.

• 8/10 ALIA acquisitions national section: Biennial dinner. River Seafood Grill, Mid-level Southgate (opposite Yarra Footbridge), 7pm. \$40 (plus drinks). Enjoy the company, the view and the food. Bookings essential. Contact: Louise Russell, DA Information Services, 648 Whitehorse Road, Mitcham 3132, Ph: (03) 9210 7777.

• 8/10 ALIA biennial conference public libraries section dinner. Double-decker bus leaves World Congress Centre at 7.30pm, travels over West Gate Bridge to an amazingly eclectic western suburbs pub — the Commercial Hotel in Yarraville — with great food and music. Cost \$50. Contact: Alison Trembath, Ph: (059) 860 347.

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