

Beijing hosts IFLA conference

Virginia Walsh

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The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) Conference held in Beijing in September broke all previous attendance records with 2384 delegates from ninety-four countries. In attempting to summarise the event, IFLA president, Bob Wedgeworth, chose one word — overwhelming. Indeed the Chinese people were generous in their welcome and hospitality throughout the conference. Poor English was no obstacle to communication in this environment of convivial goodwill.

The scale of the city of Beijing is, in many respects, unparalleled elsewhere in the world. To stand in Tiananmen Square and survey the surrounding monumental buildings — Mao's Mausoleum, the Great Hall of the People — is breathtaking. The majesty of the Great Wall of China must be experienced to be understood.

The conference was formally opened by Li Peng, Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China. Other conference events were enthusiastically supported by government representatives including a dinner for 2500 at the Great Hall of the People hosted by Luo Gan, State Councillor and Secretary-General of the State Council, and an evening of cultural entertainment hosted by the Minister and Vice Minister of Culture. The capacity to meet the demands of servicing a conference of the magnitude of an IFLA event was amply demonstrated and will be difficult to emulate in future years.

More than thirty Australians travelled to the IFLA conference and participated in a

variety of professional sessions. I hope to provide reports on these sectional activities in later issues of *inCite*. My own interest is principally in the activities of the Round Table on the Management of Library Associations. The Round Table hosted a conference session and a workshop on Association management issues — particularly focussing on the needs of associations in developing countries. In this context it was good to meet with some members of other Associations in our region with whom we have already established a process of information exchange. Arlene Cohen from the Pacific Islands Association of Libraries and Archives (PIALA) gave a presentation which made it clear that the problems faced by her members mostly include administrative arrangements that we take for granted. For example they have difficulties contacting each other by phone or fax. The prospect of e-mail connections for PIALA members is thwarted with political and infrastructure problems.

While strengthening our relations with Associations in our region is an important and ongoing responsibility for ALIA, there were opportunities at IFLA to exchange information with a number of colleagues from associations in North America and Europe. I was particularly delighted to meet with the executive director of the Special Libraries Association, Dr David Bender, to discuss the development of closer relations. Information sharing, including the potential for ALIA members to participate in SLA training sessions by satellite, were key issues discussed. Negotiations with SLA are continuing and the ALIA Special Libraries National Section will be involved in these negotiations.

Australia continues its high profile within IFLA through the role of the director general of the National Library of Australia, Warren Horton, who is on the Executive Board of IFLA and serves as treasurer. The demands on board members are significant and include a great deal of ceremonial and hospitality activities in addition to dealing with important professional issues. At this conference a statement on copyright was approved by the Executive Board and a number of important matters relating to freedom of information were debated. Warren will continue in his capacity as

At the cultural evening held during the conference



JOINT SESSION OF IFLA & ICA



ALIA executive director Virginia Walsh presenting her IFLA speech, The future of libraries and opportunities for partnerships

treasurer until elections are held at the next conference in Copenhagen in August 1997. It is a reflection of Warren's excellent performance that he has broad and enthusiastic support should he decide to stand in the election for IFLA president next year.

The conference of the International Congress on Archives (ICA) took place immediately following the IFLA event. The important conjunction of the two conferences in Beijing, and the close working relations between archivists and librarians, was marked by a joint meeting of the two organisations and senior people in both professions on Sunday, 1 September. This meeting commenced with a speech given by a representative of the international archive community selected by ICA and a representative of the international library community se-

lected by IFLA. I was delighted and honoured to be the IFLA speaker and addressed the topic of the future of libraries and opportunities for partnerships. A speech was also given by a representative of UNESCO. Delegates then had the opportunity to consider the draft text of *The Beijing Agenda* — a document designed to identify matters of mutual concern. It is appropriate that we explore further opportunities for co-operation with the archive community here in Australia and the Beijing meeting will provide the catalyst for pursuing such a union. My speech can be found on the ALIANet at <http://www.alia.org.au/aliamet/speeches/vw.beijing.html>, and will be published in the *Australian Library Journal*.

As one Chinese delegate observed: a journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step. IFLA in Beijing provided the impetus for journeys towards a number of important goals. We hope that many more Australians will attend the next event in Denmark. Information about that conference, including details of a proposed study tour, will be available at our Biennial Conference in Melbourne in October.

A meeting of interested ALIA members will be held and details will appear in *EBSCO Express* or inquiries can be made at the ALIA stand. I look forward to seeing many of you in Melbourne. ■



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