

Impressions of IFLA

Warren Horton, director-general, National Library of Australia

Australian librarians have been increasingly active in IFLA since its annual conference was held in Sydney, back to back with our own ALIA Bicentenary biennial conference, in 1988. IFLA is the world body for librarianship, and the Australian profession has much to contribute to its activities. The recent Beijing Conference is the fifth time IFLA has held its conference in the Asia/Oceania Region since it first met in this part of the world in Manila in 1980. There was particular interest among delegates in regional developments and IFLA's answers to the challenge of supporting the profession in developing countries. There were over thirty-five Australian delegates, many of whom participated in the program and business meetings.

I am the IFLA treasurer and a member of its executive and professional boards, responsible respectively for its policy and professional activities. Because of these responsibilities I, as usual, attended few professional sessions at the conference, apart from the opening and closing sessions. But I gave a paper on the NLA/NLNZ Na-

tional Document and Information Service Joint Project, and our marketing intentions in Australia for WORLD 1, in a session with the theme 'How are national libraries using information technology to forward their overall strategy?' The other speakers were from the national libraries of China, Singapore, Japan and the Cook Islands, reflecting interest at this conference in regional developments.

The most interesting debates during the conference were those about issues concerning intellectual freedom. IFLA at the 1995 Istanbul Conference set up a Committee on Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (CAIFE) to draft policies for matters which might be acceptable to the international library community. Alex Byrne represents Australia, and I, the executive board on CAIFE. The Beijing conference was a first opportunity for the committee to meet, and it also held an open forum to allow delegates to express their views on what issues should be addressed in this policy. There were



Warren Horton (l) with IFLA president, Bob Wedgeworth (r)

some tensions during the conference, not obvious to most delegates, over human rights and intellectual freedom.

The Beijing Conference was very heavily supported by the Government of China, with major functions including a dinner in the Great Hall of the People hosted by Luo Gan, State Councillor and Secretary-General of the State Council, and a major cultural entertainment event in the Beijing Exhibition Centre Theatre. Western delegates were astonished that transport problems from the conference centre/hotel to these two events were easily solved by the police closing off peak-hour traffic for their convoy of sixty buses! Chinese hospitality throughout the conference was overwhelming, with protocol rigid but interesting. ■



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