

Librarian keeps the pages of hope turning

Graham Cook

Enes Kunjundzic would not consider himself a warrior. A quietly spoken, civilised man, he is more at home with books and academic journals than guns and tanks.

But Dr Kunjundzic's country is Bosnia-Herzegovina where there are no non-combatants and the front line is never more than the next street away.

He is the director of the Sarajevo Public Library Service — and for Australians accustomed to watching the carnage from the besieged city on the nightly news, the remarkable thing would be that such an institution continues to exist. Exist it does, and that is why the scholarly Dr Kunjundzic has won a victory, for himself and the people of his unfortunate city.

He agrees that at the height of the war that racked the country in the early 1990s, it may have seemed a futile gesture. When he took up his post in late 1993, the library's main building had

been reduced to rubble by artillery. In a city where telephones, electricity, most of the requisites of civilised living, had ceased to function, what was the point of a library service?

'There was an effort by the besiegers to paralyse the life of Sarajevo', he said. 'If you succeed in keeping things moving, you are winning a victory over them.'

'It would have been easy to say "let's go to the basement and hide". It would also have been wrong. If as many people as possible carry out their normal lives, then those who wage the war have failed.'

The guns have, for the moment at least, been silenced but Dr Kunjundzic is now fighting a new battle — not this time for survival, but for the reconstruction of much that has been lost in the conflict. His main enemy is international indifference.

'One of the worst things I have had to face is listening to fine words and promises, then discovering, when the time comes to deliver, that they are empty', he said.

'It is bitterly disappointing. Much of what we have lost is gone forever ... old manuscripts and books that are irreplaceable.'

'We have had gifts from many countries but, most importantly, we need a clear-cut commitment to help us rebuild our institutions, everything else is welcome but also secondary.'

Dr Kunjundzic was in Canberra recently as part of an Australian tour in which he has been visiting the major libraries, re-establishing contacts, and exploring areas of co-operation.

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Australian
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PREMIER AWARDS

*Nominations are now being called
for the following honorary awards of the
Australian Library and Information Association*

HCL ANDERSON AWARD

The General Council may confer the HCL Anderson Award on any person who is a professional member of the Association or who holds an overseas qualification in librarianship or archives, which is recognised as a professional qualification by a library association or archives association in the country concerned, and who has rendered outstanding service to librarianship or the library profession in Australia, or to ALIA, or to the theory or practice of librarianship.

REDMOND BARRY AWARD

The General Council may confer the Redmond Barry Award on any person who is not eligible to be a professional member of the Association and who is not employed in a library, who, in the opinion of General Council, has rendered outstanding service to the promotion of a library or libraries, ALIA, the theory or practice of librarianship, or to an associated field such as bibliography.

ELLINOR ARCHER AWARD

The General Council may confer the Ellinor Archer Award on any person employed or who has been employed in libraries, who is not eligible for Associateship of ALIA, who has rendered outstanding service to libraries, the promotion of a library or libraries, the theory or practice of librarianship or to an associated field such as systems, conservations, management or bibliography.

Confidentiality

It is essential that nominees should NOT be aware that they are nominated for an award. Nominations are considered by the Honorary Awards Committee and Council in committee, and details are published only when the nominations are successful.

Divisions of ALIA are particularly asked not to note nominations in their agenda papers or minutes. Disclosure of such details can prejudice a nomination.

Nomination forms

Nomination forms and further information on each of the awards may be obtained from the National Office. Nominations for the HCL Anderson Award, the Redmond Barry Award and Ellinor Archer Award close on 1 February 1997.

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