

## Your voice

### Thank you...

A letter of appreciation for your coverage of the damage and destruction of cultural property resulting from the war in Iraq in the May issue of *inCite*. A special thank you to Joyce Kirk, ALIA president, for her Frontline commentary on media coverage of the unfolding war itself as a television spectacular.

It is good to read of ALIA's input to world events which affect our international cultural heritage and help keep retired ALIA members informed.

**Shirley McGlynn (life member)**

### Destruction, damage and looting in Iraq

I wish to respond to the excellent coverage you gave to the tragic destruction, damage and looting which occurred as a result of the recent war in Iraq and its aftermath.

Even now, we have no hard information about the state of libraries in Iraq. Reports in the media suggest that many libraries and archives have been affected, in addition to the National Library and archives. We also hear stories that important collections had been removed to safe havens before the war, and that materials looted have been handed into mosques following appeals by religious leaders. But we have not so far been able to establish direct contact with professionals in Iraq.

We were pinning our hopes on a multi-disciplinary fact-finding mission to Iraq organised by UNESCO. A distinguished and experienced member of staff of the Bibliothèque nationale de France was identified by UNESCO to be part of the team of nine people. However, I understand that the interim administration in Iraq has refused permission for him to enter Iraq on the grounds that he is French. A German member of the team has also been refused permission. A team of four consisting entirely of archaeologists was allowed to go. I understand that a second mission may be permitted to visit later, so we are pressing for a librarian to be included. The situation is outrageous and I hope that the interim administration will relent in the face of criticism, not to say incredulity.

I appreciate Joyce Kirk's suggestion that the Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict was weakened by the US Defense Secretary's remark that 'stuff happens'. However, neither the United States nor the United Kingdom governments has yet ratified the convention. Another way of looking at the situation is that their

credibility as proponents of civilised values is weakened. Our efforts to get more countries to ratify the convention and its second Protocol will certainly be redoubled. The latter requires twenty states to ratify it for it to come into force. Once it does so, destruction of cultural property in time of conflict will become a war crime.

I urge readers to protest to the United States and United Kingdom governments and to the Australian government as a member of the 'coalition of the willing' at the decision to refuse entry to the full UNESCO mission.

**Ross Shimmon, IFLA secretary general, and president, International Committee of the Blue Shield**

**Ed: ALIA is one of a number of cultural associations working with the federal government in this area. The minister will be making an announcement regarding Australia's role to assist Iraq in due course. The Association will keep members informed of developments as they happen.**

### Another concerned librarian...

I refer to *inCite* May 2003 and the letter from a 'concerned librarian' regarding the circumstances surrounding the selling of books from the Parliamentary Library collection.

It seems that the parliamentary librarian is at a disadvantage in trying to defend himself from anonymous detractors. Surely, all letters published in a professional magazine such as *inCite* should be signed or at least carry an explanation from the editor as to why the writer's name has not been supplied.

If those who are so upset by this project were to declare themselves and come forward and discuss the issues involved openly, instead of taking pot shots from behind the cover of anonymity, they might begin to appreciate the parliamentary librarian's honest and courageous effort in making difficult decisions for the future well being of the state's parliamentary collection.

**Pam Cameron-Smith**

**Ed: *inCite* does not normally allow letters to be published without the authors name attached. In this case it was allowed, in large part due to the fact that the parliamentary librarian was able to respond before the letter went to print.**

**Your letters on any issue of relevance to the library and information sector are welcomed.**

All letters should be addressed to the *inCite* editor and may be e-mailed to [incite@alia.org.au](mailto:incite@alia.org.au), or faxed to 02 6282 2249, or posted to: Your voice, ALIA, PO Box E441, Kingston 2604. Please include your name and postal address with your letter or e-mail.

Letters will be accepted for publication until the 18th of the month.

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