

# Giving the new generation a voice

There is a Vietnamese saying 'the tree wants to stand quietly but the wind blows.' It captures Vietnam's current situation as a communist country with an emerging economy and increasing links with Asian, European and North American commerce and cultures. To stand quietly the tree — Vietnam — needs deep roots — its culture.

The wind is also blowing for the Vietnamese library and information services community. The internet has arrived, and, unsurprisingly has been taken up predominantly by the under 30's, according to a recent survey. While usage is only at about twenty per cent it is expected to grow, in an economy that encourages enterprise and a society with a good literacy rate and thirst for education and training. The challenge is there for the library and information services community to play its role in facilitating access to electronic information and managing the cultural impact of that information. As the saying implies, there are good winds and ill winds and both are inevitable but if the roots are strong enough the tree will remain standing. A reflection on the last 100 years of Vietnam's history gives an understanding of the philosophy and attitudes behind the saying.

One initiative the library and information services sector is considering is setting up a national library association. ALIA and the Malaysian Library Association were sponsored to participate in a workshop in Hanoi in September with 100 representatives from major library organisations in Vietnam, to work through the many issues involved. The workshop was managed by RMIT Vietnam and Atlantic Philanthropies. I represented ALIA and it had an aligned interest through Mike Robinson, the project director, a member of ALIA's International Relations Policy and Advisory Group, and currently based in Ho Chi Mihn City.

An interest in national associations is being sparked, or in some cases re-ignited, in many countries. The plus for ALIA is that like much of the Australian library and information services sector, it has a lot to offer others to learn from. It has a growing international reputation as a dynamic and innovative organisation, that is not weighed down by the dead hand of tradition, it is just getting on and doing and achieving, often with limited resources. This year ALIA has participated in workshops in Vietnam and with the standing committee of Eastern Central and Southern African Library Associations in Johannesburg and worked with representatives from library associations in Taiwan, New

Caledonia, Sri Lanka, Papua New Guinea and Singapore. ALIA continues to take a prominent role in the activities of the IFLA Section for the Management of Library Associations (SMLA).

The wind of regeneration is blowing with the wind of rejuvenation. This year the organising committee for the IFLA 2002 program for SMLA decided to depart from the usual diet served up by the long established and resource rich associations and give the floor to our new generation and their provocative thoughts. Charles Batambuze and his young team have revitalised the Uganda Library Association and are succeeding in raising the profile of the sector — 'what is the point of holding office if you don't do something positive with it' says Charles. Bernard Dione is challenging the Senegalese Library association to use international forums to promote to the government the desperate need for resources in the sector. Natalie Blanchard, convenor of ALIA's New Generation Policy and Advisory Group stressed the importance of giving the new generation a voice and an opportunity to learn from those with a wealth of experience. Judging from the ensuing discussions the 200 strong audience of predominantly over-40s went away with a belief in the future of our sector and a personal commitment to nurture new professionals.

Another measure of rejuvenation was Kay Raseroka, IFLA president-elect's brainstorming session to encourage commitments to IFLA's core values (see the IFLA website: <http://www.ifla.com>) and prepare for her presidential platform. The session in planning had hoped for twelve tables of twelve participants. In fact the room had to be opened up to accommodate twenty tables. Most tables included participants from every continent. The main issues Kay took away were:

- the importance of advocacy and partnerships;
- translation of our body of literature to other languages to increase the sharing of knowledge;
- the promotion of literacy and especially information literacy;
- international support for the work of IFLA FAIFE (see our January 2003 joint workshop);
- best practice support and promotion, particularly through library association; and
- a forum for young professionals to balance the 'greying'.

Kay is looking at setting up a new generation group based on ALIA's model to assist her presidency. The issues show the universality of our sector, coming out of a conference with 4765 delegates from 122 countries and with probably a record twenty-two per cent first-timers.

Well, I'm off to get my grey roots touched up and investigate language classes.

Alex Byrne, ALIA Fellow and IFLA Board member believes Australia punches way above its weight in the international arena. So please, let *inCite* hear about it. ■



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## Feedback to your Board of Directors

Do you have an idea, compliment or concern about *your* Association? Contact any director below on personal issues and ideas will be reviewed at each meeting of the Board.

E-mail to [feedback@alia.org.au](mailto:feedback@alia.org.au) will be automatically forwarded to all Board members.

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