

14th General Conference of the Congress of Southeast Asian Librarians (CONSAL)

Towards Dynamic Libraries and Information Services in Southeast Asian Countries



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The Congress of Southeast Asian Librarians (CONSAL) was formed in Singapore in 1970 to establish, maintain and strengthen networks among libraries in the region; promote cooperation and provide assistance in the development of libraries and information services; and provide a platform for sharing information and experiences on issues in librarianship and information sciences. Today CONSAL has grown to include 10 member countries: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

This year, the 14th CONSAL General Conference was held on 21 - 22 April 2009 at the Melia Hotel in Hanoi, Vietnam, with the theme "Towards Dynamic Libraries and Information Services in Southeast Asian Countries". More than 800 librarians and information professionals from 24 countries participated in and attended the conference.

At the opening ceremony, guests and delegates were entertained with beautiful dance and music performances by Vietnamese children, reflecting the rich and vibrant Vietnamese culture. Delegates from the 10-member countries were introduced as representatives marched in with the flags of their respective nations. After the Vietnamese national anthem and ASEAN anthem were played, Vietnam's Vice President Professor Dr Nguyen Thi Doan welcomed the delegates.

Vietnamese Minister of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, Mr Hoang Anh Tuan, in his opening speech, emphasised that knowledge and information were a decisive force in the development of a modern society, and libraries and information centres played an essential role in the advancement of their country and the whole of humankind. Welcome speeches were also made by Dr Susanne Ornager, Adviser for Communication and Information in Asia, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); Ms Jan Fullerton, Director-General of the National Library of Australia, representing the Conference of Directors of National Libraries of Asia and Oceania (CDNLAO), and Ms Deborah Jacobs, Deputy Director of

Global Libraries, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

In her keynote address, Professor Ching-Chih Chen from the Graduate School of Library and Information Sciences, Simmons College, Boston, highlighted her cutting-edge technology application in presenting multilingual information and photographic resources on the 878 World Heritage Sites from 145 countries.

Dr Patricia G. Oyler, also from Simmons College, spoke about the influence and impact on the developments in libraries in one part of the world by libraries in another part. She outlined five such developments that would impact Southeast Asian libraries – shortage of qualified personnel; marketing and advocacy of the role of libraries; change of scholarly communications from print to electronic with the increasing use of technology; adopting common standards by libraries the world over; and recognition of the role of libraries in the preservation of cultural heritage and archival materials. Dr Oyler stressed that education played a key role in tackling the issue, for example, educating librarians to provide excellent service, educating stakeholders such as government officials and university administrators in providing funding and educating users on how the information available at the libraries could add value to their lives.

Dr N. Varapasad, Chief Executive, National Library Board Singapore, spoke on leveraging on volunteers for sustainable library services. Library services in the CONSAL countries are usually manpower-intensive, resulting in difficulties in scaling up due to staffing limitations. Dr Varapasad introduced the volunteer management strategy implemented by Public Libraries Singapore for the recruitment, selection, training, deployment, monitoring, motivation and recognition of volunteers as a self-sustaining force for libraries. Libraries could then implement additional programmes without burdening their existing staff.

The keynote speakers for the second day were Dr Gary Gorman, Professor of Information Management, School of Information Management at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, who



The signing ceremony of CONSAL 14th Resolution
 Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Lam

touched on key considerations and issues faced in the practice of digital preservation; and Mr Akio Yasue, former Deputy Librarian of the National Diet Library, Japan, who spoke on the development and implementation of preservation management.

A total of 42 papers written by 54 delegates from all over the world were presented during the two-day conference, which was organised into three parallel sessions, "Library Services and Dynamic Libraries and Information Services", "Library Education and Emerging Technology" and "Library Management and Marketing and Library Association/Profession". Among the major topics that were discussed during the conference were applications of advanced technology; library administration; marketing; training, and professional development for librarians and information professionals.

The closing ceremony included presentation of the CONSAL Outstanding Librarian Award. The award honours the significant contribution of librarians who have been committed in promoting library development and professional growth of librarians in ASEAN countries. Former Director-General of the National Library of Malaysia, Datuk Zawiyah Binti Baba, was awarded the gold medal. Four other distinguished librarians who received silver medals were Mr Salmubi from Indonesia, Ms Salvacion M. Arlante from the Philippines, Mrs Kiang-Koh Lai Lin from Singapore and Mr Nguyen Minh Hiep from Vietnam.

In a second award ceremony, Dr Varaprasad and Mr Akio were presented with the "For the Achievements of Culture, Sports and Tourism" medal by Mr Hoang.



Dr N. Varaprasad receiving his medal from Mr Hoang Anh Tuan, the Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism
 Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Lam



*The handing over of the CONGESSAL flag to Indonesia, the host country for the 15th CONGESSAL General Conference
Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Lam*

The CONGESSAL flag was then handed over to Indonesia, the next host country for the conference. It will be held in Bali, Indonesia in 2012. The conference closed with a farewell dinner for all delegates hosted by Mr Hoang.

Besides the conference, delegates were also given the opportunity to learn and experience firsthand the culture and hospitality of the Vietnamese people. The "Gala Night" held at the Hanoi Opera House showcased cultural dance and music performances by the Opera House troupe. The delegates also got a glimpse of the cultures of their fellow delegates through the short dance, song and drama performances put up by these delegates during "Gala Night".

After the two-day conference, the delegates were taken on a tour to Halong Bay, a UNESCO World Heritage site; the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum; Ho Chi Minh Museum and the Ethnology Museum, which provided the delegates with a deeper insight into the history, culture and people of Vietnam

The 14th CONGESSAL General Conference had successfully achieved its objectives. It had provided the platform for delegates from around the region and beyond to exchange ideas, viewpoints and practices and share their experiences on the different ways of making libraries and information centres more dynamic and effective in their respective countries.

We look forward to the next conference in 2012.



*A cultural dance performance by the Opera House troupe during Gala Night
Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Lam*