

PRIORITIES AND DIRECTIONS FOR THE GLOBAL ARCHIVAL COMMUNITY

Good morning. It is a great pleasure for me to be with you at this conference and to become better acquainted with the archival communities in Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Region. From the various meetings that I have attended this week, I can testify that your international reputation for vitality and originality is well deserved. I am grateful to the Joint Conference Committee for inviting me to address you today— although whether you will be grateful to them once I have finished is much more doubtful.

Earlier this week I was privileged to attend the conference of the Pacific branch of the International Council on Archives (PARBICA). The lively discussions on such subjects as the importance of record keeping, disaster prevention and preparedness, and education and training have provided me with emphatic confirmation that it is probably the strongest branch in the ICA network of thirteen regional branches covering the entire globe. In particular, its toolkit *Record Keeping for Good Governance* is an excellent product which has already been translated into French and adapted for use in other parts of the world – next week it will be the subject of training sessions at our West African branch meeting in Dakar. Their infectious enthusiasm has given me, a somewhat jaded bureaucrat based in Paris, renewed hope for the future of our profession and for ICA.

When I register for conferences from the ICA Secretariat in Paris, people often expect to meet a sophisticated Frenchman, with deep intellectual and cultural interests (preferably including a convincing line in the latest existentialist philosophy), stylish presentation, perfect manners and a charming accent. This impression rarely lasts for very long once I begin to express myself in my far from dulcet Scottish tones. Instead of perfect manners, my hosts observe a certain Caledonian intensity. There is the well known story of the Scottish soccer manager, who once opined 'football isn't a matter of life or death – it is much more important than that'. I tend to express myself in much the same way about archives and the International Council on Archives.

The title of my talk encompasses a vast subject which only the foolhardy and arrogant would feel able to tackle with any confidence. Lachlan Macquarie, governor of the penal settlement at Botany Bay, had the title of 'Father of Australia' inscribed on his grave on the Scottish island of Mull. I hope that I do not make too many grandiose claims of this kind in this address, although the temptation of make sweeping generalizations will no doubt be irresistible at times.

I should confess that this is my first visit to Australia and that my knowledge of this fascinating country is of a somewhat general character. In the Oscar Wilde play *Lady Windermere's Fan* one of the characters states that

‘(Australia) must be so pretty with all the dear little kangaroos flying about. Agatha has just found it on the map. What a curious shape it is! Just like a large packing case’. I would like to think that my knowledge of Australia is not quite as superficial as this. Indeed, one of the key messages of this presentation is that **Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific nations are well and truly on the modern global archival map.**

I want to begin my talk by describing the changes brought about globalization and their likely impact on the daily work of records and archives professionals. I then want to outline how we might respond to these challenges in ways that protect and enhance our professional identity and raise our public profile. It is stretching the imagination beyond reasonable limits to believe that entirely satisfactory responses to these global challenges are to be found within national boundaries. Indeed, I want to suggest that our objectives can be achieved only if there is increased co-operation among archivists at the international level, and that the International Council on Archives is the obvious organization to provide the principal framework within which this co-operation should take place.

We all know that it is becoming easier to communicate and to travel across the globe. It is, however, worth reflecting what a profound upheaval has taken place in the last fifty years or so. If I may give a personal example drawn from my family –

the youngest sister of my maternal grandfather emigrated to Australia just after the first world war and, although they kept in touch by letter for the following fifty years or so, they never saw each other again. In contrast, I am in daily contact with Australian friends and colleagues by e-mail, and it took me only 24 hours to reach Brisbane from Paris. It is worth noting that, as late as 1961, Richie Benaud led the victorious Australian cricket team back home from England **by boat**. If we as a profession do not take advantage of these increased opportunities for co-operation, then we may be rapidly overtaken by competitor professional groups (e.g. various brands of information manager and IT expert) who are striding boldly into what has traditionally been regarded as the territory of the professional archivist.

Before we consider the situation of our profession today, we should note some of the general trends associated with globalization.

First, **an increase in population** – it is estimated that by 2050 there will be 9.5 billion people on the planet, an increase of 3 billion on today. Two-thirds of the world's inhabitants will live in towns, of which the population will have doubled.

Second, **global warming and climate change**. – it is projected that, if present trends continue, the Earth's average temperature will increase by two degrees by 2050. The consequence of global warming will be increasing fluctuations in temperatures and a greater number of natural

catastrophes at a huge financial cost. The rise in sea water levels as a result of the melting of polar ice caps will greatly reduce the surface area available for habitation by the rising population. As the distinguished American economist Joseph Stiglitz has put it, 'the Maldives will within 50 years be our 21st century Atlantis, disappearing beneath the ocean; a third of Bangladesh will be submerged'. Clearly, this climatic trend has important implications for the design of archive buildings and the development of emergency response management programmes.

These two factors will combine to produce a third phenomenon, **a shortage of natural resources**. It will be necessary to double agricultural production by mid-century in order to feed the world's increased population, while the amount of land under cultivation is currently decreasing by five million hectares every year as a result of urbanization. The warmer, drier climates – every year the African desert increases by an area the size of Belgium – will cause a shortage of drinking water.

On the political front, archival institutions, which have largely developed within the framework of the nation state, now need to adapt to new structures. It is likely that regional organizations (for example, ASEAN, the European Union and Mercosur) will become increasingly important decision-making centres. International organizations (for example, the International Monetary Fund) have a significant impact on the

life of developing countries in particular. In the United Nations System, both UNESCO and the UNDP run programmes that are directly relevant to records and archives management which the profession should be doing more to influence.

In the age of the Information Society people are demanding easier and quicker access to the vastly increased quantities of data that are being generated. However, those who cannot access the Internet and use the latest technologies find that they are trapped on the wrong side of an ever widen digital divide. In the more advanced economies many people are enjoying longer retirements and greater opportunities for leisure pursuits. People are also becoming more mobile and moving to live and work in other countries. In order to counter-act the anonymity of modern urban living, many people strive to maintain their identity by rediscovering their roots – as the continuing popularity of family history, where many searches are now possible online, strongly indicates.

Probably the facet of globalization that has the most immediate impact on the daily work of archivists is technological change. With the advent of the Internet and increasingly sophisticated mobile phones, many people now communicate by text messages rather than by letter; blogs, face books and twitter are currently all the rage; music is on i-pods, and photographs are stored on digital cameras. Recent developments (not least Web 2.0 and now Web 3.0

technologies and 'cloud' computing) will make information more difficult to manage. We are now experiencing a data deluge as a result of digital technologies – the amounts of data being generated and stored are increasing exponentially and have reached astonishing proportions. The objects created are often compound and complex. There is no sign that this growth is abating. The issue of vast data volumes presents considerable challenges for records and archives management.

It will not come as news to this audience that advances in information technology are changing fundamentally the way documents and records are created, managed, preserved and made publicly available. There is the risk that the concept of archives – documents that should be kept permanently for present and future generations to consult – may be diluted or even disappear completely. Today some IT workers define 'archives' as any document that is not required for immediate business purposes, with no notion of permanence. Without a repeated insistence on **permanence** for records of enduring historical value, then contemporary societies will lose a part of their collective memory, history and identity. Only in this way will be paradoxical outcome – that people living in an Information Age are less well informed than previous generations about the essential facts that define the identity of individuals and communities – be avoided.

In the light of globalization and its associated phenomena, it may be anticipated that public authorities and private organizations will seek more information, from the records in the custody of professional archivists, about patterns of climate change and the location of, and entitlements to, natural resources. Public demands for easier and swifter access to the information contained in archives through the imaginative exploitation of web technologies. At the same time we will have to manage, select and preserve 'born digital' records in a bewildering variety of formats. We must not respond slowly and reluctantly to the digital revolution but should fully and enthusiastically embrace it so that we can influence its future direction. Decision-makers and the general public must not perceive archival institutions as holding information only in bulky traditional media, stored in buildings with expensive air-conditioning systems that may be considered environmentally unsound, and catering mainly for a small élite of onsite academic users. Unless it is decisively overturned, this perception will hamper archivists' efforts to raise their profile and obtain public support.

As a profession we should not be defensive in responding to these challenges. We should instead assert with confidence that we have, or are prepared to acquire, the competencies necessary to help contemporary societies obtain maximum benefits from effective information management. Archivists have at their disposal the conceptual frameworks, adapted

and amended as necessary, that are needed to provide the necessary intellectual control through the records continuum, from the moment that a record is created right through to its public presentation and preservation. At a time when we are faced with a deluge of data, with very little in the way of overall structure, society needs the skills of the archivist in appraising, selecting and disposing of this data as never before. The former Secretary General of IFLA has said that increasingly the role of information professionals will be to act as **intermediaries** between the creators of information and the general public, who will otherwise be completely bewildered by the wide variety of information sources available online. There should be little doubt that records and archives professionals, with their skills in managing, appraising and describing records in many media and formats and in accordance with internationally accepted standards, must play a leading role in acting as intermediaries, guiding the general public to reliable and authentic information in an increasingly anarchic information environment. I acknowledge that there are enormous implications for training and continual professional development in our profession if we are to carry out the role which society expects us to perform.

It is curious that, precisely at the time when records and archives professionals have **more to offer society than ever before**, the pressures on the profession to bury its identity, to

accept absorption within larger structures **have never been greater**. This is in part a consequence of the need for public administrations to reduce expenditure, and in part a misunderstanding of the archivist's role. ICA strongly believes that closer co-operation with our library colleagues in the areas of disaster preparedness, preservation, and public access arrangements (both onsite and online) can deliver major benefits for the records, public users, and the profession. However, we have our own distinctive and specific role, interacting with the creators of records and offering them advice and guidance on the introduction of electronic records systems. This role should be reinforced and not diluted as a result of organizational change. Many existing archival institutions have carefully cultivated relations with records creators for decades and sometimes centuries, and this relationship should not be discarded for short-term benefits. Archives have a critically important cultural dimension with the result that archival institutions are sometimes placed in cultural departments or directorates. However, if we have strong links with, and support from, the central administrations of our organizations, we are more likely to succeed in our mission to manage records from the moment of their creation. This is because our organizations, whether a national or state government, public authority or private enterprise, need a common approach to records management that is driven from the centre.

I have been reflecting on the connections between Ken Thibodeau's very illuminating address yesterday and the needs of PARBICA colleagues for practical measures, as expressed at their conference earlier this week. It has been argued that the needs of the national archives and other large institutions in the world's most advanced economies, focusing on the challenges of managing huge quantities of electronic records, are essentially distinct from those of small archive services in the developing world. This argument is sometimes pushed a stage further with the depressing conclusion that any attempt to cater for these very different needs through the International Council on Archives – or any other framework for international co-operation - is bound to end in failure. The ICA should concentrate on its traditional mission to support colleagues in the developing world, so the argument runs, and leave it at that.

Apart from the complete failure to take into account any basic notion of professional solidarity, this argument should be rejected on other grounds. The International Council on Archives has developed a major standard *Principles and Functional Requirements for the Management of Electronic Records*, which has been led by the National Archives of Australia, with strong participation from New Zealand, Malaysia, NARA in the US, and several European countries. This standard will be proposed for adoption by the International Standards Organization in the very near future.

Meanwhile work continues on the development of new modules that will enable its implementation in different parts of the world. Indeed, the standard (ICA Req) is intended to apply right across jurisdictional boundaries and to strengthen the hands of colleagues in stating their requirements for ERM systems in negotiations with the vendors of the global software industry. ICA needs to do much more to raise awareness of this standard so that sensible procurement decisions are taken to purchase software that incorporates the necessary functionality. ICA has a role to play in ensuring that the lessons learnt in applying new technologies in the advanced economies are made available to colleagues in developing countries, so that the same mistakes are not made twice.

I hope that it is reasonable to claim that, if the International Council on Archives did not exist, then it would have to be invented. The challenges relating to the management and preservation of archives transcend geographical frontiers and linguistic barriers. In the era of globalization, ICA, as the international Non Governmental Organization which advances the cause of archives and archivists on the global stage, is needed more than ever before – to share information, to pool expertise, to find solutions to common problems, to ensure the visibility of archives at the international level, and to enhance the understanding of the importance of archives for individuals and societies. Archival

practice – and the survival of records- is under challenge by digital technologies and the exponential rise in information volumes, which are far reaching and global in effect.

ICA today is a worldwide organization with about 1,500 institutional and individual members in 195 countries and territories. National archive services play a prominent part in our organization, together with colleagues from professional records management and archival associations, other archival institutions and individuals. We have thirteen regional branches, of which PARBICA is a distinguished example, covering the entire globe. We also have thirteen sections focusing on different professional specialisms and interests. We provide a forum for professional discussion across political divides, and play a key role in the development of major standards – perhaps the most obvious success in this area is ISAD (G) and the family of related descriptive standards. We are trying to develop new tools and standards, which will enable archivists to make the shift from being only the curators of historical documents to occupying the strategic position of information manager in the public and private sectors alike.

So what is ICA actually doing to achieve this ambitious aim? For a start, we have stated in our vision that ‘effective records and archives management is an essential precondition of good governance, the rule of law (and) administrative transparency.’ We have also defined clear

strategic objectives for the next ten years and are constructing a business plan which will support the realization of these objectives. In spite of the recession, ICA is enjoying a period of financial stability, thanks to the commitment of most of our members who continue to pay their membership dues. This has enabled us to commit 120,000 euros in total to the suite of projects in our professional programme in 2009 – a very far cry from the situation four years ago when the organization came close to bankruptcy. Applications for funding of specific projects are assessed by our Programme Commission principally in terms of their relevance to the achievement of one or more of our six strategic objectives.

The first objective is *to raise awareness of the importance of records and archives management with decision-makers and the general public*. One of the main initiatives in this area is the Universal Declaration on Archives prepared by our Section on Professional Associations (SPA) which will be proposed for approval at our AGM in Malta next month. We then intend to press UNESCO to endorse it. Many of our members also organize activities that focus on International Archives Day, which has been fixed on 9 June – the day on which ICA was created at UNESCO Headquarters in 1948. Although many countries have archive awareness campaigns at other times of year, International Archives Day was

celebrated this year in countries as far flung as Senegal, Algeria, Japan and the United Kingdom.

The second objective is *to influence the development and use of new technologies*. Here our flagship project is ICA-AtoM (Access to Memory), a freely available, multi-lingual, web-enabled open source software facilitating description of archives in accordance with ISAD (G) and related standards. This software is currently being tested by around 30 institutions around the globe, and Australia is represented in the group of testers. It is intended mainly to help smaller archive services, who could not afford to invest in commercial software, to make their catalogue descriptions available online, but several national archive services are seriously interested in it as well.

The third objective is *to build capacity in the records and archives profession*. In this connection I want to highlight the importance of the Blue Shield network for the protection of archives and other cultural property during natural catastrophes and armed conflicts. I must take this opportunity to express solidarity with the inhabitants of Samoa and Tonga who suffered so much during the recent tsunami. The Blue Shield emblem is the cultural equivalent of the Red Cross. In the Blue Shield archivists, librarians, museums curators and historical monument managers combine to pool expertise and resources that would be deployed in the event of a disaster or armed and also to

influence the decisions of civilian and military authorities. **ICA strongly advocates the establishment of Blue Shield national committees as the most effective way of increasing protection for archives and other cultural property threatened by natural disaster or armed conflicts.** At the present time there are over 30 national Blue Shield committees around the world either in operation or under construction, with new ones being set up most recently in Israel, Senegal and the United States. **As you will know, there is a highly active Blue Shield Committee in Australia – long may this continue!**

I turn now to the objectives which relate to ICA as an organization. The fourth objective is *to strengthen the ICA network*. A modern international organization cannot hope to have a major impact unless it has a user friendly website with up to date functionality. ICA has never enjoyed a website commensurate with the importance of its remit and we are presently attempting to remedy this long-standing weakness. The new website, parts of which we intend to unveil at our annual meeting next month, will present an attractive public image of our organization to external stakeholders, including grant-awarding bodies that might be persuaded to fund our projects. Examples of ICA publications and tools will also be presented in the public section of the website to encourage those records and archives professionals, who are not members of the organization, to

join. In an extensive membership only section of the website, our members will be able to download the latest ICA publications, newsletters, tools and standards, consult the minutes of governance bodies, and participate in ICA groups on various professional topics in confidential working areas.

It is worth stressing that ICA wishes to increase its membership, especially among archival institutions which are not national archives and individual archivists, and the new website is currently designed with this purpose very much in mind. It is amazing that the worldwide organization for archives has fewer than 300 individual members. By providing a clear statement of membership benefits, including access to the content rich 'members only' section of the new website, and by simplifying membership application procedures, we hope that many archivists will be tempted to join in an individual capacity, as a natural extension of membership of their national association, because they want to develop their international engagement and in the interests of professional solidarity. We will ensure that it will be possible to join at a very reasonable rate, probably as low as 30 euros per annum. We are keen to recruit new members not so much in order to secure more funds as to have a transfusion of new blood into our organization. We want in particular to attract a greater number of younger colleagues into our organization and we are devising a special programme for them so that they can report on, and

influence the content of, future ICA conferences. We are hoping that we may be able at some point to work together with ASA, ARANZ and other professional associations in order to make this happen.

The fifth objective is *to improve the performance and accountability of ICA*. Here we are trying to do all the right things in terms of business planning, financial reporting, audit controls and greater transparency. However, real improvements in this area will only come when we change the culture of the organization. Too often ICA is still perceived, with some justification, as an élite club which facilitates archival tourism for relatively prosperous Europeans and North Americans and which does not deliver concrete results with sufficient frequency. An influx of new members from other parts of the world would help enormously in accelerating ICA's progress towards a healthier organizational culture.

Our sixth and final strategic objective is *to build partnerships*. As was pointed out at the PARBICA meeting earlier this week, we need to extend our range beyond the traditional cultural agenda with UNESCO Headquarters in Paris to include other bodies in the United Nations system, such as the United Nations Development Programme, which fit in with ICA's new emphasis on the importance of records and archives management in protecting the rights of individuals and states, and in supporting democracy and good governance.

We are currently working closely with the International Records Management Trust in exploring the possibility of setting up a Centre of Excellence for Electronic Records Management in Eastern and Southern Africa. If successful, this model could be adapted for use elsewhere.

To sum up: what we are trying to do in ICA is to establish a virtuous circle whereby more members are attracted to join us, giving us greater influence with decision-makers who fund major programmes at the international level. When it is clear that ICA initiatives have got significant resources at their disposal, then even more records and archive professionals will wish to join us. And so on....

The most crucial event in the ICA calendar is the four-yearly Congress. As well as enabling us to review our current achievements, they also provide the foundations for future initiatives. A good Congress will give the organization significant momentum and increase the flow of energy for the subsequent four year period. As you all know, the next ICA Congress will take place here in Brisbane 20-25 August 2012. Everything that I have seen here in Brisbane this week indicates that the facilities and infrastructures for a successful Congress are in place. I wish to place on record my gratitude to Ross Gibbs, Director General of the National Archives of Australia and ICA Vice-President, and his talented staff for doing so much to further the mission of ICA, and to Janet

Prowse of Queensland State Archives for supporting the plans to hold the Congress here.

I hope that I have said enough to convince at least a few of you that ICA's existence and activities give an **international standing and credibility** to the profession in the era of globalization. ICA needs you, and I would like to think that we would be able to help you as well.

Harold Larwood, the English fast bowler who made his name during the body line series in 1931, once said that 'a cricket tour in Australia would be a most delightful period in one's life if one was deaf.' Adapting Larwood, I would like to say 'an archival visit to Australia is a most delightful period in one's life, especially if one listens'.

And that is what I now propose to do. Thank you very much!

6 November 2009