

A tale of innocents abroad

Report on the 36th Annual AIJA Conference

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In September, Sydney reaffirmed its position as international destination of desire by hosting the 36th annual International Young Lawyers Association (AIJA) Congress. More than 300 delegates from 45 countries descended to meet, greet, do lunch, do golf, swap cards, swap stories, party and explore the sights. And, of course, there was time to talk shop, with seminars and working session focusing on the latest international legal issues.

The first day of the conference provided delegates the opportunity to hear some leading speakers discuss driving issues on the Australian legal scene. Bret Walker, SC, Immediate Past President of the Law Council of Australia, Rob McGeoch, Chair of Partners at Corrs and Chief of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games bid, and Peter Day, Director of ASIC, were there. His Honour, Justice Michael Kirby, of the High Court spoke in inimitable style on the role of young lawyers today.

A highlight of the day was the address by the Governor-General, Sir William Deane, who urged all young lawyers to uphold professional standards in all aspects of their work to ensure their relevance and standing in the future.

Tuesday and Wednesday saw delegates get down to business with a hectic schedule of seminars, working sessions and commissions. The range of topics covered was extensive: from corporate collapses to nature protection; de facto relationships to joint ventures; distribution networks to regional trading blocks.

Being an IT lawyer, I attended sessions on "Webvertising - Unfair Competition and Trade Marks on the Internet" and "Internet and Taxation of International Electronic Commerce". From these sessions and my discussions with other delegates, two main themes recurred.

Firstly, it struck me just how many areas of practice are affected by laws from outside a particular jurisdiction. It is frequently necessary to take into account "globalisation" and the effect this has on national legal regimes. An obvious example is, of course, the Internet, where one country's soft and furry website is another country's blasphemous monstrosity. In short, national boundaries are increasingly becoming less relevant as parameters for legal regulation.

The second issue that emerged was that, notwithstanding that all delegates recognised the need to "think internationally" and "act globally", such a

challenge is easier said than done. When confronted by international legal issues, it is sometimes difficult to adopt a global perspective. We are all presently bound by local laws which often result in "big issues" being approached in a piecemeal and parochial manner. To return again to the Internet, if a corporation seeks to trade world wide on the Net, it is simply not feasible for it to comply with every law in every jurisdiction at all times.

Clearly the challenge we face as young lawyers is to develop a new way of thinking, to explore new possibilities, to exchange information and perspectives and to embrace a truly global mindset.

Much is happening at the international level in terms of cross-fertilisation. All AIJA delegates I spoke with were open and friendly, and the congress had an inclusive atmosphere that was conducive to sharing new ideas and having a fabulous time.

In addition, I was pleasantly surprised at the number of delegates who were aware of legal developments in jurisdictions other than their own.

Finally, I was struck by the number of links that unite us. One delegate was excited to note that family law principles from jurisdictions as apparently disparate as Eire, Cameroon and Australia can have so many similarities.

The AIJA Congress showed that young lawyers today have great knowledge of others, an openness to others, and a desire to reach out to others. Our challenge is to focus on the fact that we are *young* lawyers: to break with the old, to seek a new language of expression, to forge a new template, to become *l'avocats sans frontieres*.

The Congress was notable for its high calibre speakers and the opportunities afforded to delegates to gain insight in a global context. The three years hard work and preparation of the organising committee was evident in the social events held, such as the Australiana evening, day trips to stunning environs, and initiation into Sydney's nightlife.

The week culminated in the Gala Ball at the Sydney Town Hall. Complete with a Priscilla floor show, the Ball saw delegates party the night away in a whirl of fun, colour and flamboyance - a fitting end to a sensational week. Next year's Congress will be in Brussels. If Sydney is anything to go by, it will be well worth the trip.