

Summary of FAN meeting 2013 in Brussels

The Brussels annual conference provided the venue for a milestone meeting of the Forum des Archivistes Nationaux, more commonly known as FAN. This was the first meeting of the group under the ICA's new constitution and built on the extensive work done by Daniel J Caron following the conferences in Toledo and Brisbane. It was held in the auditorium of the Royal Library of Belgium and was attended by over 80 National Archivists representing 60 countries, covering every continent (except Antarctica!).

After words of welcome from both our hosts (Mr Patrick Lefevre, Director-General of the Royal Library of Belgium, and Mr Karel Velle (Director General of the General Archives of the Kingdom of Belgium) the first order of business was to formalise the organisation and operation of the FAN.

Based on an election process that was conducted by the interim FAN Secretariat between September and October 2013, the meeting ratified the FAN Bureau membership of Mr Joel Tembe (Director, Arquivo Histórico de Moçambique) representing the Africa and the Arab Countries world region and myself representing the Asia and Oceania world region. I was formally installed as President, with Joel taking on the role of FAN Secretary.

The FAN's role is defined in article 15 of the ICA constitution. It "meets within the framework of the ICA Annual Conference and develops high level strategic responses to the contemporary challenges of managing archives". This is, quite properly, a very open ended description and the inaugural meeting therefore spent some time to sharpen the definition of the role and function of the group, and in particular to ensure that it would operate for the benefit of FAN members and contribute something of value to the entire membership of the ICA.

Two key questions were posed – what form should the "strategic responses" take; and what were the "contemporary challenges" of most importance?

The forum was strongly of the view that if the group was to be a valuable part of the ICA, it had to produce tangible outcomes – products or activities that are accessible, useful tools to develop important capabilities, enhance the standing of our institutions and develop our profession. The discussion produced many ideas, including:

- Model legislation or policies relevant to the management of Archives;
- White papers on emerging technological or policy areas;
- Position papers on Archival issues;
- Advocacy with Governments and International Bodies;
- Influencing the ICT industry; and
- Seminars, Webinars.

The FAN had a lively discussion on the contemporary challenges that we face as a group. Not surprisingly, with so many National Archives represented and at a time of unprecedented change in the area of records and information management we quickly gathered up a substantial list of pressing issues. To mention just a few:

- Legislation and legal reforms needed to address developments such as digital record keeping; copyright of Archival material; open government; data protection;
- Providing efficient, effective and equitable access services to digital information;
- Managing the authenticity of digital records;
- Proper governance and long term management of email;
- Cooperation and collaboration of national archivists; for example to support the transition to digitisation;
- Streamlining and harmonisation of standards; and development of guidelines for the application and use of standards;
- Classification and De-classification of sensitive records and information holdings;
- International officer exchange program; and
- Implementation guidelines and training program for the ICA “Principles of Access”.

The FAN devoted some discussion to our relationship with ICA – how we fit within the broader governance framework and how we combine our particular strengths to generate real value for all ICA members. It was generally agreed that FAN should take responsibility to determine for itself the issues for discussion and the program of activities to be pursued, while reporting to the ICA Executive Board to ensure at all times that the FAN is conducting itself in a manner entirely consistent with the values of the ICA. On this point, it is also clearly articulated in the ICA Constitution that the FAN will seek Executive Board approval prior to the use of ICA resources in any program or activity. Other communication channels were also suggested, including a regular FAN report to the General Assembly and presentations at annual conferences.

The Forum benefited from three excellent presentations. ICA President Martin Berendse provided a strategic overview of major international information policy issues – such as data protection, open government, open data and access – and the central role that National Archivists should be playing in our respective jurisdictions to ensure that our contributions are recognised. Dr John Bannon, Chair of the National Archives of Australia Advisory Council and former Premier of South Australia, gave a presentation on Open Government; in particular how it is viewed by the Political Leadership and the issues that National Archivists should take on if they are to be seen as relevant and essential by Government. Jaime Antunes da Silva, Director-General of the National Archives of Brazil, shared Brazil’s experience in the introduction of public data access laws and described the solutions developed around highly complex issues of government accountability, personal privacy, national security and declassification of sensitive documents.

Following the meeting, Jaime kindly agreed to join the FAN Bureau representing the world region of Latin America and the Caribbean.

I found the inaugural FAN meeting to be stimulating, provocative, surprising and immensely valuable. It is however just the beginning.

The Brussels meeting laid some foundations for FAN – it established some ground rules, formalised our governance and accumulated lists of possible ideas to take forward. There is now



forum of national archivists
international council on archives
Forum des archivistes nationaux
conseil international des archives

plenty of work for the FAN Bureau to be getting on with and I look forward to reporting significant progress when we next meet in Girona.

David Fricker

President, FAN

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