Report on the 6th Meeting of the International Friends

The Sixth meeting of the International Friends was convened on the 11th of October 2003 in the BA Conference Center. Twenty Friends Associations from around the world were represented at the meeting, with 79 persons participating, including 29 from Egypt.

Dr. Ismail Serageldin, Director of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina welcomed the Friends and provided an excellent review of the Library’s programs and activities over the past year.

We welcomed new Friends Associations in Morocco, Portugal, Switzerland and the American Egyptian Scholars Association (AEAS) – USA.

We discussed the following:

1. Operations and Maintenance: The BA will always need the support of the International Friends to support our fund-raising activities, promotion of the Library within your countries, and for appropriate book donations. Mrs. Layla Abdelhady, Director of Library Services layla.abdelhady@bibalex.org, explained that the book processing procedures are lengthy, especially for used books coming from donors. She recommended that book donations be for new books published in the current or future year to be most useful for the library users here. All books undergo lengthy processing procedures for registration, cataloging, etc. Old books have to go through additional and sometimes expensive processes for fumigation and cleaning. We will review the collection development policy in light of our discussions and we will provide new guidelines for book donations. This will help each Friends’ Association evaluate book collections to make sure they are appropriate for the Library.

2. The criteria for becoming a Friend’s Association was briefly addressed. In the past the BA had recommended that the Associations be formed by influential persons coming from the government, business and library world who could be the best benefit to the Library. Generally, we agreed that there is also now a place for more informal associations of Friends who want to support the library by specific activities, such as institutional and/or organizational cooperation. Several suggestions were made about membership fees, and that each Friends Association should have something to offer the Library. Therefore, we propose that a small group from the International Friends work on this issue over the next year to prepare guidelines for membership and fees, responsibilities and activities.

3. The tax status of your organization could be important for the BA to receive certain kinds of donations. Please take this into consideration during your working meetings this coming year and help us to find a suitable method for the transfer of items (like books) or financial donations in a way that will benefit the donor as well as the library. Please inform Laila Dowidar about the possible tax benefit for donations through your Association, or be able to recommend an alternative method.

4. The International Friend’s webpage will be created by the Mexican Friends, as described by Stephan Wittig, swittig@arpax.com. Mrs. Beatrice Jaberg b.jaberg@alexandrina.ch, Switzerland, will help to coordinate the Friends ideas for the rules, a logo, website content, etc.

5. The Alexandria Key is still under discussion and would be an excellent way to promote the Library and the work of the International Friends.

6. Mr. Abdelwahab Elabd again promoted the idea of sponsoring interns and scholarships to and from the BA. At this point, the BA is accepting qualified interns, especially in the library as part of study curriculums. Other types of internships should be addressed specifically to Mr. Rafik Nakhla, Director of Human Resources rafik.nakhla@bibalex.org. Dr. Loutfy Dowidar, President of the Egyptian Friends, announced that the Egyptian Friends are ready to host some interns here in Alexandria. The BA staff from all departments are interested in expanding their knowledge of the world especially within the countries of the International Friends. We would like to have the opportunity to send our staff especially to organizations and institutions in Europe and North America to acquire new skills and bring new technology and methods back to the BA.
7. The BA takes this opportunity to thank Carlos Bernardo and the Portuguese Friends for their kind offer to hold the meeting in the Azores. However, the meeting for next year is tentatively scheduled for 9th October 2004 at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. I will confirm this to you all as soon as possible.

We were fortunate to see Mr. Jean-Marie Arnoult, Vice-President of the French Friends, present an informative discussion and pictures about the state of the libraries in Iraq following the war. We are relieved that some archives were safely removed, but deeply saddened at the total destruction of many of the collections of books and archives.