**EAST WIND**

***Official Newsletter of the World Blind Union-Asia Pacific***

**No. 7**

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THE LOOK AT OUR NEW PRESIDENT OF THE WORLD BLIND UNION:

Ms. Maryanne Diamond: the lady the local media in Australia named as “Sparkling Diamond”

Maryanne is blind and has been all of her life. She has 4 children one who is vision impaired. She was employed in the information technology industry for many years before moving into the community sector. She spent four years as the Executive officer of Blind Citizens Australia, the recognized representative organization of people who are blind. three years as the inaugural CEO of the Australian Federation of Disability Organizations, The peak organization of state and national organizations of people with disability. In May 2007 commenced a role with Vision Australia and works as General Manager International Programs. Vision Australia is the largest organization in Australia providing services to people who are blind or have low vision. Maryanne has held a range of positions on: community, local, state, national and international boards and committees over many years. Currently she is: aboard member of ACOSS, the Australian Pacific Islands Disability Support and a core group member of the Australian Disability Development Consortium.

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**THE NEW BOARD AND POLICY COUNCIL IN OUR REGION**

PRESIDENT:

Mr. Chuji Sashida

I became vision-impaired when I was 15 years old. I entered school for the blind. Then I went on to a university and studied law. Currently I am making researches on employment systems for persons with disabilities at the institution set by the Japanese Government. In recent days, I am working on topics such as Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, prohibition of disabilities discrimination, employment of disabilities in each country, and measures for expansion of job opportunities for the visually impaired.

Back in 1993, I participated in an international conference on computer technology in Malaysia. This provided me with an opportunity to know about the situation of people with vision impairment in Asian region. Since then, I have participated in several conferences related to WBU and WBUAP, such as Rehabilitation and Employment Board, and Massage Seminar. Between 1993 and 2002, I participated in Regional NGO Network Campaign Conferences held in Malaysia and Vietnam. I had great opportunities to get to know so many people.

WBUAP covers broad area in the Northern and the Southern Hemisphere with different climate and environment. It also includes populous nations such as China and Indonesia. The economic situation in each country is diverse and of course, the issues carried by persons with vision impairment are wide-ranging.

Our predecessors in the region have achieved a lot in education, welfare and employment of visually impaired. In order to consolidate those gains acquired by our seniors, I would like to promote activities which will pave the safer and securer way for vision impaired people. Following are outlines of my objectives.

1. Building and strengthening the organizations of visually impaired people in each country.

2. Enhancing activities and linkage of the three sub-regions of the WBUAP

3. Creating an independent financial resource of the WBUAP

4. Creating PR activities of the WBUAP (print, electronic media)

5. Convening seminars on exchanging information in education, welfare and employment.

6. Building capacity of women and youth, who are going to take the leading role in the next generation.

7. Working together with organization of visually-impaired people in different countries in order to realize the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities.

There may be many other issues we might encounter. To address these we will do our best. In the Policy Council meeting held in November in Tokyo, we agreed with the new framework of the executive board.

For the next four years, I would like to take my utmost effort to protect the rights and benefits of visually impaired persons by cooperating with members of the board. Thank you very much!

VICE PRESIDENT:

Dato' S. Kulasegaran

Dato' S. Kulasegaran (fondly known as Dato' Kula) is the President of the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM) which is the national co-ordinating body for the five major organisations serving the blind and vision-impaired people in Malaysia.

Since his appointment as the Chairman of the WBUAP South-East Asia Regional Committee in 2005, Dato' Kula is keen to assist the weaker countries of SEARC, and in the past few months he, together with the Secretary General, has visited all the 10 countries of SEARC to exchange views on development and to touch base with the leaders in the movements of the blind. As a result of the visit, Dato' Kula drew up the Quadrennium Plan of Action (QPA) which has been accepted by the WBUAP Policy Council and it is being vigorously pursued. (A short article on the QPA can be found elsewhere in the East Wind).

As a further commitment to the movement of the blind, Dato' Kula convinced the NCBM Management Board to support the running of the WBU Permanent Office in Toronto with a five-year pledge of US $2,500 per year. At the 2007 WBUAP Mid-Term Regional Assembly held in Shenzhen, China, Dato' Kula offered to house the WBUAP Secretariat in NCBM. This offer was made with the realisation that an organisation without an office and paid staff to implement its decisions and proposals, most of them would remain on paper.

Elected the Vice-President of WBUAP on 19 August 2008, Dato' Kula has the three main objectives in mind:

1. The strengthening of organisations in the WBUAP Region to better serve their blind members through the implementation of the QPA.

2. To encourage the more developed organisations to assume heavier responsibilities in making WBUAP a stronger and resilient body that can speak and act on issues affecting blind people.

3. All decisions agreed to, and commitments made during meetings, should be taken seriously so that WBUAP can be a respected and progressive movement.

Dato' Kula is a Barrister-at-Law (Middle Temple, United Kingdom), an Advocate and Solicitor in Malaysia. He is in legal practice since 1965, and is a Founder Partner of the legal firm Ranjit, Thomas and Kula. Dato' Kula and his wife, Datin Gisela, are blessed with five grown-up children, four daughters and a son.

**TREASURER:**

**Dr. Kevin Murfitt**

Dr Kevin Murfitt is a Lecturer at Deakin University in Melbourne Australia. His specific research interests revolve around diversity and employment. In addition to his World Blind Union-Asia Pacific roles, Kevin is currently Chair of Vision Australia, Australia’s largest blindness and low vision service provider, and a Director on the Disability Services Board of the Victorian State Government. Kevin lost his sight in his mid 20’s after a penetrating eye injury, so he has a personal and professional perspective on the impact of blindness, and the challenges and solutions to accommodating impairment and achieving success.

One area of life where Kevin has had outstanding success is water-skiing. After winning his first World Championship Gold medal in France in 1993, Kevin has accumulated 10 World Championship titles and two world records in the blind skier category. He says his greatest achievement is breaking the world jump record in 2005 at the world championships in Belguim. He jumped 19 metres and added another 2 metres to the former record.

**SECRETARY GENERAL:**

**Mr. Ivan Ho Tuck Choy**

Mr. Ivan Ho Tuck Choy is the Executive Director of the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM) since 1996. He was one of the founders of the Society of the Blind in Malaysia back in 1964, and SBM is one of the five major organisations affiliated to NCBM. He was also one of the founders of NCBM back in 1984; became its Vice-President in 1986 and its President in 1990. He resigned from the presidency in 1995 to take up full-time employment in NCBM.

Mr. Ivan Ho served as the Secretary General of the Asian Blind Union between 1996 - 2000 when Malaysia was part of that Region.

After the restructure of the two regions in 2000, he was elected the first SG of WBUAP, re-elected in 2004 and again in 2008.

As the SG of WBUAP, Mr. Ivan Ho wants to see WBUAP develop into a meaningful and progressive movement of the blind, able to act effectively as a regional body, to tackle the many issues confronting the blind. He realises the job of SG is tough and demanding, but he believes that by working together as a team, he can contribute something to the mission and vision of WBUAP.

He hopes one day, perhaps within these four years, WBUAP can employ a full-time officer so that things can progress faster.

Until then, he will try to carry out all the assignments to the best of his ability.

Mr. Ivan Ho is married to Jill, and they have two grown-up children, a daughter and a son. They each have a two-year-old plus and a one-year plus daughter respectively.

**EXECUTIVE MEMBER:**

**Mr. Kim Mok**

Mr. Kim Mok is now working for The Hong Kong Social Service Development Foundation as Director (Business Development and Corporate Communications).

Kim is a new member from Hong Kong to WBU family. With nomination of David Blyth, Kim was elected as executive member of WBUAP Committee from August 2008 to 2012. Kim completed his social work profession with first class at Hong Kong Baptist University in 1998.

Kim became totally blind at the age of 13. Kim has a special appetite for ICT applications in social service delivery. Kim has been very keen on advocating for equal rights of access to information for the blind in Hong Kong and tackling digital divide by way of preaching fro accessibility, usability and affordability. Kim received Ten Outstanding Young Persons and Ten Outstanding Young Digi-persons in 1999 as recognition of his contributions to tackling Y2K problems for welfare sector and his efforts to narrow digital divide for social minority groups. Kim is also a current member of Rehabilitation Advisory Committee for HKSAR Government. He joins hands with Mrs Grace Chan, ex-CEO of The Hong Kong Society for the Blind, to found the first Hong Kong Blind Sports Association in Hong Kong. Kim is now the captain of HK Elite Blind Golfers Club.

**EXECUTIVE MEMBER:**

**Senator Monthian Buntan**

“Mr. Monthian Buntan: Servant of the Blind and the Poorest”

Born in 1965 in a remote village of Phrae Province (500 km north of Bangkok) Thailand, Monthian has been blind since birth. He received his primary, secondary and first university education in Thailand before earning his second bachelors at St. Olaf College and a Masters at University of Minnesota, USA. His experience and education help shaped and strengthen his belief that there is nothing wrong with his blindness and that the society has made too big deal out of it.

After serving as a university lecturer for eight years, Monthian left his stable teaching career behind and became a full time social activist in 2002. He has served in a number of positions within the organized blind movement in Thailand, currently in his second four-year term as president of Thailand Association of the Blind. His role in the World Blind Union began officially in 1996 as one of the blind youth committee members before elected to serve as WBU executive committee member in 2000.

He is proud to be a part of two major contributions: the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) from which the first disability- inclusive policy documents in the mainstream society at the international level were created and Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) which is the first thematic international human rights law for PWDs and the first international human rights treaty of the twenty-first century. Monthian loves Braille, but also strive to make ICTs accessible to all including blind people. His career has become even more complicated and more challenging since he became a senator of Thailand in 2008.

His most favorite slogan is "I've given up on giving up."

**EXECUTIVE MEMBER:**

**Ms. Michiko Tabata**

I was born partially sighted in Tokyo and attended the local blind school from kindergarten to senior high school courses. I attended the then Texas School for the Blind at the age of 16 as an exchange student, and coming back to Tokyo, pursued university degree in English. I was employed at a local financial institution with language skills.

I was not very active in the blindness field for some time, but during that time I was engaged in international NGOs involving in human rights, environment and poverty alleviation. The Blind Summit in 2002 brought me back to the blindness organization, and I have been involved in the WBU community since our mid-term assembly in 2003.

I may not have long experiences in the blindness organization but I am always keen on moving forward and starting something new, and am trying to stay a person of action.

I am looking forward to working with all the colleagues in this region for another 4 years and to exerting my energies for the advancement and greater opportunities for the blind and visually impaired in the world.

**CHAIRPERSON, WOMEN’S COMMITTEE:**

**Ms. Martine Abel**

I am Martine Abel, delegate from New Zealand and I work as Policy Advisor - Disability Issues for a local government agency in Auckland. I have been resident in New Zealand for the past 12 years now, following emigrating from South Africa. I have a keen interest in all matters pertaining to equity, not just equality and that is where women's issues fit in the larger scheme on the WBU agenda. I have tertiary qualifications in the fields of psychology, education, vision rehabilitation and social policy and I am looking forward to become proactively involved in regional and sub-regional projects and programmes.

**CHAIRPERSON: REGIONAL MASSAGE COMMISSION:**

**Mr. Zhu Gang**

Zhu Gang is a chief physician and massage therapist of traditional Chinese medicine**.** He has more than 30 years experience of performing professional massage and published more than 20 clinical papers about massage and health care at home and abroad. Zhu Gang's name now appears in the Chinese Disabled Celebrity Dictionary, the Chinese Famous Physicians Biography, the Chinese Experts Collection, the Dictionary of Chinese Outstanding Leaders in All Fields, and the Dictionary of Famous Physicians in Continent as well as many other publications.

At present, he is the chairman of World Blind Union Asia Pacific Regional Massage Commission, vice-president of China Massage Association of Blind Practitioner, president of Association of the Blind in Hunan Province. And also, he is the board chairman of Hunan Yeahcome Health Care Co., Ltd., a group company with hundreds of blind and visually impaired masseurs as well as more than 3000 normal staffs, including about 50 business entities in China and foreign countries.

For more information, please contact：penglei@yeahcome.com

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**THE WBUAP QUADRENNIUM PLAN OF ACTION 2009 – 2012**

Mr. Ivan Ho Tuck Choy

Secretary General, WBUAP

As some of you may remember WBUAP officially came into existence in 2000, in Melbourne, when some countries grouped with the Asian Blind Union (ABU) were joined with the countries in the East Asia Pacific Region. Leaders have come and gone, and after every 4-year term we have to start everything from scratch. In simple words, there is no structure for continuity. Let’s not blame anybody (except ourselves) for not being proactive in strengthening an organisation which we claim to represent us. It was in this worrying situation that the Vice-President, Dato' Kulasegaran, presented the Quadrennium Plan of Action (QPA) at the Joint Board and Policy Council Meeting in November 2008. The QPA was accepted for implementation.

The QPA basically aims to achieve three objectives:
(a) The strengthening of the weaker organisations to better serve their blind members through the exchange of information and the giving of encouragement and support.
(b) The setting up of National Task Forces in countries that have not already done so to lobby their governments to implement the WBU-ICEVI Initiative "Education For All Vision-Impaired Children" by 2015.
(c) The strengthening of WBUAP itself by establishing more permanent structures and by encouraging the more developed organisations to assume more responsibilities in making this organisation a stronger and resilient regional body that can speak and act on issues affecting blind people; thus, contributing to building a strong and respectable World Blind Union (WBU).

1. Appoint a Liaison Officer:

In order to respond speedily to correspondences and to act on decisions made by WBUAP, every affiliate is urged to appoint a Liaison Officer (or Coordinator) to deal directly with the WBUAP Secretariat. In some countries the appointed Delegates to WBU are so busy that they have no time to communicate or take actions on the requests of WBUAP.

2. Partnering with Another Organisation:

The more developed organisations are encouraged to partner with one or two weaker ones to give them special attention by way of following their progress, sharing of ideas and expertise, and assisting them in all possible ways

3. Strengthening the Fund-Raising Capacity of Organisations:

As money is the lifeline of any organisation (and most organisations of the blind which the Vice-President visited last year, notably in the South-East Asia Sub-Region are poorly funded), WBUAP should give special attention to this aspect of work by conducting fund-raising workshops. These weak organisations should be given training in the writing of project papers and on the various methods of fund-raising, both on a small- and large-scale basis.
4. Programme Exchange:

WBUAP to encourage its more established affiliates to make available opportunities for blind people to attend courses run by recognised training centres in computer literacy, vocational rehabilitation, blindness-specific skills, etc. In order for the Exchange Programme to materialise, efforts should be made to secure scholarships for them and to cover travel expenses in appropriate cases.

5. Education For All Vision-Impaired Children:

To follow up with the work of National Task Forces where they exist, and to help those countries to form them where they do not exist; and to persuade the organisations of the blind to be partners in the WBU-ICEVI Initiative that all blind and vision-impaired children should have access to education by 2015.

6. Assist Weaker Organisations with Basic Items:
Every effort should be made by WBUAP to help blind children in the weaker organisations with basic items, such as Braille paper, writing slates, white canes and recreational game sets. This should be undertaken through consultation so that needed items are sent.

7. Setting up Committees to Implement PRIORITIES of WBUAP:
The Board has set up three committees:

(a) The Resource Generation Committee, under the chairmanship of the Treasurer, to find ways of raising funds to strengthen the financial position of WBUAP in order to carry out its activities and programmes.

(b) Committee on ICT and Assistive Technologies, under the Chairmanship of Sen. Monthian Buntan, to make ICT information available to the affiliates, and to plan training programmes for this Region.

(c) The Employment and Economic Empowerment Committee (still in search of a Chairperson), to look into the employment issues facing blind people, and to encourage them to go into economic ventures, such as micro-credit schemes and entrepreneurship. This committee is also expected to look into the feasibility of organisations of the blind operating co-operatives and undertaking bulk purchase of Braille items to reduce costs.

8. Strengthening the WBUAP Secretariat and Setting Up an Accessible Website:

WBUAP to work towards having a Secretariat with paid staff so that it becomes the central coordinating base for WBUAP. And, in order for WBUAP to disseminate information efficiently and effectively, WBUAP to set up a website with links to national organisations. At present the WBUAP Secretariat is located in the premises of the National Council for the Blind in Malaysia.

In order for us to ensure the success of the QPA, you are kindly requested to send in your ideas (or criticisms) and to co-operate with the Board in implementing all the points mentioned in the QPA. Keep communicating with your Board to follow the progress of the QPA.

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**FIRST BLIND SPORTS ASSOCIATION IN HONG KONG**

Mr. Kim Mok, Executive member

There had never been a Sports Association specifically for the blind in Hong Kong before 2008. The situation was quite undesirable as young blind adults who were interested in sports would have no place to turn to for training.

The above situation has then been changed upon the retirement of Mrs. Grace Chan from the Hong Kong Society for the Blind in January this year. A group of blind people approached Mrs. Chan urging her to set up a Blind Sports Association so that they could receive sports training and/or participate in sports activities organized by a sports association specifically caters for the needs of the blind.

Seeing the needs of the blind, Mrs. Grace Chan agreed to lobby some community leaders for this purpose. It was pleased to see that after a few months hard work, the Hong Kong Blind Sports Association (HKBSA) was inaugurated on 29 May, 2008. Over 100 guests attended the Opening Ceremony with Mr. Paul Cheung, Assistant Director (Leisure Services) of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, Mr. Raymond Tang, Chairman of the Equal Opportunities Commission and Mr. Stephen Sui, Commissioner for Rehabilitation as the officiating guests. It is worth to mention that the Board of Directors consists of professionals from different disciplines and most important of all, we have two blind members on the board to participate in the policy making and program planning. They are Kim Mok, the current WBUAP Executive Committee and Galant Ng, an outstanding blind golfer in HK.

Although HKBSA has been established for only 8 months, we have so far recruited over 300 visually impaired members.

From July to December 2008, 8 programs have been organized. They include Shenzhen Sai Lai Lake Horse Riding Fun Day, Gym Equipment Training, Mid-Autumn Festival Singing and Dancing Night, Sai Kung Water Sports Camp, Kingdom Swimathon for One World, Bowling Fun Day, Horse Riding in Tuen Mun and Party in the Dark which was co-organized with Crossroads International. Through the above activities, it is evident that our work for promoting equal participation and sports for all have been well progressing.

There were altogether 63 members participated in the Horse Riding Fun Day, they were all deeply impressed by this event and enjoyed the feeling of riding horses. Our blind members all believed that they can now enjoy a wonderful life through participating in sports event.

One of our highlighted events was “Kingdom Swimathon for One World 2008” which we hoped to arouse the public awareness on the sports needs and abilities of the blind. Over 1000 people from all walks of life participated in this meaningful event. Moreover, we broke the Guinness World Record of “Most swimmers to complete a lap within one hour” with an encouraging numbers of 254 swimmers against the old record of 204 by UK.

We will organize variety of events for our blind members in order to promote equal participation and sports for all. It is planned to organize a Race car fun day in February 2009 in order to bring new experience and exposure for our blind members.

At the same time, we have now organized a series of training courses for our blind members. We are attempting to participate in some International competitions. One of the key events is the most Visually Impaired to run for Standard Chartered Marathon on 8 February, 2009 by a single organization - HKBSA. There will be 12 blind runners participating in this training program. We have invited Mr. Lam Wai Keung, Lecturer of the International Association of Athletics Federation (IAAF) to train up our blind runners 3 months in advance of the captioned event. We have also recruited 12 sighted runners to pair up with our blind runners for the training. It is hoped that they can complete the 10K marathon run at the Standard Chartered Marathon and learn much from participating in International competitions.

Bowling Classes have already been started respectively at 4 sessions a month for about 3 months. We are grateful to Ms. Che Kuk Hung, first Asian Games gold medalist, for assisting us in this program as the trainer. We also establish an elite blind golf team and join the International Blind Golf Association. We will actively promote blind golf in China to share among our blind friends about the joy of “can’t see, can Tee”.

In view of the upcoming training classes, capable blind team leaders have been appointed to be the team leaders of training classes in Bowling, Swimming, Marathon and Golf. The main purpose is to let them have “we feeling” and to train them to be the potential leaders and drivers for future development of different sports activities.

Last but not least, a fund-raising activity called “Walkathon for Brightness” will be organized for the establishment of a service centre so that our blind members will be able to drop in the Centre for our regular activities and training. By then, a social enterprise called Vision Social Enterprise will also be set up to provide members with employment opportunities.

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**VISIT TO MONGOLIAN FEDERATION OF THE BLIND**

Mr. Yoshihiko Sasagawa

Chairman, National Committee of Welfare for the Blind in Japan

Mr. Bayasgalan Maidar, President of the Mongolian National Federation of the Blind, and his group visited us in Tokyo in October 2007. He kindly invited us from Japan to visit his country and his organization.

I was always hoping to visit Mongolia following our friendship and exchange at international conferences and massage trainers’ training programs in Okinawa, and our organization planned a visit in the summer of 2008. We were about to abandon our plan after the huge earthquake hitting Sichuan, China in May last year, but went on with our initial plan.

We spent 3 days in Mongolia, from July 9, visiting the federation of the blind, the local blind school, Braille library, vocational training center and massage training center. We also received briefings on the current situation of the blind and visually impaired in Mongolia and the problems facing them. Although facilities and infrastructure are far from being sufficient, their massage center has fairly good facilities and is run under proper management policy, and we find it as a promise for the bright future.

Honestly speaking, I felt that the steps are too slow for a country which left its history of socialism with nearly 20 years of transitional period. President told me that the federation will soon cover the entire country and the nationwide activities will be possible. There will probably be lots of difficulties in a huge country where most of land is steppes.

The blind in Mongolia in socialist days were engaged in the production of gels which are nomadic tents in designated factories, Nowadays, there I only one such factory where about 100 blind and visually impaired are working. Thrown out into the free market economy, persons with disabilities are always placed in disadvantaged positions, with enormous difficulties in opportunities for education or occupational independence. The federation is planning to promote massage for the blind following the experiences in Japan and their assistances. Here, AMIN will have the major role to play, which is the medical massage instructors network for the blind and visually impaired in the Asia Pacific region set up under the initiative of the Tsukuba University of Technology.

You may think that Mongolia is a country of grassland, but the city of Ulan Bator is crowded with cars with occasional congestions. We met parents and children cleaning cars in parking lots to earn very small money. It seems that Mongolia is faced with the gap between the rich and the poor, just as many other countries around the world.

Mr. Bayasgalan Maidar became president of the federation 3 years ago and is still in his thirties. He is leading the blindness movement in Mongolia with his passion, actively advocating with the government and taking various actions. I am sure he will lead the fellow blind and visually impaired people to a better life and wider opportunities.

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**REFLECTIONS ON THE COMMEMORATION OF THE BICENTENARY OF LOUIS BRAILLE'S BIRTH**

Ms. Olivia En, New Zealand

For some it was another trip overseas paid for by their employer, for others, it was a pilgrimage of a lifetime, for me, it was a dream come true.

When I first mentioned to my husband in 2007 how much I would love to attend the celebrations for the bicentenary of Louis Braille's birth in Paris in 2009, I knew it was improbable that we would be able to go. When, on the offchance, I asked a travel agent to investigate the cost of travelling to Paris for the celebrations, I knew it was financially impossible. Even after receiving the news that I had been awarded the Otsuki prize for the Onkyo Braille essay contest and won the opportunity to travel to Paris, I could not believe that it might truly happen. Yet, on the 5th of January 2009, there I was, having just flown half way around the world, sitting in the UNESCO headquarters along with over 400 other delegates as Monsieur Vincent Michel, Chair of CINAL, opened the celebrations.

I must confess that the celebrations passed in something of a blur. Everything was so different and so exciting that it is extremely difficult to point to only a few moments as being outstanding.

I remember, though, receiving my attendance pack as we all filed into the conference hall and delightedly discovering that everything in that pack, including maps, timetables and menus, were all in Braille. Perhaps it is a rather sad reflection of the experiences I have had with Braille in my own country but, believe it or not, I had expected that much of the conference material would only be provided in print, despite the fact that we were there to celebrate Braille the man and Braille the code. While blindness organisations in New Zealand have always claimed to actively support Braille, I had been to events before arranged by these blindness organisations where braille was not available. Thus, the first of many highlights for me was entering a world where braille was an automatic option, where I was able to receive, without fuss, everything in my medium of choice because expense was not the excuse for non-production of Braille materials.

For me, the whole of the second day of the conference was one big highlight. The organisers had arranged for papers to be presented that discussed how Braille was used and produced in different languages. I was fascinated and amazed. As various presenters spoke about using and producing Braille in Russian, Arabic Japanese and more, it truly brought home to me the astounding versatility of Braille. This simple system of 6 dots has been used to reproduce written words for the blind in almost every language across the globe. No wonder over 400 people from 6 of the world's continents had gathered there in Paris to pay homage to the man who had discovered those 6 simple dots.

One of the presenters on the second day, Mr. Lex Grandia from Denmark, spoke of how Braille has opened the world to those who are deafblind. I found this to be one of the most inspirational papers of the entire conference. Mr. Grania described in stark detail a world that was almost a prison, a world of isolation and loneliness, where communication was tremendously difficult and access to objective information near to impossible. Braille was the only key that could unlock the doors to this prison because even speech technology, which is, for some, the holy grail of the modern blind world, was useless to the deafblind. Connection, conversation and community had become so much easier with Braille, particularly nowadays as more and more deafblind are gaining access to refreshable braille displays.

Memorably, Mr. Grania introduced the delegates to a system called finger Braille. This is a system whereby one person places the 1st, 2nd and 3rd fingers of each hand on the corresponding fingers of another person. By pressing on each other's fingers, these persons can then type braille messages to each other. This is an efficient method for people who know Braille to communicate with a deafblind person who also knows Braille. I actually believe that finger Braille could also have relevance to those tasked with the hugely important job of teaching young children Braille. Finger Braille would be a way of making Braille fun for young children, thereby providing much needed motivation for them to learn the code.

From fancy Braille displays to finger Braille that only requires the hands of two people who wish to communicate, Mr. Grania's message was so full of hope and optimism that I must admit to a few tears as I joined the delegates in giving him a standing ovation for his presentation.

If I were to pick out one outstanding moment that topped the myriad other outstanding moments, however, I would say that, for me, this moment occurred towards the end of the 3rd day. In opening the last session of the celebrations, Mr. Fred Reid of the United Kingdom pointed out that the greatest memorial to Louis Braille was not set in marble or paint but in living flesh. Mr. Reid said "when we see a pair of living hands gracefully traversing a Braille page, that is when we know that Louis Braille's memory lives on and is honoured". Upon hearing these words, it struck me afresh how crucial it is that we continue to work tirelessly together to ensure that more Braille is readily available so that more living hands can honour Louis Braille. We should be able to honour him not just in the workplace or the school, but in the shopping mall, the supermarket, the voting booth, the bank and every other public place.

At this point, I feel that I must mention one matter that greatly disappointed me and other delegates. This is the fact that no official from the French government attended the celebrations. I think that it should have been a priority for the French government to send a representative to honour one of the greatest sons of France. The organisers were unequivocal in expressing their disappointment and I, along with all the delegates, wholeheartedly supported the resolution to officially declare that disappointment.

Overall, however, the celebrations were a resounding success. Regardless of what our individual motivations were for attending the celebrations in the beginning, I know that by the time the celebrations concluded, all of the delegates felt that they had come for only one purpose. We had come to Paris to honour a man who had given us the light of literacy and, with it, the chance to contribute meaningfully to our communities, our countries, our world.

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**HISTORICAL WORKSHOP IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA**

Dr. Kevin Murfitt, Treasurer

Late in2008, Papua New Guinea’s Blind Union (PNG-BU) Held their first national elections during a five day workshop in Garoka. The 30 participants, all of whom are blind or have low vision, elected a nationally representative Board comprising of 5 men and 4 women.

During the five day interactive workshop, participants swapped stories about their struggles and achievements as people living with blindness in PNG, developed skills in leadership, advocacy, fund-raising, operating a committee, accountability, media presentations, ethics, and strategic planning.

A highlight of the workshop was an evening concert presented by the students from Mt Sion School for children who are vision or hearing impaired. Salutations and thanks were given to the three international visitors who facilitated the workshop sessions: Daniel Stubbs from Fiji; Kevin Murfitt, Chair of World Blind Union’s Pacific-Oceania sub-region; and Robyn McKenzie, Executive Officer of Blind Citizens Australia (BCA).

Thanks were also given to the many volunteers who provided assistance during the workshop, as well as Mt Sion School staff and staff from St John’s in Port Moresby. PNG-BU’s administration officer, Josephine, was the key person who pulled the whole workshop together, ably assisted by Ben.

The workshop was sponsored by the Danish Association for the Blind (DAB) and Vision Australia. Other contributors were the PNG Department of Community Services, and local corporate sponsors.

As PNG implements its inclusive education policy, a strong PNG-BU will be an important advocacy and reference point for the rights of people who are blind or have low vision. This historic election also now enables PNG-BU to apply for full membership of WBU. Blind Citizens Australia has kindly offered to pay their initial membership fee.

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**3RD ASIA PACIFIC DISABILITY FORUM: GENERAL ASSEMBLY & CONFERENCE**

Ms. Michiko Tabata, Executive member

WBU-AP joined the Asia Pacific Disability Forum following the postal vote of 2007. The third APDF General Assembly and Conference on February 27 to 29 was the first APDF assembly for WBU-AP, and I was there in Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh (from ABU region), together with more than a dozen members from Japan Disability Forum. There were more than 140 participants from more than 25 countries and territories, and in addition to persons from disability fields in the Asia Pacific Region, the conference welcomed members from the World Bank and some NGOs in Europe and America, and even members from the Palestine and Uganda. There were about 300 participants from Bangladesh alone, including more than 50 blind and vidually impaired participants.

The government of Bangladesh, which ratified the CRPD in December 2007, was in full supprt of the event. There were many high rank officers including the prime minister, and the opening ceremony was broadcasted on the national TV channel. Upon our arrival, volunteers were allowed inside the immigration section. On the first day, our bus from the hotel to the Convention Center was escorted by police cars!!

One of the major themes was, undoubtedly, the CRPD, and how to use the Convention and other UN documents for national legislations. We had people like Ms. Nagata from the UN encourging the full utilization of frameworks to advance our rights in each country and territory. Another big theme was ICT, and as you can imagine, India, an IT giant in the South Asia was very active in discussions and project proposals, although the blind people in Bangladesh are still facing the absence of screen readers in their native Bengali language. I earnestly hope screen readers will be available for native language of all countries and territories very soon.

There were many workshops and I attended two of them. One was on women with disabilities, and we had reports on the survey of women with disabilities conducted by the Pacific Disability Forum, which our colleagues in Oceania may be familiar with. It demonstrated in figures that women with disabilities are more likely to suffer domestic violence than women without disabilities, and that women with disabilities have lower school enrollment rate than men with disabilities. The Pacific Disability Forum seems to have good networking efforts, and I am looking forward to working with you to form similar networks in Asia as well.

Another workshop was on sports, culture, entertainment and universal tourism, although culture and entertainment were not discussed much. There wer blind cricket players making presentations, but there are still people, even PWDs themselves who consider sports as not necessary for PWDs who are “protected”. But I agree with the presenters who stressed the effectiveness of sports for mainstreaming and this is why I often emphasize sports.

General Assembly was held for only a couple of hours, in which WBUAP and other new comers were declared as new members. APDF also joined IDA and GPDD as a network.

ICEVI West Asia held as a side event its workshop on the Education for All Visually Imapired campaign, but due to my flight schedule, I just said hello to ICEVI people there and left for the airport.

During the short visit, I had a chance to visit two local blindness-related organizations. One was “The Blind Education and Rehabilitation Development Organization (BERDO)” where they provide 6 months computer training in addition to library services, Braille training, CBR and other projects. One of my big aims was to talk to their sponsor which is an international bank to tell them that visually impaired can be contributing human resources in financial institutions. I was told that after the bank knew about me working in a bank, they hired a blind for telephonist for the first time, and I am very happy to hear that!!

I also visited a girls hostel of the organization “Assistance for Blind Children” which is an associate member of WBU and the recipient of Takeo Iwahashi Award in early 1990s. The organization runs several student hostels, produce Braille and talking books, runs CBR projects and eye clinics, and a series of other activities. I met about a dozen blind girls living in the hostel attending local regular schools with Braille books provided by the organization. They wer eall thrilled to have a chance to study, and talked brilliantly about their dreams.

Bangladesh is still a poor country but I was overwhelmed by the power and dedication of various NGOs.

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**WOMEN IN ACTION**

Ms. Martine Abel, Chairperson, Women’s Committe

“A dream is a picture your heart makes when you’re fast asleep” – anonymous.

The Women’s Committee of our WBUAP region is in the process of forming and this is indeed quite an exciting time, for I believe that so many blind and vision impaired women from all over our region will have a great deal to contribute. So, we’re talking here about reality and action, changing a dream into something concrete!

The Terms of Reference has just been finalised and most of the committee’s initial work will focus on:

* Getting to know each other so that an atmosphere of trust and familiarity can be fostered,
* Information sharing, so that we can collate an issues register, for us to know exactly what we’d need to focus on in the next 4 years,
* Promotion and publicising of funding streams and opportunities to assist in capacity building.

This is indeed not the only areas of focus for our term, but one has to start somewhere and once we have an idea of problem areas, need for growth, etc, we can start various projects and of course focus on positive items such as leadership development and information sharing of “small wins” and not just trying to solve problems.

At present, committee members are:

Ms Martine Abel – New Zealand (Chair),

Ms Michiko Tabata – Japan,

Ms Robyn McKenzie – Australia,

Ms Gerel Tontow – Mongolia,

Ms Tina Medina – Philippines,

Ms Rina Prasarani – Indonesia,

Ms Tewai Skipwith Halatau –Pacific Disability Forum,

If you have anything to share with the Women’s Committee, please either get in touch with your local Women’s Committee, your country delegate or feel free to email me on martine.abel@manukau.govt.nz;

“Do not follow where the path may lead; go instead where there is no path and leave a trail” – anonymous.

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**SIGHT WORLD: EXHIBITION IN TOKYO EXCLUSIVELY FOR BLINDNESS**

**WBUAP FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN FOR CYCLONE-HIT MYANMAR**

“Sight World” is the synthetically organized exhibition in Japan designed for the visually impaired persons. The exhibition was first held in November 2006, and the third exhibition was held between November 2 and 4, 2008. The 3rd Sight World welcomed 48 exhibition booths from in and out of Japan showing their products, services and activities and giving opportunities for 5000 or so visitors to actually experience them.

In commemoration of Louis Braille bicentenary, a special exhibition was organized on the history and pre-history of Braille. This included study materials before the invention of Japanese Braille in 1890, and a wooden ballot board for election votes in Braille authorized in 1925 and put into practice in 1928 for National Diet members.

There was also a room for symposiums and lecturers, and WBUAP organized an international symposium on November 3, which was attended by nearly 200 audiences. WBU President Ms. Maryanne Diamond talked about the missions, organizations and objectives of WBU, Senator Monthian Buntan, on the significance of CRPD and movements in Asia toward its ratification and implementation, and Mr. Ivan Ho Tuck Choy, on capacity building of blind individuals and organizations in developing countries.

WBUAP conducted a fundraising campaign at the event to support the association of the blind in Myanmar which was severely hit by Cyclone Nargis in May 2008. The donation, combined with personal donations to the National Committee of Welfare for the Blind in Japan, was handed to the Myanmar National Association of the Blind in January 2009, in the sum of US$1,000.

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**COMING UP…..**

**THE 7TH WBUAP ONKYO BRAILLE ESSAY CONTEST**

The Onkyo Corporation Ltd., The Tenji Mainichi Newspaper "The Braille Mainichi" and WBUAP announced the start of the 7th WBUAP Onkyo Braille Essay Contest for blind and vision impaired people in the Asia Pacific Region. Cash prizes of US$1,000.00, US$500.00 and US$200.00 will be awarded respectively to the best seven entries from two age groups from all countries in the region.

The closing day is May 10, 2008.

For further details, please contact Ivan Ho Tuck Choy at the contact details at the end of this newsletter.

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FROM THE EDITOR

This is the first issue of our East Wind for this quadrennium. As you all know, East Wind is intended as one of the key communication tools among our friends and colleagues in the Region in the blindness-related fields.

As we have the new team of the Board and Policy Council, the first pages have been dedicated to the introduction of the members and their personalities, which you may not have the chance to explore in the tight schedule of our General Assemblies. These paragraphs show diversity and power of our team, which is a hope and promise for the future of our Region. Don’t you agree?

I would like to thank Olivia of New Zealand, the Otsuki Prize winner of last year’s Braille Essay Contest, for letting us have the chance to read her brilliant account of the Louis Braille bicentenary celebration in Paris.

We are mostly keen on hearing messages and feedbacks from you, Dear Readers. Please let us know whatever you felt about this issue.

Michiko Tabata: Editor-in-Chief

Editorial Committee: Ivan Ho Tuch Choy

Kevin Murfitt

Kim Mok

We Are Waiting for Your Contributions!!

Send in your writings…reports, essays, poems, commentary, just about anything, that you might want to share with your friends and colleagues in the Region.

Your Donations Is Always Welcome!!

Help us make a difference of what it means to be blind. Your donations will help our international blindness movement in particular from our friends in less economically privileged circumstances.

Your generous contribution is very much appreciated. Please note that, following the election of our new Treasurer, we have our new USD account in Australia.

Please direct your payment to:

National Australia Bank

Bank Address: 330 Collins Street , Melbourne, Australia

BSB: 083-004

Account Number: WBUAPUSD01

Swift Code: NATAAU3303M

Name: World Blind Union – Asia Pacific

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