

East Wind No. 26

September 2018

Official Newsletter of the World Blind Union – Asia Pacific (WBUAP)

“The Voice of The Blind and Visually Impaired in The Asia Pacific Region”

Please visit the World Blind Union – Asia Pacific website

www.wbuap.org

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Editorial by Mary Schnackenberg

Welcome to another issue of East Wind.

Three countries are sharing their news, China Hong Kong, Myanmar and Thailand. And we have the first of several outcomes of the Mid-Term Regional General Assembly. The UlaanBaatar Statement covers the priority concerns discussed in Mongolia. And I especially like point 13 which reads: "We urge WBUAP members and networks to maintain strong communication with each other, using the WBUAP web site, The East Wind newsletter and other communication tools – ensuring that where practicable no person is left behind." So I look forward to publishing a number of papers and reports on the website and in our next issue of East Wind.

I also enjoy the E-Bulletins that come from the World Blind Union head office in Toronto. They share news from other regions of the WBU family as well as bring us up to date with all the advocacy efforts of the team in Toronto. The E-Bulletin is published in English, French and Spanish. You can sign up to receive the WBU E-Bulletin, press releases and other updates. There's a subscription form on their website at <http://worldblindunion.org/English/Pages/EBulletinSubscription.aspx>

This issue of East Wind and the previous one have come out later than we intended. We've tried to provide readers with news leading up to and following the Mid-Term Regional General Assembly. Because of the delay, the next issue of East Wind, no. 27, will now come out in November. I would like your contributions by Wednesday 31 October please.

A Helping Hand to the University Students with Visual Impairments

Submitted by Aye Chan Aung (Alice)

Grade 11 or the so-called university entrance exam is a turning point of life for the students in Myanmar. Let alone the blind or visually impaired students with limited resources, even the sighted ones have to try very hard to pass it. No matter what, the grade 11 students with visual impairments put all their heart and soul in their study and sit for that exam every year on an equal basis with others.

The matriculation exam results for the academic year 2017-18 came out in early June this year. It is really amazing to know that 12 students from various blind schools all over the country passed the exam with flying colours. Most of them got distinctions in History, Geography and Economics. We, Myanmar National Association of the Blind (MNAB), are very proud of their great endeavor and astounding success.

At the moment, those students are getting busy with the preparations for their further study at universities. They will specialize in their interested subjects and pursue their dream of being university graduates. On the other hand, MNAB is making various arrangements to be able to help them catch their dreams.

Firstly, MNAB will organize an event in honour of those outstanding students. Next, MNAB will help them with the availability of their lessons in braille. The students may

come to the office in person and bring the documents to be converted into braille version. Or they may send them via email. Then, MNAB has opened resource rooms at some universities. The blind students can listen to knowledgeable audio books other than their lessons in those rooms. They can also use the internet there in search of data and information related to their major subjects. Besides this, the tutors and lecturers can leave soft copies of lessons in the computers of the resource rooms for the convenient access of the blind students. Last, but not least, MNAB will provide laptop and tablet rental services to the needy university students with visual impairments for their effective learning.

To sum up, MNAB wishes to create the barrier-free learning environment as much as possible for the blind or visually impaired students in Myanmar. With this in mind, it is always ready to give a helping hand to them.

Hong Kong Blind Union Released 2018 Hong Kong Web Accessibility Survey

Jess Shek writes:

On 16 July, the Hong Kong Blind Union (HKBU) unveiled the survey findings of the 2018 Web Accessibility in Hong Kong. The overall rating is unsatisfactory as more than 80 percent of the websites tested presented enormous barriers for the visually impaired users.

HKBU conducts the survey exercise regularly with an aim to reveal the overall level of web accessibility in Hong Kong. This year's survey, funded by the Equal Opportunities Commission of Hong Kong, was conducted between November 2017 and April 2018. The survey selected 198 websites for testing, including sites of 70 public organisations, 101 listed companies and 27 Legislative Councillors. The websites were evaluated against 12 basic requirements and 10 advanced criteria extracted from the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 published by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C).

The survey report showed only 16.7 percent (i.e. 33 out of 198) of the evaluated websites met all the 12 basic requirements. Amongst those, listed companies were the poorest performer, with only 9 out of 101 websites included in this "Pass" category. The 12 basic requirements are vital for good web accessibility, such as providing text description for images and captions for audio tracks.

"The findings showed web accessibility level in Hong Kong still leave a lot to be desired," said Kevin Chow, Chairman of HKBU's IT Advisory Committee and member of WBUAP ICT and Adaptive Technology Committee. "To alleviate the present situation, the Government should spend more efforts in raising the awareness of web accessibility in the community through various activities, such as organising a web accessibility recognition scheme, seminars and so on. They should also consider to promote the web accessibility design through different kinds of administrative measures under the existing discrimination ordinances, where all websites are required to attain a certain level of accessibility."

"The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities states that governments must ensure equal access to information and communications systems

for persons with disabilities, in order to enable them to participate fully in all aspects of life," he added.

More information

- Read the executive summary of the 2018 Web Accessibility Survey at:
http://www.google.com/url?q=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.eoc.org.hk%2FEOC%2FUpload%2FUserFiles%2FFile%2FFunding%2520Programme%2Fpolicy%2F1718%2F2018_webaccessibility_survey_ExecutiveSummary_final%2520version_EN.pdf&sa=D&sntz=1&usq=AFQjCNEHpQW-Mla6gyDUcbk5PF6MROcF-Q
- Read the full survey report (Chinese only) at:
http://www.google.com/url?q=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.eoc.org.hk%2FEOC%2FUpload%2FUserFiles%2FFile%2FFunding%2520Programme%2Fpolicy%2F1718%2FEOC%2520Report%25202018_final%2520version_ChineseOnly.pdf&sa=D&sntz=1&usq=AFQjCNG1j9K-yRYOEUMnuvngaPeMnJEMQg

Questions? Feel free to reach out to Terry Wong of Hong Kong Blind Union at terrywong@hkbu.org.hk.

The 5th Thailand Blind Music Festival - S2S Fly High "No One Left Behind"

Thipyaporn Khempila writes

The Thailand Association of the Blind (TAB) and the Thailand Association of the Blind Music Academy Foundation (TABMAF) worked with the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security and other partnerships to organize the 5th Thailand Blind Music Festival. This was based on the theme S2S Fly High "No One Left Behind".

This year, we were pleased to expand the music festival to three cities; Nakorn Phanom in the North-East, Phuket in the South with the biggest stage in Bangkok – the capital city in the Center of Thailand.

The Bangkok performance was staged at the National Theatre on June 22, 2018. The General Anuntaporn Kanchanarat, Minister of Social Development and Human Security, was officially the president in the opening ceremony of the festival. This international music festival by the blind was well organized with two rounds of performance; the afternoon round from 12pm to 4pm and the night round from 4:30pm to 10:30pm. The main objectives of the concert for this year were not only to offer happiness for all through music, but also to fundraise for building the S2S studio. The concert for the night round was also broadcast live on NBT Thai TV channel.

The audiences had a good experience enjoying the spectacular music shows performed by more than 100 blind singers and blind musicians. For example, the spectators were pleased through music performances by:
 S2S Fly High music artists from "From Street to Stars" project,
 Diamond band – the blind music band travelling on the music way for more than 15 years,
 Suk Sawan band from Lanna Kingdom located in the North of Thailand,
 Or Chao band – the new champion of the 4th Blind Folk Song band Contest in April 2018,

Annie – Angel of Ku Zheng (Chinese music instrument) from Phuket,
 Louk Isan band – the young blood of blind music from the North-East of Thailand,
 and
 Sweet and Cool band with sweet songs playing the piano and the saxophone and
 the Jazz Battle between Jazz Impression and S2S Jazz Version etc.

In addition, blind singers and blind musicians from other ASEAN countries participated in this international music festival including:

The Sunshine from Vietnam,
 Daniel Blind Busker from Singapore,
 Toetoe Linn Guitar Hero from Myanmar,
 Happy Mahori from Lao PDR and
 Baraya from Indonesia.

Moreover, some famous Thai artists came to join in the concert this year such as Focus AF, Nim AF, Suay Sarocha, Da-Jim Thai rapper, Duangdao TaoHiran, Dr. Supachai Jansuwan – one of national artists of Thailand and the very special show where there was a collaboration between kids from Tree Music, the Bangkok School for the Blind, Punyawuthikorn School, Sri Sangvalya Chiang Mai School and Ramintra School for the Blind.

The first concert of the Thailand Blind Music Festival was organized in 2012. It coincided with the 8th World Blind Union Convention in Thailand. The Thailand Association of the blind Music Academy was officially created in 2017. Since then this music academy has had the main responsibility to encourage S2S blind singers and blind musicians and also other Thai blind music artists.

S2S Fly high is growing out of the project “From Street to Stars or S2S”. The Thailand Association of the Blind Music Academy works to support and develop high music potential of Thai blind music artists through cooperation with Thailand Association of the Blind, the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security and other organization partnerships. This huge project for blind music artists was organized to systematically improve the potential performance and skills of blind musicians and blind singers not only in public places but also on the professional stage of performance. The project has been created in order to seek nationwide support for new stars. The professional music artists from the famous music public companies in Thailand such as G-MM Grammy and RS have trained this young blood group. As a consequence, all new stars who have visual impairment can become “S2S artists”. They can achieve and improve themselves to work at the professional music level much more than was possible previously.

It's evident that the Thailand Blind Music Festival is one of many activities organized in order to have welcoming places for shows by the blind artists. With pride and honor, all artists with visual impairment have an opportunity to communicate with society the potential of persons with disabilities.

First Time Experiencing Thai Blind National Convention

Nichakarn Kaveevorayan writes:

I had heard that the Blind National Convention has been held annually by the Thailand Association of the Blind (TAB) in different regions of Thailand, but I never

joined it. But this year, I was asked to be a Thai delegate in the sixth ASEAN Community Blind Forum (ACBF), which was one of the sessions in the 21st TAB National Convention.

The 21st National Convention was organized during 21st-25th April at Songphanburi Hotel, Suphanburi, a province in the central part of Thailand. In my thought, it was not an ordinary meeting but a great fair that gave plenty of knowledge about current status of blind people and ways to develop blind people in various aspects of lives. There were several hundreds of visual impaired participants of different ages and different careers from around Thailand. Moreover, the event also grabbed attention from blind foreigners and sighted people.

In terms of the sixth ACBF session, there were 17 participants from seven countries: namely Brunei, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Thailand. The session emphasised the Marrakesh Treaty which would help alleviate the book famine for blind, visually impaired and print disabled persons. After joining it, I not only learned about the Marrakesh Treaty and its importance, but also knew the strategies for encouraging the promotion and ratification of the Marrakesh Treaty in Thailand together with the current process related to the treaty in the other six ASEAN countries. We, all of the participants, shared and brainstormed ideas about the next Marrakesh Treaty campaign in our region.

It was also worth mentioning that the sixth ACBF had the honourable speakers, Mr. Paolo Lanteri, legal officer of WIPO of Switzerland, and Mr. Neil Jarvis, general manager of Strategic Relations of Blind Foundation of New Zealand. Mr. Paolo Lanteri presented us with the role of World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and other international mechanisms in promoting the right to read and cross-border access to information for the blind and print disabled. For Mr. Neil Jarvis, he stated the New Zealand six-year attempt to promote the significance of Marrakesh Treaty to the government and involved organizations. Finally, New Zealand could completely succeed passing the Marrakesh Treaty to the parliament and approve by its cabinet. In addition, Mr. Neil kindly created the beautiful resolutions for progressing the Marrakesh Treaty process to ratification and implementation in ASEAN region. That was, "urging all governments to take all necessary steps to ratify and implement the Marrakesh Treaty as a matter of urgency and adopt the World Blind Union's Guide to the Marrakesh Treaty as the authoritative publication which will inform the ratification and implementation process." Nonetheless, involved organizations should work closely with the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and the Accessible Books Consortium (ABC). I believe if we follow these resolutions, visually impaired and print disabled people will fully gain fruitful benefits from the Marrakesh Treaty. We will have the rights to access all kinds of both Thai and foreign language books in alternative formats without any limitations.

Besides ACBF, participants from ASEAN countries and I had a chance to join other seminar sessions on 'Vocational Careers and Occupations for the Blind', 'Enhancing Quality of Life of Thai Blind People in the Main Streamed development from Disparate to Inclusive Society"', 'Discrimination Elimination', etc. These made me realize that many organizations relevant to persons with disabilities have been collaborating with one another on developing the quality of life of people with visual impairment, and society giving more opportunities, like education, employment and access to information, to those with sight impairment. Therefore, these days, there were a number of vocational career choices for the blind, such as agriculture, business owners, and investors. We could be and do what we want.

For our leisure time, we toured the exhibition hall where products made by blind people and technological items for the blind were shown. We enjoyed shopping and doing activities there, like playing amusing games and drawing lots. However, the joyful moment had not ended. The last night at Songphanburi Hotel, Thai and foreign participants had a great dinner together including the wonderful S to S (From Street to Star) concert from very talented Thai blind singers and musicians.

It was only five days that I participated in the 21st Blind National Convention, but it was like my world was opened up. I had got a lot of knowledge and inspiration, as well as learned to develop myself and live happily with sight impairment in the society.

New app to help the visually impaired identify banknotes

Jess Shek writes:

To further facilitate the visually impaired to differentiate the denominations of Hong Kong banknotes, the Hong Kong Monetary Authority sponsored the Hong Kong Society for the Blind to develop a new mobile app that scans a banknote with a phone's camera, and reads out its denomination by speech or by vibration feedback. Because of the similar sizes, it is easy for the visually impaired to confuse HK\$20 notes with HK\$50 notes, and HK\$100 with HK\$500 notes.

During the development process of the mobile app, a number of focus groups were held to collect feedback from visually impaired persons so as to cater for the needs of people with different levels of visual impairment. Before the availability of the new mobile app, accessibility features were added to aid the visually impaired to differentiate the denominations. These included braille in the bottom left corner of the banknote, a "stronger" embossed numeral in the top left corner and embossed lines that varied in number depending on the denomination. In addition, note-measuring templates have been made available for the visually impaired to identify the denominations.

To get the new mobile app, search for "Hong Kong Banknotes Reader" in the App Store or Google Play. Have a question about the app? Feel free to reach out to Navy Hui at navy.hui@bfahk.com.hk.

UlaanBaatar Statement

Editor's note:

The WBUAP Mid-Term Regional General Assembly was held from Sunday 9 to Wednesday 12 September 2018 in Ulaan-Baatar, Mongolia. Here is the closing action statement adopted by assembly participants.

We, the participants at the World Blind Union – Asia Pacific (WBUAP) Mid-Term Regional General Assembly in UlaanBaatar, 12 September, 2018 adopt the following statement and refer it to relevant stakeholders for their consideration and action where appropriate:

1. We request governments to review or enact legislation which ensures that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities constitutes an effective tool for change in the lives of people who are blind or partially sighted; and we urge all WBUAP members to engage with monitoring and implementation processes to the maximum extent possible.
2. We call upon all governments throughout the WBU Asia Pacific region (Region) to ratify the Marrakesh Treaty as soon as practicable, so that persons who are blind or partially sighted or who have other print disabilities, have the fullest possible access to works of literature and to educational materials. We congratulate the five countries in the Region that have already ratified the Treaty.
3. We encourage national and international development organisations to work with governments to develop disability-inclusive policies and to implement programs to progress the action plans for the Sustainable Development Goals, the Incheon Strategy and the Beijing Declaration.
4. We encourage WBUAP members to co-operate with the United Nations Development Program to build capacity across the region so that persons who are blind or partially sighted are able to advocate for greater access to information.
5. We request all WBUAP members to give priority to policies that promote the empowerment of blind and partially sighted women by striving for their equality, safety and economic independence. In particular, members should focus on the themes identified by the 2018 WBU Asia Pacific Women's Forum: education, employment, leadership opportunities, social participation, technology and the prevention of abuse and exploitation of women.
6. In acknowledging the very successful leadership training course held in December 2017 in Bangkok, under the generous sponsorship of the Danish International Development Agency (Danida), we encourage WBUAP members to actively provide leadership training and mentoring opportunities to facilitate the active participation of young people at the national and regional level. Furthermore, we request all members to pay attention to the needs, opinions and aspirations of young people, as well as nurture their leadership potential.
7. Noting that not all countries in the WBU Asia Pacific region were able to fully participate in this regional assembly, largely due to a lack of resources and/or infrastructure, we encourage WBUAP members to reach out to neighbouring countries to help them build their capacity to ensure improved services and peer support for their blind and partially sighted citizens. In this regard we express our appreciation to those organisations which have sponsored participants at this Assembly.
8. We call upon all governments, corporations and other global partners to take their share of responsibility and consult effectively to ensure that information and communications technologies are available, accessible and affordable to, and useable by, persons who are blind or partially sighted—as it is through such technology that real inclusion can be advanced and social isolation eliminated.
9. We endorse the generous offer of Hong Kong Blind Union to initiate and lead the implementation of a web accessibility campaign at the regional level, with active support from WBUAP members, to promote the adoption of internationally

recognised accessibility standards in web design, apps, e-learning and other ICT products and services.

10. Noting the unacceptably high levels of unemployment and under-employment of persons who are blind or partially sighted in many countries, we call on all governments to implement or out-source programs that enable economic empowerment through the full participation in employment including: the promotion and resourcing of occupation-specific programs which promote the economic independence of blind and partially sighted people; awareness-raising programs for public and private employers and the community; transition to employment programs for school-leavers and newly-blinded persons; and the operation of specialist equipment and assistive technology schemes.
11. We support the proposal of the WBU Global Employment committee to request the WBU Officers to give much higher priority to employment issues including a major focus at the 2020 WBU General Assembly in Spain. In addition, noting the success of project Aspiro, we request WBUAP members to find ways to support Project Aspiro such as by providing employment-related information and case studies in their major languages for inclusion on the Project Aspiro website.
12. We call on the WBUAP members to share actively best practice initiatives and programs in areas including employment promotion and entrepreneurship, fundraising and capacity building.
13. We urge WBUAP members and networks to maintain strong communication with each other, using the WBUAP web site, The East Wind newsletter and other communication tools – ensuring that where practicable no person is left behind.
14. We congratulate the Mongolian National Federation of the Blind (MNFB) on the hosting of a very successful regional assembly; and we express our appreciation to the Mongolian Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and to the members, staff and volunteers from MNFB whose collective efforts have made our stay in UlaanBaatar so productive and enjoyable.

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Upcoming Dates for East Wind

Here are the dates for the next two issues of East Wind. Please can you put these dates in your diaries so you can get your news to the Editor in good time.

Issue No. 27 is now due in November 2018. Please send your items by Wednesday 31 October.

Issue No. 28 is now due in February 2019. Please send your news by Thursday 31 January.

Please note that we may edit submissions due to space limitations. Please send your contributions to Mary's email address: mary@aicomms.co.nz.

You should also check out our website www.wbuap.org. If you go to our home page you can sign up to receive updates from our website direct to your inbox or use our RSS feed.

That concludes this issue of East Wind No. 26, September 2018.