



CENTENARY OF THE INTERNATIONAL MUNICIPAL MOVEMENT
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Memories of Local Governments' Path To Unity and Inclusiveness

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My background in International Local Government structures commenced in 1977 with my election as an Alderman (now Councillor) on Concord Municipal Council which was an inner city municipality located in Sydney, Australia (since amalgamated and is known as the City of Canada Bay). As a Socialist I was committed to ensuring equity, environmental sustainability and egalitarianism and I resolve to demonstrate that the public sector should be demonstrably more efficient and effective than the private sector. I rapidly perceived that personal ideology did not count as much in Local Government as in other spheres of Government and Local Government politicians of all persuasions could work together for the common good because their mandates were very close to the community of which they were an integral part.

I was an elected member for over 26 years before I stood down, including 10 years as Mayor and in Australia this role is more than ceremonial. There is an expectation that Mayors "roll up their sleeves" and work alongside staff and provide not only political leadership but also administrative and community leadership.

I spent 12 years as the President of the Local Government Association of New South Wales and 15 years as a member of the National Executive of the Australian Local Government Association including two years as Australian President, a member of the nine person Council of Australian Governments chaired by the Prime Minister and numerous Ministerial Councils. It was at this time I became involved with and committed to the International Local Government movement.

In 1992 I became Executive Vice President of the International Union of Local Authorities Asia Pacific, 1996-2004 President of IULA ASPAC and Vice President of IULA and spent 10 years on the Board of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum until 2004. These were exciting years and I recall many battles including our sponsorship of China into IULA as a full member in 1998. Conservative forces tried to prevent this with cries that China was not a democratic country and the like. What nonsense. Looking underneath the surface, many so-called "democracies" display very un-democratic practices and from Asia Pacific's point of view we have experiences of dealing with many systems but believe the true path for a World organisation requires tolerance and inclusiveness if we are to move along the path of progress and change. And change we have seen in our great region. We have seen constitutional democracies, Communist systems, military dictatorships, fledgling democracies in transition, assumed democracies with centralised control over Local Government and the list goes on. If we were to isolate all but those who have the ideal-type democracy there wouldn't be many members of our organisation. But we don't make value judgements as we know that the processes of reform are dynamic and an effective organisation must be inclusive and encourage new ways of doing things. Who in this day and age would prevent China being part of a World Local Government organisation or any World organisation? However only a few years ago the social purists tried but fortunately didn't succeed. The real thinkers in IULA welcomed China and all who had the confidence of IULA ASPAC and our Region has progressed and contributed greatly to World Local Government.

Then came the big AMALGAMATION debate. IULA, UTO, METROPOLIS. I was very pleased to have been part of this process but as a resident of Australia couldn't understand the sharp divisions within Europe between "Francos" and "Anglos".

Maybe I was assisted by having a Celtic ancestry (Scottish and Irish) but the cultures in Asia Pacific unanimously supported unity too. In fact when the vote was taken within IULA it was adopted by one vote on the united strength from IULA ASPAC.

We then had to work with other like-minded people like Joan Clos, Norbert Burger, Alan Lloyd, Mercedes Bresso, Jeremy Smith, Pierre Schapiro and many others to bring the three organisations together and form United Cities and Local Governments and blend the cultural differences. This has been a great achievement. I really enjoyed working with the Francophone colleagues (and debating with them) and my only regret is that my fluency in French is zilch but my commitment to unity, I hope, makes up for that linguistic frailty.

Our new UCLG was however too centrist and did not take proper account of the fact that a World organisation must reflect all its cultural diversity in real political and bureaucratic terms, so I was happy working with the Secretaries General of the Regions to realise this part of the Organization and, with the establishment of the Co-Presidency, to ensuring equity and further break down of the centrist control mentality that works against a truly inclusive structure and organisation. The success in having Mayor Topbas of Istanbul following the very successful leadership of the Mayor of Paris Mayor Delanoe as President sends a clear message that Europe and the Regions must share the leadership in a truly world organisation. Selahatin Yildirim from MEWA, I single out as he was my closest co-worker in achieving many of the reforms and having to battle the diminishing forces of reaction.

Alan Lloyd from Wales played a decisive political role in the whole scenario and his contribution should never be underestimated. His country should have honoured him. If they don't, we should continue to do so.

So as we look to the future of UCLG let us build on our achievements: unity, intercultural sensitivities, inclusiveness and the search for common elements that unite us rather than the issues that divide us. Let us continue to build an organisation that engages in participatory democracy and diminish the structural inefficiencies of centrist political and bureaucratic controls. Let us enhance the role of women in leadership positions and shame National Governments into reform by exposing their rhetoric through clear examples at Local Government level and through our UCLG World and Regional Sections (if need be we should also expose the rhetoric in UCLG too. It is no good having policies if we don't push for constructive mechanisms for implementation).

UCLG ASPAC will continue to have Taipei and Beijing, South Korea and North Korea and India and Pakistan sitting at the same table. We will demonstrate to the World that there is a better way of engagement with people-to-people and Local Government-to-Local Government. I hope that other Regions will do likewise and that the World Organization of UCLG will support this and show that in the negative elements in the flawed political structures there is a very real way forward.

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS OF THE WORLD UNITE!