



Fourth Asia Pacific Judicial Reform Forum Meeting

The Asia Pacific Judicial Reform Forum (APJRF) is a network of superior courts and judicial education bodies in the Asia Pacific. The APJRF emerged from the Manila Declaration on Judicial Reform, signed in November 2005.

The APJRF is focused on developing the effectiveness of courts throughout the Asia Pacific Region. Its members come from the judiciaries of 49 countries. They include many large countries — both China and India are members — and many very small Pacific Island nations. It has developed a website and encourages personal contact and the exchange of ideas between judicial officers from member countries. In its short history, it has published a major work entitled *Searching for Success in Judicial Reform*. The book was published in English and has now been translated and republished in Chinese for Chinese judges.

The APJRF has held four major international conferences since 2005. Although its primary concern is to assist courts in resolving practical problems, members often discuss complex legal issues.

The most recent international conference was held in Beijing in the People's Republic of China from 26–28 October 2010. The theme of the conference

was “Using Technology to Improve Court Performance”. A number of judges spoke of their experience with the introduction of technology into their courts. Both the successes and failures were discussed. It became apparent that every court has encountered difficulties in introducing technology. Many have experienced similar problems. The involvement of senior judges is critical to the successful implementation of technology. Senior judges must determine the needs of the court and, from the range of options presented by consultants, develop the facilities which the particular court requires. A universal comment across every jurisdiction was that consultants do not understand the needs of a court or the most effective approach to adapting technology to the litigation process. The papers presented at the conference will be published on the APJRF website in the near future.

There were 105 delegates from 24 member countries at the Beijing meeting. A number of senior judges from the Supreme People's Court of China attended and a number of Chief Justices from member courts. There were also representatives of the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, the Asia Foundation and the United Nations Development Program.



The Honourable Justice Peter McClellan addressing the meeting. Seated (l-r) President of the Supreme People's Court of China, Chief Justice Wang Shengjun, Chief Justice Tun Zaki Azmi, of Malaysia and the Vice President of the Supreme People's Court of China, Justice Shen Deyong.



Mr Ernest Schmitt, Chief Executive of the Judicial Commission of NSW with Judge Jiang Huiling, Senior Judge and Deputy Director-General of the Judicial Reform Office of the Supreme People's Court of the People's Republic of China.

The work of the APJRF is managed by an executive comprised of Australian judges, court executives and a representative of the Judicial Commission of NSW. The Secretariat is chaired by the Honourable Justice Hayne of the High Court. Unfortunately, Justice Hayne was unable to travel to Beijing and Justice Peter McClellan, Chief Judge at Common Law of the Supreme Court of NSW, chaired the Beijing meeting. Mr Ernest Schmatt, PSM, Chief Executive of the Judicial Commission helped to organise the conference in Beijing with members of the Supreme People's Court. Mr Andrew Phelan, Chief Executive and Principal Registrar of the High Court had oversight of the preparations in Australia.

The conference was opened by the President of the Supreme People's Court of China, Chief Justice Wang Shengjun who spoke of the importance of the work of the APJRF and the opportunity it provided for courts in the region to share their experience and knowledge. The keynote address was delivered by Chief Justice Tun Zaki Azmi of Malaysia who spoke of the introduction of technology in Malaysian courts.

A number of countries indicated that they had a long term objective of complete conversion of their courts to electronic processes, however only Singapore has effectively introduced e-filing at this time. All courts have experienced a reluctance in many older judicial officers to make effective use of the resource which technology provides. Some courts,

particularly those from the Pacific region, struggle to obtain any technology at all. When responding to a questionnaire, Samoa indicated that technology in that jurisdiction was limited to a sound amplification system in some courts. The need for basic computer facilities to provide access to statutes and decided cases when judges are travelling in more remote regions is obvious and was identified as a task requiring the assistance of aid organisations.

The delegates were the guests of the Chief Justice of China at a banquet in the Great Hall of the People. The representatives of the Secretariat and one representative from each country also attended a meeting with Mr Zhou Yongkang, a member of the standing committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee. When welcoming the delegates to China, Mr Zhou spoke of his belief that the theme of the APJRF's meeting was important in promoting openness and fairness and improving the efficiency and quality of judicial work in all member countries.

From its early beginnings, it is now apparent that the APJRF is providing a valuable resource to judiciaries throughout the region. Through both its major conferences and the personal exchanges between judges from member countries, many opportunities for the development of reforms in each country have emerged. Many judiciaries share common problems to which answers may come from discussion with others.

Commission wins gold in the Premier's Public Sector Awards



At the Premier's Public Sector Awards ceremony on 15 November, the Premier of NSW, the Honourable Kristina Keneally MP, presented the gold award for annual reporting to the Judicial Commission's Chief Executive, Mr Ernest Schmatt PSM. The NSW Public Bodies Review Committee, in conjunction with the Public Accounts Committee, selected the Judicial Commission's 2008–09 annual report to receive the gold award. The award is to recognise excellence in public sector annual reporting. In accepting the award on behalf of the Commission, Mr Schmatt acknowledged the work of writer Ruth Sheard, graphic designer Lorraine Beal, the Commission members and all staff for their contribution.