

PRESENTATION OF BOOKS TO THE NATIONAL LIBRARY

Speaking notes for Senator Evans for the receipt of books for the Indo-Chinese National Libraries, Canberra, 28 August 1991.

It's a great pleasure to be here today to take delivery of this collection of books assembled by the Friends of the National Library for presentation to the National Libraries of Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam.

The Friends of the National Library have contributed generously of their time and their resources. I am sure that the books which they have collected will be welcomed warmly by the ultimate recipients - the libraries and, through them, the peoples of Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam.

The Australian Government is assisting with the provision of freight and will ensure through its diplomatic representatives in the region that the books are delivered to the libraries.

It would be superfluous of me to rehearse the history of the last half-century in Indo-China. The wars and their aftermath have taken a terrible toll, not only in terms of human suffering and economic backwardness, but in the particularly destructive effect on the region's intellectual infrastructure - on libraries, cultural and religious institutions, schools and universities.

Santayana's dictum holds true for Indo-China - those who do not understand the past are condemned to relive it. And the surest way to understand and spread the lessons of the past is to revive intellectual life. I hope earnestly that this gift will play some part, however small, in doing just that.

I hope, too, that the vicious cycle of instability and poverty in the region will be broken soon by a solution of the Cambodian dispute. As I say these words, the Cambodian factions are meeting in Thailand in an effort to resolve their differences on the implementation of the Australian-originated United Nations peace-keeping plan to allow elections and stability to be given a chance in Cambodia.

The gift of these books will underline the importance of public, non-governmental links between Australia and the countries of Indo-China. We cannot overestimate the importance of individual and institutional links between Australia and the region where we live. The public diplomacy represented by this gift of books is a part of the web of ties that increasingly binds us to Asia.

The National Library itself is an important part of this web. The Library has a long history of association with libraries in Indo-China. It has substantial holdings of material from the region. It has maintained links through the training courses it has run in Australia and Indo-China.

Of course, this assistance to the libraries of Indo-China is only part of the National Library's program of developing links with counterpart organisations in the Asia Pacific region. I note in passing the Library's reputation as a major source for works on Indonesia and its extensive holdings in a number of other key regional languages.

The books that you have made available today will meet a very real need in all of the libraries for English language material. In all the countries of Indo-China there is a recognition of the importance of English for economic development as well as for a reinvigoration of intellectual life. Australia is helping to meet this need in a variety of ways, by offering training courses in Australia, through the teaching of English by radio carried out by Radio Australia and Radio Vietnam together and the provision by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of English language radio and television programs.

I shall end by pointing out that it is not just the National Library that is involved in the gift of these books. What we see is the wider Australian community rising to the challenge of assisting those in need. The Friends of the National Library have gathered together donations from individuals, corporations and from the ACT Government. Volunteers have sorted and catalogued the books. On behalf of the Government, I thank all of those involved for their generosity and effort.

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