

Scholars think big to support our smaller neighbours



DIVERSE: UNESCO Pacific Office cultural adviser Mali Voi, Belau National Museum director Faustina Rehner, Solomon Islands National Museum director Lawrence Fomato and ANU professor Amareswar Galla, back, are among hundreds of scholars taking part in this year's Asia Pacific Week at the Australian National University. The event is focusing on the world's most vulnerable countries. Picture: LANNON HARLEY

By Diana Streak

With more than 300 scholars from around the world in Canberra at the Australian National University, this year's annual Asia Pacific Week is the biggest and most diverse yet.

Professor James Fox, convener of the ANU College of Asia and Pacific, said the 2006 event had attracted "the largest number of scholars from the widest array of countries that we have had since kicking off the program three years ago".

Among the programs held this week were workshops for sustainable

heritage development for Asia Pacific museums.

Director of graduate studies in Sustainable Heritage Development at the ANU's Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Professor Amareswar Galla, said this year's program was focused on those countries that were most vulnerable to the rapid changes taking place around the world.

"If people have the capacity to take advantage of the forces of globalisation and they can build their institutions to participate, they can take advantage, otherwise they miss

the bus and are even more marginalised," Professor Galla said.

He said this week was the largest meeting of Pacific Island museum directors and staff and the focus was on indigenous people.

"One of the impacts of globalisation is homogenisation so sustaining cultural diversity through museums is important."

Among the issues being discussed were codes of ethics for museums, illicit trafficking, cultural property and emergency preparedness for events such as cyclones, riots and armed conflicts.

Director of the Belau National Museum and incoming president of the Pacific Island Museums Association, Faustina Rehner, told *The Canberra Times* that Pacific museums needed to link with each other and internationally. "The more we understand each other, the better," she said.

She said many objects from small countries were stored in large museums in Europe, America and Australia. "I'd like to see a really good travelling exhibition some time in the future or a long-term loan so we can show Pulauan objects that have

been taken to Australia or Germany so people can get to see them.

"We need to work together on these shared resources. They came and took the objects and images and it's a good thing they did... but now we need to share them."

Among the countries participating in Asia Pacific Week are Korea, China, Japan, East Timor, Vietnam and Indonesia. The program includes public events, intensive courses and workshops.

For the full program, see <http://rspas.anu.edu.au/asiapacific/week/index.php>

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