

Creating an International Federation of Arts Support Agencies: Purpose, Mandate, and Process

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When noted environmentalist, Dr Vandana Shiva, delivered her Reith lecture this year she voiced concern about the ecological challenge of globalisation: "...it is time to stop and think," she said, "about the impact of globalisation on the lives of ordinary people. This is vital to achieve sustainability." Only through creating structures of democratic governance, Dr Shiva pointed out, can the survival options of the poor and the environment be safeguarded against the worst depredations of commerce and trade.

It is not only our ecology and our dispossessed that need to be safeguarded and sustained. What about artists and the arts environments structures of democratic governance are there for? How do we, as arts funding bodies, resist genetic engineering of the arts - refuse the infertile seed that offers us size and convenience at the expense of flavour? How do we, in an increasingly global mono-culture, ensure that the artists that give us African kwaito music, magico-realist writing, and Australian Aboriginal paintings not only survive but flourish?

Firstly, I believe that we must all recognise, as we strive to support artistic diversity in our own countries that our success depends on the artistic success of our neighbours. That the celebration of arts practice in Brazil or Bulgaria or Botswana is the celebration of arts practice in every country. And I believe that we can only nurture and sustain what we have, by sharing. By pooling our knowledge and resources. By offering each other our expertise about the best ways to facilitate and encourage people, young, old, urban or rural, Indigenous and non-Indigenous to communicate with each other and express themselves through art - to sing, dance, paint, and tell their stories.

Not so long ago you could have counted the number of arts councils on two hands. Now you'd need sixteen hands. In developing the proposal for a Federation of Arts Support Agencies, which you have in your kit, I talked to dozens of my counterparts around the world. There is a wealth of knowledge and expertise to spare. And with the worldwide web, we also have the mechanism to enable us to share it. The proposed Federation will maintain the momentum generated over the last three days. It will keep open the lines of communication. It will not only enhance our ability to achieve our goals as individual agencies, but also further those of our neighbours'.

Today, as we approach the conclusion of this remarkable Summit, we all have the chance to make the Federation a reality. Today is historic. We can witness the birth of something significant. After the presentations and discussion you will be asked - by a show of hands - to make history - to say yes, I want the Federation to happen. To talk about how that can happen, I welcome today a wonderful series of speakers to present their views on the Federation. The panel represents five continents and a variety of perspectives. Many of the them, cajoled by me earlier this year, agreed to be co-opted onto a steering committee to help guide the development of the proposal. I thank them enormously for their help and contribution. The first speaker is the Director of the Arts Council of Ireland, Patricia Quinn....