

The great value of ABU

Several generations of men and women across the Asia-Pacific have devoted time, energy and expertise to developing broadcasting in the region to where it is today.

Nowhere are their contributions better reflected than in the history of the ABU (Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union) over the past 49 years because we are an organisation built on our members – the broadcasting organisations of the Asia-Pacific. The full story of the ABU and the priceless contributions its members have made will be told during the 50th Anniversary celebrations in 2014, but as we near that milestone we must constantly remind ourselves that the ABU now is the combined contributions of all our predecessors since the Union was founded in 1964.

Each generation has built on the achievements of its predecessors and each has had to cope with the special challenges of its time – the development of radio as a lifeline for millions of people, the advent of television to inform, educate and entertain and the expansion into the digital world of the 21st Century.

The challenges today – and the reason the ABU is as important as ever – involve not just building the organisations we have inherited but also knitting them together in such a way that continues to serve more than half the world's population spread across half the earth's surface. The special challenge of the digital world is that it is evolving so rapidly and in so many directions that no single organisation has the capacity to meet the demands on its own. And if the largest broadcasters in the world struggle to cope, how can the smaller, less well-resourced organisations manage?

They can do it by working together - which is the great value of the ABU. By bringing all the region's broadcasters together and providing a forum for the sharing of knowledge we help the large and the small, the rich and the less wealthy, developed and developing broadcasters, our most long-established and our newest members.

Working together

Today, the ABU has more than 220 member broadcasters large and small spread across the region's 58 countries, from Turkey in the west to Samoa in the east, and from Russia in the north to New Zealand in the south. In the past two years alone the ABU has expanded by 35 to 220 members, a 13% increase, with seven applications awaiting

approval.

Full membership is open to national free-to-air broadcasters in the Asia-Pacific region, with associate membership for provincial broadcasters, subscription broadcasters or national broadcasters in other parts of the world. Other organisations connected to broadcasting can hold affiliate membership. Most of the ABU's associate members comprise European, African and North American broadcasters, many of whom have operations in Asia, and pay-TV and cable operators in the Asia-Pacific. Our affiliate members include satellite providers, telecommunications companies, production houses, equipment vendors and regulators.

Linking this diverse family together and offering meaningful professional services are what made the ABU so attractive to its members and new members. The ABU, as a non-profit, non-government, professional association is playing a crucial role to facilitate the development of broadcasting in the region, promote the collective interests of television and radio broadcasters and encourage regional and international co-operation between broadcasters.

The ABU runs a wide range of activities, including the daily Asiavision TV news exchange, co-production and program exchanges and technical, programming, legal and management consultancy services, as well as international frequency planning and coordination. We negotiate rights for major sports events such as the recent 2012 Summer Olympics and Paralympics in London and organise coverage for the region.

With a mission to assist all members wherever possible, the ABU provides rights-free content acquisition for developing countries, we organise seminars, workshops and training courses and offer annual ABU Prizes for radio and television programs. This October, we are organising the Asia-Pacific's first regional television and radio Song Festivals with finals to be held at the General Assembly in Seoul, Korea, from 11-17 October. And keeping everyone in the loop are the ABU website, e-newsletters, magazines and other publications.

To achieve all this, the ABU is funded primarily by annual subscriptions from members. We have an elected President and three Vice-Presidents who serve three-year terms. The current President is Dr. Kim In-Kyu, the President

and CEO of Korea's national public broadcaster KBS. The ABU Secretariat is located in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, with more than 35 staff, of whom at least a third are broadcast professionals recruited from among ABU members.

New initiatives and developments

The ABU works closely with the regional broadcasting unions in other parts of the world on matters of common concern, and with many other international organisations to exchange information on the latest developments in broadcasting, undertake activities to improve the skills and technologies of its members and encourage harmonisation of operating and technical broadcasting standards and systems in the region.

As well as major ongoing services such as our ever-expanding Regional TV news exchange AsiaVision, our impressive range of expert technical services, our legal and training resources and the regular conferences, seminars and forums, the ABU is constantly creating new opportunities to help our members – with our members help.

The following are just some of the most significant additional initiatives which I believe are currently helping to create new and exciting opportunities for broadcasting within our region and beyond.

We are at the start of what I hope will be a mutually beneficial joint project with the Ministry of Information and Culture of Malaysia and our member there RTM to establish an ABU television marketplace in Kuala Lumpur as part of Malaysia's Content and Creative Industry Market (KLCCIM). The ABU TV Market will be one-stop-shop for the TV industry in the Asia-Pacific, working with RTM-Malaysia on a "soft launch" in Kuala Lumpur in November and a full launch in 2013.

The ABU has a central role in a regional initiative to improve gender equality in broadcasting. Called Broadcasting for All: Focus on Gender, the project partners have already produced the region's first guide to developing gender mainstreaming and we are currently working on testing those guidelines. Prior to this year's General Assembly we are holding a Gender Media Forum which is bringing together leading media and IT practitioners to take stock of the current status of women in the media and IT industry to identify strategies and good practices for achieving a higher

representation of women in those industries and work on a fairer female portrayal in the media, advertising and movies.

As well as organising regional events such as the Radio Asia Conference and Digital Broadcasting Symposium- both of which are expanding in scope and influence to become truly global events – the ABU Secretariat is gearing up with RTM to host the 2014 World Summit on Media for Children in Kuala Lumpur. The ABU will also be organising the World Media Summit on Natural Disaster and Climate Change in Jakarta in 2014 in partnership with the ABU members in Indonesia.

As an umbrella body with its roots very firmly in media, the ABU runs or helps organise a number of important radio, TV and online content initiatives. One of these is the Digista Teens project which links established producers with industry newcomers to nurturing the film production skills of young people. Started in 2011, it now involves ten countries and 500 students working under professional mentors.

Similarly, the Change Asia Rescue the Earth (CARE) co-production series is an ABU partnership with the UN to progress Millennium Development Goals. The second series, CARE 2, produced four one-hour and seven 20-minute documentaries for distribution to all ABU members for broadcast. CCTV-China is now acting as executive producer for Series 3 alongside KBS who are managing it. They have just held their first producers meeting in Beijing and hopes are high for some wonderful programs to be produced.

Of special interest to the readers in Hong Kong is this year's annual ABU Robocon competition. Dubbed the Olympics of Knowledge for young people, the contest is truly regional, with 10,000 university students from 18 countries competing in teams to represent their country in the international finals. The aim of the contest is to design and build robots to navigate an obstacle course and reach a prize in the fastest time possible. This year's finals were hosted by RTHK-Hong Kong on the theme "Peng On Dai Gat, In Pursuit of Peace and Prosperity" which was inspired by annual Hong Kong Bun Festival and called for competitors to build robots to grab the top-most and luckiest buns on a tower. A team from the University of Electronic Science and Technology of China emerged as champions.

✉ Dr. Javad Mottaghi
Secretary-General

Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU)