



AFRICA and Middle EAST REPORT

By Arnold Tanzer

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These past two years have been an amazing learning and growing experience for me personally and for the region as a whole. I have been fortunate to meet many members of our global fraternity both within our culturally rich and divers region, as well as in Europe, the Americas and Australia.

My initial objective as stipulated when I assumed the position was to create lines of communication within my region and to the WACS fraternity as a whole. I have endeavoured to represent the region fairly, and for what I have believed is in the common interest of the members within the region and that of WACS as an umbrella organization.

To this end, a continental newsletter has been started with information being extracted from member organizations across the region. This has proved very successful with greater awareness of what is happening within the region reaching more associations.

Undoubtedly, as the developed world marches forth within the ease of electronic communication, large portions of Africa and the Middle East are still in the development of broadband access for all. The newsletters have therefore been designed to be forwarded in a small format to associations where they can then print it out or forward it to their members as they see fit.

Furthermore, the decision was to also include news from associations that are currently not members that have paid its dues. I felt that by reaching out to as many chefs as possible, and to include their news and views would only benefit our association in the long-term. Consequently we have found that many of these associations have inundated us regularly with their local news, and we have had to beg for current member countries for their news. The aim is to be inclusive of such associations, to help them grow membership, educational opportunities and one day welcome them within our fold.

However, I must stress that huge obstacles are in our way: firstly and foremost the question of finance. Where most of the developed countries in our membership have greater access to sponsorship, funds and trade exchanges, many associations within my region struggle with finances. Either through inefficient finance structures, governmental exchange controls or the inability of members within their organization to pay their local association dues. Many chefs across the region are minimum wage chefs, and with a large proportion of management of both associations and hospitality institutions being run by ex pat members. This has lead to associations not putting sustained growth measures in place, with many associations folding once the ex pat management structure moves on.

Further political situations within the region are not always conducive to the formation of associations, and some associations exist below the political radar. I have felt that support through communication is possibly the best option to increasing the membership within our region.

Further, the decision by the board to create a tiered membership structure for associations within the developing world should, with support from member associations, enrich our membership over the next couple of years. The outgoing aim of the past two years has been not to randomly acquire more members with no sustainability, but rather to encourage the communication with chefs across the region and to ensure that those countries that are not yet members are creating long lasting sustained financial and membership growth before joining WACS. I believe that we will see the fruits of this decision at the next congress.

Sadly, one member state has not maintained contact with either me or WACS as a whole. I have endeavoured through various means to try and initialised contact but to no avail. This is a particular misfortune for the members of the association, as the full benefit of being a member of WACS is not passed on.

I have endeavoured to travel to as many countries as would host me, in order to ascertain on ground level what a member of WACS means to the association and to glean information on how WACS could benefit the association. At board meetings this information was discussed and certain steps have been taken.

Firstly and foremost the yet to be ratified tier system, as proposed in the BYLAWS will greatly benefit not only countries in my region but also across the world. I would like to thank Mr. Metz, the board and, in particular Glenn Austin for the support and understanding on the issue of fees within my region and the rest of the developing world. This new tier structure will enable new members who are in a precarious financial position to partake at base-level within our organization and hopefully be inspired and supported to become full members.

Further, my various visits and communications have highlighted the need for education at base level. Many chefs and countries in the region have little or no resources to facilitate or train chefs with credible international recognized certification. For this reason, I fully support the proposed WACS Chefs certification programme. The pilot which is about to take off in various countries will highlight any potential problems that may arise globally using the American model. While the opportunity for an African or Middle East association arose to partake in the pilot programme, I declined due the cost and also due to the language restrictions at the current stage. I fully endorse the programme and certainly look forward to the official launch of the programme and implementation within the region.

The past two years have seen many highlights within our region and these have been reported on throughout the past two years. We have made contact and maintained regular contact with the following non-member countries within our region:

Morocco

Kenya

Congo Brazzaville

Tanzania

Rwanda

Lebanon
Ghana
Mozambique
Seycelles

Sadly, we have lost Saudi Arabia from our fold due to the unprecedented rise in membership fees when WACS voted to change the fees from Swiss francs to Euros, during the last WACS congress. Zimbabwe has not been able to pay its membership fees for sometime now, due to foreign exchange controls within that country and the lack of foreign reserves. However, we maintain constant contact and they are a very active association. We trust that within a short period we are able to welcome them back into our fold.

Namibia has had a slight rough patch over the last two years, however it seems that all is back on track. Contact has been maintained and we are encouraged by their willingness to sort out their financial situation and I will report back via my board report shortly on their status.

South Africa has had two very successful years with the opening of the Centre for Culinary Excellence, the re-launch of the SACA Web site and membership growth. Egypt has, as always maintained and grown their very successful chefs association and Markus Iten and his team have been invaluable to me in the Middle East. Markus has quietly been working at forging friendships and contact with various associations in the Middle East and I am confident that we will see the fruits of his labour soon.

United Arab Emirates, the location of our next congress, has hosted me a couple of times over the last two years and it has always been a pleasure to work with the Emirate Culinary Guild. The team is always very active and ground work preparations are already underway for the next congress. Furthermore the team from the Emirates recently won the MLA Black Box competition in Brisbane, Australia, no mean achievement, pitched against some very tough competition within the Asia Pacific.

Mauritius, which had moved over to Asia before my current directorship, is an active association, maintaining current correspondence with me, and I trust that the association will welcome the move back into the Africa and Middle East Region

For me the most inspiring moments over the last two years have been that non member associations have embraced the information and communication from WACS, have implemented WACS endorsed programmes such as International Chefs Day within their countries and in particular have embraced the spirit of fraternity and maintained regular contact.

No more proud was I of Rwanda, an association that is barely two years old, who ran a Worlds Cook Tour in Rwanda last year, to coincide with the 10 year anniversary of the terrible genocide that occurred in Rwanda.

I wish to close my report by showing you a short video highlighting the World Cooks Tour. I am enthusiastic about the future of our region, together we have made great progress, and with continued mutual support, I am confident that the best is yet to come. Till Dubai 2008, thank you.

{PLAY DVD 4 Minutes}

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