



UNION des FOIRES INTERNATIONALES

35bis, rue Jouffroy d'Abbans, 75017 PARIS, Tel. (33) 1 42 67 99 12, Fax (33) 1 42 27 19 29
E-mail: info@ufinet.org - <http://www.ufinet.org>

Press release

Departure and a new start in the UFI management

Gerda Marquardt,

Secretary-General of UFI from 1 April 1983 to 30 June 2001, retired from this position on 30 June of this year. Her departure signals the end of an important era in the history of UFI. In 1958, the young German left Augsburg for Paris and took a job as a foreign language secretary in the small office of the UFI General Secretariat. After becoming assistant to the Secretary-General, she was appointed head of the office in 1977 and was promoted to the position of Deputy Secretary-General in 1981. In 1983, she was elected Secretary-General of UFI.

During Gerda Marquardt's early years with the association, UFI was a European association with 60 member trade fairs. In the intervening period, it has developed into a global organization with 185 full members from 72 countries and a total of 601 events that are recognised as UFI member trade fairs. A further 34 federations and organizations are associate members of UFI.

There has been a fundamental shift in the profile of the association over the years. UFI has developed from an interest-representing body into a global federation active in the arena of market communication. Its members compete with each other throughout the world yet – and perhaps for this very reason – rely on their integration in a system of close, partnership-based cooperation. Under a number of UFI Presidents, who have all been committed to the same central goals but who have naturally placed emphasis on different focal points within this overall framework, the Secretary-General has always found the ideal mix of unity and variety. She has developed both the internal and external information activities of the association, thus helping to underpin cooperation between UFI members. She has successfully implemented the decisions and ideas of the Executive Committee and the Steering Committee – the creation of the association's website, for example, the development and optimisation of PR activities, and the planning of congress and seminar programmes – and, when conflicts of interest arose, she has always been able to work out a compromise solution, acceptable to all parties.

The rapid development of electronic communication technology driven by globalisation will continue to change the face of the trade fair industry and will also result in new challenges for the UFI General Secretariat. But whatever the nature of these challenges, future success will always also depend on the personal commitment of all employees of the General Secretariat and of Managing Director Vincent Gérard.

Vincent Gérard

took up the post of Managing Director of the UFI General Secretariat in Paris on 1 July 2001. The 51 year-old Belgian has wide-ranging experience in the international trade fair industry and a solid background in liaison with international bodies and organizations. He headed the AGRIBEX international agricultural fair in Brussels for 15 years, during which he was also General Manager of FEDAGRIM, the Belgian federation for agricultural machinery.

During this period, he also served a six-year term at the helm of the FEBELUX (*Fédération des Foires et Salons de Belgique et du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg*) and was Vice-President of EURASCO, the European Federation of Agricultural Fairs.

After having been involved in the aid programme for the Sahel zone as a student, the qualified architect, who also underwent additional training in the field of international trade, worked for UNESCO in a number of African countries as a young man. He worked for a general construction company active all over Africa for five years before taking his functions with AGRIBEX.

In his various functions, Vincent Gérard has always made major efforts to promote international cooperation.

The new UFI Managing Director is married with four children between the ages of 14 and 23. He is a music and art lover as well as a keen photographer, and he likes to keep fit.

A new era in the work of UFI

The direction of the General Secretariat by a Managing Director heralds a new era in the history of UFI. If UFI wants to meet the present and future challenges in the trade fair/exhibition sector, it will need to operate from a far more broadly based foundation. In a speech on basic principles given at the UFI Congress and General Assembly in Hong Kong in October 2000, UFI President Prof. Dr. Manfred Busche said that the membership base of UFI needs to be extended. In particular, he believes we have to attract more organizers from Asia and North America as members and to establish closer contacts with important regional trade fair companies in order to meet the challenge of globalisation. The recent creation of regional chapters is an important step in the right direction. We also need to expand cooperation with other international organisations. One example of the way in which this can be achieved is the global strategic alliance with the IAEM, the International Association of Exhibition Management. It will also be necessary to strengthen the position of associate members and partners with whom UFI already cooperates – such as airlines, hotels, stand construction companies and special-interest publishing companies – should be able to become members of UFI. As most of these recommendations made by the UFI President have meanwhile been approved by the decision bodies, the UFI Managing Director can now build on a solid and future-oriented platform.

Vincent Gérard, the new Managing Director, will also have important tasks to perform within the association – such as the extension and improvement of activities geared towards providing information for members and greater efforts in the field of press and public relations. Moreover, the organization of the work of the Committees and Regional Chapters will be of major importance. The activities of these bodies could be underpinned by such measures as the revival of the special-topic working groups and similar initiatives.

A number of challenges and tasks await Vincent Gérard, and the new position of Managing Director that was created specifically for the new era will allow him the necessary freedom of action to address these tasks.

