

International Relations Committee Report to Council

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Submitted by the IRC Chair, Ismail Abdullahi

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International at Midwinter

As of January 4th, there were 80 registrants from 16 countries outside the United States for Midwinter 2021. The numbers are similar to the final tallies for Midwinter 2020. There are nine exhibitors from outside the U.S., all from Canada this time. This is half of the number of international exhibitors that participated in-person in January 2020.

ALA International Membership

The global COVID pandemic and financial stress has impacted librarians around the world. ALA currently has 1,756 from 96 countries. Of these a little over half are from Canada. International membership has dropped around 9% since last year, equal to reduction in total ALA membership.

U.S. Russia Virtual Dialogue

Instead of a planned in-person meeting in Siberia in September 2020, the 4th U.S.-Russia Dialogue was held virtually over three days, September 15, 16, and 18. The title of the was "Libraries Rise to the Challenge: Meeting the UN Sustainable Development Goals in the Times of a Global Pandemic." ALA President Julius Jefferson Jr. and a dozen other U.S. librarians met to share knowledge and ideas with Russian colleagues via Zoom over multiple time zones. The initiative is supported by the U.S. Russia Foundation through IRO, and the grant has been extended through 2021.

Sharjah Virtual International Library Forum

IRO worked with partners the Sharjah International Book Fair and the Combined Book Exhibit, to pivot in September from a planned 7th full in-person conference to a virtual forum as COVID cases rose and travel restrictions were imposed.

The [Sharjah Virtual International Library Forum](#) expanded the normal regional event to a global one with 956 registrants (830 librarians and 126 exhibitor staff) from 52 countries. Registration

was free of charge this year. Over 550 participated live over the course of the three-day event November 10-12. Overdrive was the Gold Sponsor.

ALA President Julius Jefferson keynoted the Forum with the address “Meeting the Challenge in Times of Crisis.” The Forum held in Zoom included simultaneous interpretation in English and Arabic.

ALA Task Force on United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's)

The ten-member task force chaired of Past-President Loida Garcia Febo partnered with the National Library of the Philippines, The Philippine Librarian Association Inc. (PLAI) on November 20th to present "Philippine Libraries and Their Roles in the United Nations SDGs." Registration exceeded 800.

The Task Force has added [new resources](#) for all types of libraries to highlight their activities related to the UN SDG's. A Word version of the chart originally created by the Los Angeles Public Library can be used by libraries to copy in their activities to any of the seventeen SDG's for display and promotion.

The Task Force will be part of the next *ALA Connect Live* on February 25th focused on Sustainability. They will be joined by the Sustain RT.

ALA International Webinars

IRO working in collaboration IRRT, IFLA, and others hosted eleven international focused webinars from July to December 2020. Some such as ALA-IFLA “Going from disaster to wonder - managing successful teams” and “International Work and Projects During COVID-19” provided knowledge and insight during these challenging times, while others provided information on international activities, “Reaching national impact in Kenya and Namibia: EIFL's strategy for public library development.” The total registration for these webinars was 1,746 with 1,152 attending the session in person in time zones around the world.

ALA IFLA Nominations

This fall and early winter the IRC, with support from IRO, have worked with multiple units of ALA to solicit, review, and bring forward recommendations of ALA members to the Executive Board to be nominated for IFLA Section Committees for 2021-2025. IRC will continue this effort with additional recommendations through February ahead of the IFLA deadline for nominations. There are currently forty-three ALA members who were nominated by ALA serving on the various forty-four sections of IFLA.

IFLA Update

IRO Director Michael Dowling has continued to serve on the IFLA Governing Board as it moves forward on its governance restructuring. The vote to modify IFLA's governance will be on February 12. ALA President Julius Jefferson is the voting representative for ALA.

The main recommended changes are to a smaller Governing Board (from 19 to 11), and elected treasurer, and adding more regional committees to help raise the visibility and engagement of library communities around the world with IFLA. There would be a new North American Regional Committee of up to 20 members from the U.S. and Canada (Mexico is part of the Latin American and Caribbean region.) The six regional committee chairs would form a new Regional Council with its chair serving on the Governing Board.

ALA has been in discussions with other North American associations and groups to create a regional committee that can be diverse and inclusive. The call for nominations for this new North American Regional Committee will go out after February 12th if the governance changes are approved by the IFLA membership.

ALA Representative to American Library in Paris

The ALA Executive Board approved a second term of Damon Austin as the Nominations as ALA Representative on the Board of the American Library in Paris through September 2022. Damon and Betty Turock virtually presented the plaque from ALA recognizing the Library's Centennial.

Resolution Task Force

The IRC Chair and two members have participated on the Joint Task Force with the IFC reviewing the referred "Resolution Condemning U.S. Media Corporations Abridgement of Free Speech," 2019-2020 ALA CD #46.