

International Relations Committee Report to Council

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Submitted by the IRC Chair, Min Chou

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8th Sharjah International Library Conference

ALA with its partners, the Sharjah Book Authority and the Combined Book Exhibit were able to hold the hybrid (in-person and virtual) *8th Sharjah International Conference* Nov 9-11, in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates. Though on-site participation was lower than normal due to the pandemic, 223 librarians from 17 countries attended. They were able to hear presentations from: Carla Hayden, Librarian of Congress; Patty Wong, ALA President; Julius C. Jefferson Jr, Immediate ALA Past President; and Tracie Hall, ALA Executive Director Tracie Hall. Live streaming of the keynotes reached another 350 librarians around the world. One of the preconference workshops was ACRL's *Project Outcome for Academic and Research Libraries: Measuring the True Value of Your Library*.

National Libraries Summit

In addition to the Sharjah Conference, ALA and the Sharjah Book Authority, created the 1st *National Libraries Summit* that was held Nov 8-9. Leaders from 19 national libraries participated. Six each from Africa, Europe and the MENA Region, and Dr. Hayden from the Library of Congress. The four topics of the Summit were: *Visibility; Engagement; Impact; and Collaboration*. The Summit was well received with plans to continue in 2022. The Summit has allowed ALA to increase its contacts with national libraries.

ALA-FIL Free Pass to Guadalajara Book Fair

IRO organized the 21st ALA-FIL Free Pass Program to the Guadalajara Book Fair at end of November after not being able to offer it in 2020. Though the number of ALA member participants was much lower than in pre-pandemic years, with only 40 instead of the usual 150, it was a good turnout and a start of a return. Those attending found a safe environment and reported being able to find new books and other resources for their libraries. To assist the members a pre-travel webinar and an on-site orientation were held. ALA Immediate Past-President Julius C. Jefferson Jr. and Executive Board Member Eboni Henry represented ALA.

U.S. Russia Dialog

The Russian-US Library Dialogue, a collaboration between ALA and the Russian Library Association (RLA) hosted online sessions on December 16th and 17th to explore how libraries in both countries can advance a green agenda as part of the UN Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs) and what opportunities there are for joint projects between libraries in the U.S. and Russia. ALA President Patty Wong discussed how ALA is promoting sustainability work within libraries? Rebekkah Smith Aldrich and Casey Conlin of the Mid-Hudson Library System (NY) outlined opportunities and challenges the green agenda presents to libraries in the U.S. and Russia. Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library (KS) and David Siders, Cincinnati and Hamilton County Public Library (OH) provided examples of programming and planning that their libraries have done.

ALA and Global COVID Pandemic

The International Relations Roundtable (IRRT), with support from the International Relations Office organized hosted numerous webinars at the end of last summer that provided global perspectives on libraries during the pandemic and other issues. Over 500 librarians from around the world registered for these sessions. To make the webinars accessible they were held multiple times for various time zones. The series *Libraries Reopening: A Perspective of Best Practices from Around the World in the Time of COVID-19* included: *Opening a digital door to our campus users and libraries' community during global COVID-19 epidemiology outbreak;* *Insta-Library: Connecting to Youth Through Instagram during COVID Times.*

Webinars on EDI, Broadband, International Connections

IRRT and IRO teamed up this fall on three international focused webinars on two critical topics as well as one on making connections. *Truth and Reconciliation: Decolonizing Approaches Within Social Memory Institutions* attracted nearly 500 participants from around the globe. In October, *Gigabit Libraries and Beyond: Improving Broadband Access Worldwide* introduced registrants to the free toolkit *The Toward Gigabit Libraries Toolkit and Broadband Improvement Plan.*

Showing the continued strong interest in expanding beyond their borders, 200 signed on for *Virtual International Connections: The Global Librarian Exchange Program* which was held in November.

Disaster Assistance to Haiti

Through its Disaster Relief Fund, ALA provided \$12,000 to the Bibliothèque Nationale d'Haïti to re-establish two of its public libraries whose locations that were damaged and made uninhabitable due to the large earthquake that struck Haiti in August. ALA's donation provides for temporary locations for the St. Louis du Sud Library and the Marigot Library on the Tiburon Peninsula to keep their doors and services open during this critical time. The IRC would like to thank all the ALA members and other library supporters for their generous support.

IFLA

IFLA held its Virtual World Library Congress this August 17-19 with a global attendance of around 2,000. In person conference average around 3,000. IRO Director Dowling completed four years on the IFLA Governing Board in August. The new smaller IFLA Governing Board, 2021-2023 does not have a U.S. member, but Yasuyo Inoue from Japan is long time ALA member.

Immediate Past President Julius C. Jefferson Jr. is the Chair of the new North American Regional Division made up of 20 members (half each from U.S. and Canada). In this role Jefferson serves on the IFLA's Regional Council. Over 40 ALA nominated members are currently serving on various IFLA Section Committees, including Past President Loida Garcia-Febo, IRC Chair Min Chou, and Councilors John DeSantis and Karen Downing.

IFLA launched its new [website](#) in September. Plans are still on to hold the IFLA 2022 IFLA Congress in person in Dublin, Ireland, July 26-29. All ALA members can register at the reduced IFLA member rate through ALA's IFLA membership.