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The Dynamic International Relations Round Table of the American Library Association

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In 1999 the International Relations Round Table (IRRT) of the American Library Association (ALA) marked its 50th anniversary. To celebrate, IRRT sponsored a commemorative conference at the 1999 ALA annual meeting featuring speakers who discussed the past, present and future of international librarianship. Today the IRRT's major goals include promoting interest in library issues and librarianship worldwide, coordinating international activities within the American Library Association, developing programs and activities of the ALA, providing hospitality and information to visitors from abroad, and serving as a liaison body between the International Relations Committee (a separate group).

The group's executive meetings are quite educational in and of themselves. Many reports on international topics are presented to the Round Table's Executive Committee on Sunday mornings at both annual and mid-winter ALA conferences. For example, in July 2000, at the ALA annual conference in Chicago, those in attendance learned that there were some 330+ on-site international registrations with over fifty countries represented, including a large group from China sponsored by the U.S. State Department. Also, reports were given on the Carnegie Corporation Program on African Libraries, the Joint Committee on International Exchanges, and the Sister Libraries Initiative, which is becoming an official subcommittee of IRRT.

The IFLA 2001 conference is coming up soon in Boston. The IRRT has begun taking a leadership role in planning and preparing for this much-anticipated event. Round Table members will coordinate and serve as hospitality volunteers for visitors from beyond the U.S. borders. IRRT will be enlisting anywhere from 200 to 300 people to assist international visitors in navigating the conference

area in Boston. There are plans for two volunteer training programs. Tasks will include meeting visitors at the airport and staffing the information desk. For more information, contact Michael Dowling at the International Relations Office at ALA headquarters in Chicago. (Call ALA via their main information number: 1-800-545-2433.)

As far as other specific activities, the International Relations Round Table is always involved with program presentations held at annual American Library Association meetings. For example, it has sponsored: ALA preconferences such as the *State of American Librarianship* preconference Lounge; the International Poster Sessions (in 1999 representative countries included Haiti, Hungary, Russia, and Switzerland, among others). It also co-sponsors programs with other groups, such as *Intellectual Freedom: A Global Perspective*. And last but not least, IRRT plays host for the gala International Visitors Reception at every annual (summer) ALA meeting. The International Visitors Reception is usually a large event with many networking opportunities for librarians from the U.S. and abroad. Sponsorship comes in part from library vendors such as the Gale International Group and the library automation vendor VTLS, Inc.

One of the proposed major goals for IRRT over the current five-year period (2000–2005) is to help ALA remain an internationally aware organization, supported through activities focused on cross-cultural awareness training for ALA leadership and staff. Another set of primary goals is to help ALA maintain an internationally aware and involved membership and to support an effective, far reaching international program through work with IFLA and other library organizations.

This very active ALA organization gets its message out to interested librarians through more than one publishing effort. First, *International Leads* is an approximately 8-page newsletter of the IRRT, featuring articles and editorials on topics of interest to librarianship at the international level. All regions of the world have been featured in past issues. Second, the IRRT has a current Web site at <http://ala8.ala.org/irrt/>. Featured on the site are IRRT's membership form, the IRRT mission, organizational chart, a list of its nine committees, the IRC/IRRT International Exchange Commission bylaws, and a listing of international activities at ALA. Also included is the full draft of ALA International Relations Agenda for the years 2000–2005.

For those interested in participating in ALA's IRRT as an active member, IRRT membership dues are only \$10 annually, but this must accompany a personal American Library Association membership. It's a great organization to join for all librarians interested in learning about the great variety of ways to make connections with library people and library events beyond U.S. borders on a global scale. 