

## 1.2 From ALA to IFLA: A Primer on International Librarianship

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### Introduction

Libraries have been part of the human civilization for centuries but their growth has been very slow in many countries for various reasons including illiteracy, wars, poverty, shortage of funds, and national policies. Until recently a majority of libraries in the world developed collections and stored them in the four walls of library buildings for the use of their patrons. There was very little cooperation among libraries within nations or beyond borders. Librarians and libraries had little interest in international librarianship until the twentieth century. In earlier times, many scholars visited well known libraries to learn and to do research. The famous libraries of the ancient world included the Taxila University and Nalanda University of India during the 700s BC and fourth century respectively and the Alexandria Library of Egypt in 297 BC. During the first quarter of the twentieth century, a few American and British librarians visited developing nations to guide librarians and libraries. They included Asa Don Dickinson and W.A. Borden of the United States and A.C. Woolner of the United Kingdom. There was no library association to push for international cooperation and development in the field of librarianship until 1926.

### International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA)

The IFLA is the oldest and largest association in the world devoted exclusively to the advancement of library and information activities. It is an independent, non-governmental organization based in The Hague, Netherlands, and holds consultative status in its area of expertise with UNESCO. It has regional offices in Pretoria, South Africa for African libraries and librarians, Singapore for Asia and Oceania, and Ciudad Universitaria, Mexico for Latin America and the Caribbean. Its members include library associations, corporations, libraries, and interested individuals.

The three pillars of IFLA activity adopted in 2004 are societal involvement, professional advancement, and membership benefits ([www.ifla.org](http://www.ifla.org)).