

The Foundational Years of IALS

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Thoughts about the need for an International Association of Law Schools date back about 15 years now. One way to measure the success of any institution is to reflect back on how it stated its mission and goals at its inception, and compare the articulation of the mission and goals at that time to the "reality" of how the institution has developed. It provides a more rigorous and honest reflection to look at what was actually stated at the time, rather than to create a "modern" restatement -- some might say revisionist history -- of what the mission and goals were.

As background for my remarks at the conference, I am thus including a copy of an article I wrote for the Society of Legal Scholars in the United Kingdom shortly after the formation of IALS.

International Association of Law Schools Launched

In late October 2005, Articles of Incorporation for a new International Association of Law Schools (IALS) were approved. In December the IALS, which was incorporated in the United States, received its tax exempt status from the U.S. Internal Revenue Service. The incorporation of IALS is the culmination of a process that began in 2000 when 50 legal educators from 35 countries gathered in Florence, Italy, to discuss the different structures of delivering legal education in different legal systems and how law schools could cooperate across international boundaries.

As a result of the "La Pietra Conference" (named for New York University's Villa La Pietra in Florence, where the Conference was held) working groups were appointed to follow up with plans for a second conference that would focus on curriculum issues for educating law students about different cultures and legal systems, and the possibility of forming a new international organization. This second conference, entitled "Educating Lawyers for Transnational Challenges" was held in Honolulu, Hawaii. At the conclusion of the conference, the 130 attendees from 50 countries unanimously adopted a resolution calling for the formation of an international association. In May 2005 a working group of 16 people from 15 different countries met in Istanbul, hosted by the University of Bahcesehir, and adopted a Charter for what is now the International Association of Law Schools.

The mission of the Association includes fostering "mutual understanding of and respect for the world's varied and changing legal systems and cultures as a contribution to justice and a peaceful world". It is anticipated that this mission will be advanced by developing recommended curricula for educating students about diverse legal systems and cultures, by regular publication of a newsletter and journal containing items of interest to legal educators throughout the world, by facilitating scholarly exchange and student and faculty exchanges among IALS members, and by the convening of relevant conferences that will bring together leading scholars and teachers to discuss and adopt curriculum recommendations and engage in other important activities.

The Charter provides for membership by law schools, groups of law professors, and individual law professors; voting membership is limited to institutions offering legal education that would typically lead to a law degree or its equivalent. Dues for an educational institution range from

\$250, for institutions located in countries on the United Nations List of Least Developed Countries, to \$1,000 for institutions located in developed countries, while institutions in “developing” countries pay dues of \$500. The Charter permits institutions to petition a Finance Committee to be permitted to pay one level lower in dues than would otherwise be expected based on the country in which the law school is located.

The initial Governing Board of sixteen people consists of legal educators from Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Ghana, India, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Malaysia, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The Charter limits Board membership to one person per country unless a second person is currently serving a term as an officer. The Charter also limits the voting power of law schools in any one country so that, no matter how many law schools might join from a particular country, those law schools would not be able to dominate the work or agenda of the IALS.

The working language of the IALS is English, but funding will be sought to enable translation of as many documents and proceedings as possible into other languages. The Charter is available in all six of the United Nations’ official languages.

The Association of American Law Schools, located in Washington, D.C., has agreed to serve as headquarters for the IALS until such time as the IALS is able to establish its own offices. The AALS has also volunteered to provide staffing to IALS until such time as IALS can afford its own staff. Carl Monk, AALS Executive Director, is serving as the IALS President until the first meeting of the General Assembly, which it is anticipated will occur in early 2007. At the first General Assembly meeting, a Board, President, and President-elect will be chosen.

In describing the need for a group like the IALS, Carl Monk has said, “We have the opportunity as educators to influence not just the quality of lawyering in the next generation, but also the quality of world leadership, for as legal educators we are training a significant number of graduates who will occupy national and international leadership positions. Let us commit ourselves to trying to assure that those future leaders will be courageous, compassionate, and committed to the highest ethical standards and to excellence. Let us commit ourselves to educate good listeners who will always seek to understand and be respectful of differences among people and legal systems and seek to draw on the strengths of our diversity. But let us also commit ourselves to a concept of human dignity that respects certain fundamental rights, both economic and political, for all people of the world regardless of race, gender, or religious belief. The task may seem daunting but if we are unwilling to undertake it, who will? We must not shrink from our duties as educators at this time of critical need for world leadership. The IALS should serve as one important vehicle for helping us meet our responsibilities.”

Although IALS has only recently started accepting members, many leading law schools have already joined. It is expected that the first Newsletter will be published within the next two months and the first conferences of leading professors in different fields of law is expected to occur later this year, with the second occurring no later than early fall 2007.

To obtain a complete copy of the Charter and a brochure and membership application, visit the IALS website, at www.ialsnet.org.