

ALA 2024 in San Diego Goes International: Programs Address Issues on Global Law and Policy

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The annual conference of the American Library Association (ALA) was held June 27–July 2, 2024, in San Diego, California. This year’s opening session, which began the afternoon of June 28, 2024, featured an introduction by current ALA President, Emily Drabinski. She reviewed the progress of the association and commented on the number of international participants attending this year’s conference. She noted that there were 340 participants from 51 different countries represented at the meeting.

The highlight of the opening session was Lessa Kanani’opua Pelayo-Lozada’s interview of keynote speaker, comedian, and author, Trevor Noah. Pelayo-Lozada, ALA’s Immediate Past President, mentioned Noah’s first book, *Born a Crime: Stories from a South African Childhood* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2016), and the upcoming release of his children’s book, *Into the Uncut Grass* (New York: One World [expected Oct. 8, 2024]). Pelayo-Lozada noted some of her favorite quotations from the latter, including “Every person is just an obstacle until you try to understand them.” The story centers around Walter, a bear, and his young human friend, the boy.

Noah was asked about his relationship with libraries throughout his lifetime. He commented that they provided access to new worlds through books when he was a child in South Africa. “A book is powerful,” Noah commented, “but a library is the magic behind that power.” Noah was also asked about recent attempts to censor books, especially those featuring LGBTQ issues and those authored by people of color. He noted that the real fear that proponents of bans have is that these works will open the minds of children to new ideas.

The conference also featured a Global Solutions Poster Session, which had entries from international participants, both in-person and virtually. Many of the posters portrayed how libraries are addressing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).¹ The SDGs were derived from UN General Assembly Resolution 70/1, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.²

In her poster, Wendy Pothier, Business & Economics Librarian at the University of New Hampshire, documented a seminar she taught for first-year business students where students created posters addressing one or more of the SDGs. Her poster provided a QR code that linked to a research guide she had compiled for this project.³ In their poster, Sarah Tribelhorn (San Diego State University) and Bharat Mehra (University of Alabama) outlined the compilation of a book with chapters on how various academic libraries have addressed the SDGs. Vafa Mammadova of the ADA University in Azerbaijan presented a poster, emphasizing her library’s efforts to address the SDGs that focus on education quality, decent work, economic growth, reduction of inequalities, and the sustainability of communities. Librarians from South Korea, Taiwan, Nigeria, Ghana, and other nations were also among those presenting a poster in this session.

The program “Multitudes: The Power of Authentic & Diverse Representation in Muslim Stories” featured Muslim authors from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. The session was moderated by Helaine Hamilton Mitchell,

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¹ See UN Dept. of Economic and Social Affairs, *The 17 Goals*, accessed July 14, 2024, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

² UN General Assembly, Resolution 70/1, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, A/RES/70/1 (Oct. 21, 2015).

³ Wendy Pothier, *FIRE—First-Year Innovation and Research Experience 2023–24*, University of New Hampshire Library, <https://libraryguides.unh.edu/FIRE23-24> (last updated Apr. 16, 2024).

Youth Services Librarian of the Redondo Beach Public Library in California. Author Sarah Mughal (<https://www.sarahmughalrana.net/>) began the program with an introduction to Islam and noted that American Muslims are the most racially diverse group of Muslims in the world. The authors discussed the importance of the diverse representation of Muslim Americans in library collections. The other authors on the panel were Natasha Kahn Kazi (<https://natashakhankazi.com/>), Diana Ma (<https://dianamaauthor.com/>), Rhonda Roumani (<https://www.rhondaroumani.com/>), Khadijah VanBrakle (<https://www.khadijahvanbrakle.com/>), M.O. Yuksel (<https://moyuksel.com/>), and Huda Al-Marashi (<https://www.hudaalmarashi.com/>).

While most of the authors on the panel had authored children's books and young-adult fiction, Huda Al-Marashi had authored a non-fiction memoir about her own arranged marriage, *First Comes Marriage: My Not-So-Typical American Love Story* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2018). After the presentation, I explained that I was an academic law librarian, and my patrons sometimes inquired about the law in countries following Islamic law. I noted that I thought the sources I uncovered probably were not as objective as they should be. She suggested advising students to conduct searches on the four schools of thought on Islamic jurisprudence—*Hanbali*, *Maliki*, *Shafi*, and *Jafari*—to gain a better understanding of the topic.

During the program “International Collaborations: Strengthening Library Impact,” librarians throughout the country spoke about their collaborations with non-US libraries to attain the SDGs. Dr. Clara M. Chu of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign provided an overview of how libraries can help the world reach these goals by operating in green buildings to provide a sustainable environment and by offering sustainable resources, technology, and services to our patrons. She played a video from the website of the Libraries for Sustainable Development (<https://sdglibact.web.illinois.edu/>). For statistics on how the United States is working to achieve the SDGs, Dr. Chu noted the resources available from <https://sdg.data.gov/>, a US government website. She suggested using the search term “information” to find statistics relevant to librarianship.

Professor Lisa Hussey of Simmons University spoke next, focusing on her work with the School of Leadership Afghanistan (SOLA, <https://www.sola-afghanistan.org/>). The organization operates a boarding school in Rwanda for Afghan girls who have escaped the rule of the Taliban. Her work in the library for the school included organizing books—including existing books and books donated by Oxford University Press—and developing and classifying a fiction collection.

Vivienne Byrd of the Los Angeles Public Library was the next speaker. She discussed her collaboration with librarian Nurfarawahidah Badruesham of Malaysia, who later joined the discussion remotely. Their work focused on providing resources on “citizen science” to various areas of Malaysia. “Citizen science” involves raising awareness of important environmental issues, such as biodiversity, water quality, and climate change. The results of their collaboration can be viewed at the CitizenScience.Asia website at <https://citizenscience.asia/>.

Shawn Mitchell of the Toronto Public Library next discussed the Bridge Reports, measures of digital inclusion and literacy.⁴ Digital inclusion is one of the SDGs. The final speaker was Robin Kear of the University of Pittsburgh Library. She provided a report on her work with the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) regarding advocacy for support of the SDGs. One of the US advocacy efforts Kear presented was the work of the ALA Task Force on United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. Its website can be found at <https://www.ala.org/aboutala/ala-task-force-united-nations-2030-sustainable-development-goals>.

A related program, “Libraries Supporting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals,” took place the following day. The principal speaker for this program was ALA's International Library Consultant, Loida Garcia-Febo. Garcia-Febo discussed ALA's work with IFLA towards achieving the SDGs in libraries, again noting the ALA Task Force's web page. She noted that the role of librarians in achieving the SDGs was to introduce them to patrons and decision-makers and provide better access to resources to improve literacy.

Robin Kear (also mentioned above) next spoke about how academic libraries could help achieve the SDGs. She noted that improving access to information by providing more open-access and open-educational research would help improve education. Kear discussed the “Nelson Memo”⁵ and noted that the document directs federal agencies that spend money on research and make it available to the public to publish public-access policies.

⁴ See <https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/impact/reports-and-findings/>.

⁵ Alondra Nelson, Dr. Alondra Nelson to Heads of [Federal] Executive Departments and Agencies, memorandum (Aug. 26, 2022), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/08-2022-OSTP-Public-access-Memo.pdf>.

Sara Benson, Copyright Librarian at the University of Illinois, was the next speaker. She focused on how using copyright exceptions and the provisions in international treaties can help promote the SDGs related to education quality and inequality reduction. She noted that the use of copyrighted material in a face-to-face teaching environment is an exception to copyright action. She also discussed the concept of fair use in teaching (i.e., making copies of copyrighted works for teaching purposes) as another exception to copyright action. She noted that quoting from and criticizing a copyrighted work is also a fair use exception. She added that the Marrakesh Agreement (Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired, or Otherwise Print Disabled)⁶ allows the copying of books to provide them in a format that can be used by the visually impaired.

Sarah Tribelhorn of the San Diego State University Library was the final speaker in this program. She discussed some of the library partnerships in the San Diego community that have helped improve access. Specifically, she mentioned the San Diego Circuit (<https://circuit.sdsu.edu/>), a consortium of public and academic libraries, and the San Diego Citizen Science Network (<https://tinyurl.com/yeyjwwss>), which comprises academic, museum, and government groups.

The last educational program I attended at the 2024 ALA conference was “Beyond Borders: Beyond Basics: The Value of International Resource Sharing.” Lapis Cohen of the University of Pennsylvania Library and Renna T. Redd of the Clemson University Library presented information on the International ILL Toolkit, a global lender list of 243 international lenders and 53 US lenders. The toolkit provides access to national and union catalogs, instructions for requesting materials, and form templates in multiple languages. Fee payments can be made by IFLA voucher, credit card, or wire transfer. Information on the toolkit is available at <https://www.ala.org/rusa/sections/stars/section/internationill/toolkit>. There is a link on the page to a spreadsheet of current participants.

At the closing ceremony, actress Anika Noni Rose was interviewed about her forthcoming book, *Tiana's Perfect Plan* (New York: Penguin Random House [expected Oct. 22, 2024]). Rose is best known as the voice of Tiana in the Disney film *The Princess and the Frog* (2009). A synopsis of her new book is available at <https://books.disney.com/book/tianas-perfect-plan/>.

After the end of the conference programs, some attendees celebrated the inauguration of the new ALA President, Cindy Hohl. Hohl is a librarian at the Kansas City Public Library. She is also indigenous and, specifically, is a member of the Santee Sioux Nation of Nebraska. The ceremony featured performances by the Navajo Warrior Women, who later led the luncheon attendees in a traditional circle dance.

The ALA 2024 Annual Meeting featured the work of librarians from around the world and reflected the diversity of the profession here in the United States. Highlights of the conference can be viewed online at <https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/tag/alaac24/>.

⁶ Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired, or Otherwise Print Disabled, June 27, 2013 (entered into force for the US on May 9, 2019), <https://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/text/301019>).