
10.6. About the Editors

The Union of International Associations (UIA) is a non-profit, independent, apolitical, and non-governmental institution in the service of international associations.

Since its foundation in 1907 the UIA has focused on documenting the nature and evolution of international civil society: international non-governmental organizations (NGO) and inter-governmental organizations (IGO).

The approach is scientific, the result is quality. The information presented by the UIA is structured, comprehensive and concise. A standard framework makes comparison possible.

The Founders

The UIA was founded in 1907 by two Belgians, Henri La Fontaine and Paul Otlet.

The peoples are not awake...[There are dangers] which will render a world organization impossible. I foresee the renewal of...the secret bargaining behind closed doors. Peoples will be as before, the sheep sent to the slaughterhouses or to the meadows as it pleases the shepherds. International institutions ought to be, as the national ones in democratic countries, established by the peoples and for the peoples.
– Henri La Fontaine

La Fontaine was an international lawyer, professor of international law, and a member of the Belgian Senate for 36 years. He was a socialist, a renowned bibliographer, and a devoted internationalist. In 1913 he won the Nobel Peace Prize.

Paul Otlet was a lawyer, bibliographer, political activist and a Utopian with an internationalist agenda. His seminal work in documentation included the creation of

the Universal Decimal Classification system.

Otlet envisioned an *International Network for Universal Documentation*: a moving desk in the shape of a wheel, powered by a network of spokes beneath a series of moving surfaces. This machine would allow users to search, read and write to a database stored on millions of 3X5 index cards. Otlet imagined users accessing this database from great distances by means of an "electric telescope" connected through a telephone line, retrieving an image to be projected remotely on a flat screen. In his time, this idea of networked documents was still so novel that no one had a word to describe these relationships, until he invented one: "links".

Everything in the universe, and everything of man, would be registered at a distance as it was produced. In this way a moving image of the world will be established, a true mirror of his memory. From a distance, everyone will be able to read text, enlarged and limited to the desired subject, projected on an individual screen. In this way, everyone from his armchair will be able to contemplate creation, as a whole or in certain of its parts.
– Paul Otlet

Together La Fontaine and Otlet established the International Institute of Bibliography (later the International Federation for Information and Documentation - FID) and the Repertoire Bibliographique Universel, a master bibliography of the world's accumulated knowledge.

Early years

In the early years of the 20th century La Fontaine and Otlet turned their efforts to the emerging civil society transnational associations. They wanted to "assess and describe the degree of internationalism prevailing throughout the world". (It is worth noting that the word "internationalism" did not exist before the early 20th century.) They wanted to bring together all international associations in a concerted effort. There were, at the time, about 350 such civil society bodies, two-thirds of them headquartered in Brussels.

Through their efforts, the *Central Office of International Associations* was founded in 1907 in Brussels. At the First World Congress of International Organizations in 1910 in Brussels, the participating civil society bodies formally agreed to transform the *Central Office* into the *Union of International Associations*.

The UIA's work contributed to the creation of the League of Nations and the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (the predecessor of UNESCO). During the 1920s, the UIA created an International University, the first of its kind.

Since 1951 the UIA has been officially recognized by the United Nations system as an research institute whose programmes focus on facilitating the work of the community of international associations.

The UIA is the world's oldest, largest and most comprehensive source of information on global civil society. To this day, it carries out the sophisticated and visionary concepts of its founders. In developing beyond its initial bibliographical and organizational focus, the UIA seeks ways to recognize, honour and represent the full spectrum of human initiatives and preoccupations.

It is through increasingly close contacts between nations, the pooling of their experience and achievements, that internationalism will achieve its greatness and strength. Thus, from all the reconciled, united national civilizations, a universal civilization will gradually develop. The effort must first be directed towards the development of the International Associations as these constitute the social structure which best responds to the organizational needs of the universal society. To accomplish these tasks, a central body is necessary. This body is the Union of International Associations...
– Report of the 2nd World Congress of International Associations, Ghent, 1913

Location

The UIA was founded in Brussels and is still headquartered in that city. It contributed to the adoption by the Belgian government, in 1919, of a legally recognized status for international non-governmental organizations, and is itself registered as such.

Structure

The UIA consists of its full members, a secretariat, and a host of partners (associate members, corresponding and collaborating organizations). The General Assembly of Active Members elects a Council of 15 to 21 members. The Council appoints a Bureau to oversee the work of the Secretariat.

Active Members are individuals who have demonstrated sustained activity in international organizations. They come from every continent and include association executives, international civil servants, and academics.

Organizations or individuals wishing to associate themselves with the UIA's work may become Associate Members. Associate Members include a wide range of organizations, foundations, government agencies and commercial enterprises, and are entitled to preferential use of UIA services.

The UIA is entirely self-financed through the sale of publications and services. The annual budget is approximately €550,000.

Collaboration with other organizations

The UIA has Consultative Relations with UNESCO, UN/ECOSOC, and ILO. It collaborates with the Council of Europe and the European Commission.

A special ECOSOC resolution of 1950 establishes cooperation between the United Nations and the UIA for the preparation of the *Yearbook of International Organizations*.

The UIA is in regular contact with the 30,000 international non-governmental organizations included in the *Yearbook*. Its annual mailing is marked by a response rate of about 30 per cent.

The UIA's aims as stated in its statutes are to:

- *Facilitate the evolution of the world-wide network of non-profit organizations.*
- *Promote understanding of how such bodies represent valid interests in every field of human activity – scientific, religious, artistic, educational, trade, labour.*
- *Collect and disseminate information on these bodies and their interrelationships.*
- *Present such information in experimental ways, as a catalyst for the emergence of innovative bodies.*
- *Promote research on the legal, administrative and other problems common to these bodies.*

Purpose

The UIA aims to promote and facilitate the work of international associations. It seeks to achieve these goals primarily in three ways:

1. By documenting global civil society activity.

The UIA's associations database – the basis of the *Yearbook of International Organizations* both online and in print – attempts to cover all “international organizations”, according to a broad range of criteria. It therefore includes many bodies that may be perceived as not being fully international, or as not being organizations as such, or as not being of sufficient significance to merit inclusion. Such bodies are nevertheless included, so as to enable users to make their own evaluation in the light of their own criteria. In preparing and updating the organization profiles, the UIA gives priority to information received from the organizations themselves, then checks this information against other sources (periodicals, official documents, media, etc.) to present a reliable picture of a dynamic situation. The information presented by the UIA is structured, comprehensive and concise. A standard framework makes comparison possible.

2. By publishing research reports

The UIA's associations database – the basis of the *Yearbook of International Organizations* both online and in print – is continuously updated and includes descriptions of some 70,000 international organizations – NGOs and IGOs – active in all fields of human endeavour, in all corners of the world, and throughout centuries of history.

Its meetings database – the basis of the *International Congress Calendar* both online and in print – currently includes half a million international meetings of these bodies, from 1850 to far into the future.

The organization profiles and meetings profiles are complemented by bibliographies, biographies, statistical reports, and descriptions of problems perceived and strategies adopted by international associations as well as the values and approaches that animate them. Over 500,000 hyperlinks facilitate navigation through this data. The UIA also produces customized reports on demand for a variety of governmental, non-governmental, and commercial bodies.

3. By providing training and networking opportunities for international association staff.

Since 2006 the UIA hosts an annual Associations Round Table, bringing together representatives of international associations to learn practical skills and share experience. For more information, visit roundtable.uia.org.

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