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From the Chair

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From the Chair  By Lela P. Love

This is my last Chair’s Column. Time flies. I feel both honored and blessed to have had the opportunity to serve this organization as Chair.

This remarkable issue of the magazine is the result of one of the highlights of the past year—the International Mediation Leadership Summit at the Peace Palace at The Hague in October. The Hague summit marked a new and strong commitment of the Section of Dispute Resolution to be an active participant in the global dispute resolution community. The summit was, by all measures, a great success. Ninety leaders from twenty-eight countries attended, and the program generated both important information and connections for its attendees and their organizations. Responding in part to criticisms of Americans coming to foreign parts and imposing their models of mediation, the event was informally dubbed “America Listens.”

This issue of the magazine weaves many threads together about mediation going global. Geetha Ravindra’s article “Is Mediation a Profession?” includes a description of her session with international mediation trainers at the Peace Palace, uncovering their shared hopes and common hurdles and calling for the building of international databases and standards for mediation training and mediator ethics. Edna Sussman urges meaningful enforcement mechanisms for mediated agreements—especially in international cases—in her article “The New York Convention Through a Mediation Prism.” Stuart Ness, in “A Pilgrim’s Progress,” winner of the JAMS Foundation funded Award for the Best Short Article emanating from the International Mediation Leadership Summit, highlights nuances between different cultures and communication challenges that influence dispute resolution in international construction projects. A quantity surveyor, Mr. Ness laments the incursion of the legal profession into the mediation arena. (Let’s hope that attorneys can—as listeners and problem-solvers—live up to the high standards set by precursors from other professions!) Diane Levin in “Only Connect: The Impact of Blogging on the Field of ADR” takes us into cyberspace, describing how international boundaries and limitations of geography and time are overcome by blogs that create a closely knit and impactful ADR community without boundaries.

In June, friends made in The Hague invited me, as Section Chair, to make a presentation at a conference of the Croatian Bar Association on the development of mediation in the United States. Jeremy Lack, an incoming co-chair of the International Committee of the Section, was also at the Zagreb conference, and it felt as if a seed planted by the section at The Hague was already bearing fruit in friendships and opportunities to share ideas and build networks around the world. As I write this column, I am teaching a course on Mediation and Democratic Dialogue in Budapest with students attending from 17 countries. Things learned at The Hague summit will impact this group. The world is growing smaller, and the ABA Section of Dispute Resolution is stepping up to make the dispute resolution systems in this smaller world function well. It seems as if a global community shares core principles about creating understanding and connection and fostering creativity—and the local applications and variations make our work challenging and exciting.

I cannot leave this Chair’s Column without special thanks to a few individuals who made my service as Chair wonderful: Bruce Meyerson, who did the lion’s share of work to make The Hague Summit a success; Nancy Welsh, who organized the Call for Papers from The Hague and helped bring this issue of the magazine to fruition; Betty Murphy, who served as Chair of our International Committee since the inception of the Section and received the 2009 Chair’s Award for Service; my amazing colleagues and fellow officers on the Executive Committee, Homer La Rue, Wayne Thorpe, Debbie Masucci, and John Phillips, who co-chaired the annual conference in New York; the JAMS Foundation, for its generous contribution to support publications from The Hague; Frank Sander, as chair of the editorial board of this magazine, a deep debt, for he has made this publication one of the most valuable in the dispute resolution community; council members, who were passionate about the issues we faced and suffered my struggles with Robert’s Rules with good humor and grace; the Section staff, who are the silent pillars upholding each initiative; and, above all, Kim Knight, in her first year as Section Director. Kim made my job doable and fun.

What could be better than doing important work you love with inspiring colleagues? This has been a great year.