



Twenty Years Later – A Retrospective on the Foundation of the International Association for Court Administration

JEFFREY A. APPERSON

PROFESSIONAL ARTICLE



ABSTRACT

This brief article is dedicated to all my friends and colleagues who were instrumental in the creation of the International Association for Court Administration (IACA). One could say that the idea for IACA started in 2003, when I was in a cab with Markus Zimmer on the way to the airport in Denver, Colorado. Markus and I were among the first court administrators to visit and work with the newly independent Eastern European satellite states of the former Soviet Union and to understand the great challenges they faced in rebuilding institutions that supported democratic values. These values are deeply rooted in the effective and fair administration of justice.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Jeffrey A. Apperson

Vice President for
International Affairs NCSC,
Williamsburg, Virginia, USA

japperson@ncsc.org

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Beyond the two of us in the cab, however, creation of IACA was rooted in a unique confluence of events and opportunities. For me, the idea of IACA wasn't just about a constellation of political events that created an opportunity; it was about reinforcing the doctrine of separation of powers, so artfully articulated by John Adams in his 1776 pamphlet, *Thoughts on Government*:

The dignity and stability of government in all its branches, the morals of the people and every blessing of society, depends so much upon an upright and skillful administration of justice.

This statement by John Adams, whom I consider to be the father of Article III of the U.S. Constitution, was based in his extensive historical considerations of philosophers' commentaries with respect to the best forms of government, particularly the thoughts of Plato, Cicero, Polybius, Montesquieu, and David Hume. Achieving the upright and skillful administration of justice was, in my opinion, one of the central doctrines present at IACA's foundation. Indeed, the current Mission Statement of IACA reinforces the good governance goals outlined by John Adams by stating:

- A.** To promote professional court administration and management in emerging democracies and other countries pursuing the rule of law;
- B.** To sponsor international conferences, forums, and education and training programs on court administration and management; and
- C.** To serve as a resource for judges, court administrators and managers, and other government officials in search of ways in which to evaluate and improve court and justice systems.

There was also a term used by John Adams that permeates his writings – *virtue*. This word is the heart of ethical frameworks and an important part of IACA's mission.

As we were considering the organizational framework for IACA, I was also attending meetings of other international organizations, particularly the European Association of Judges, which I attended in 2001. It was there that I learned about the organizational model of the International Association of Judges, an organization whose membership comprises national judges' associations. I began conceptualizing an international organization composed of national associations of court administrators modeled on the U.S. court administration organizations based upon this experience.

The second important organizational influence on my thoughts of IACA's organizational structure was my experience as president of both the National Association of Bankruptcy Clerks, and the Federal Court Clerks Association (FCCA). It was during my term as president of the FCCA from 2003–2005 that IACA was incorporated. In finalizing the structure and mission of IACA, and shortly before incorporation, I formed an exploratory committee of the three main U.S. national court administration associations, FCCA, the National Association of Court Administrators,

and the National Conference of Bankruptcy Clerks. With Markus' participation, and the leading officers of the national associations, we agreed that the organizational principles of IACA would be based both on the association organizational model of the International Association of Judges, and the individual membership model of the three U.S. national associations. We then agreed to have vice presidents for each major international region that would encourage individual memberships, as well as a vice president for association development. One of my proudest memories after incorporation was assisting in the formation of the court administrator associations in Mongolia and Macedonia. They are both strong and active to this day.

As part of our formation strategy, we agreed to plan our first international conference in Ljubljana, Slovenia with Aleš Zalar, President of the Ljubljana District Court and the Supreme Court of Slovenia, with their incredible court administration leader, Tina Breclj. We did it in 90 days and had about a hundred attendees, including national leaders from, India, Rwanda, the UAE, and Europe, among others. They each were impressed by our vision. Markus led the way with agenda planning, as he did with most conferences, and I helped oversee the logistics. After the first conference, our momentum kept building with successful conferences in Verona (with many thanks to European Union of Rechtspflegers, as well as the Verona Courts), Dublin (with many thanks to Noel Doherty and the Courts Service of Ireland), Istanbul, The Hague, Indonesia, Argentina, Dubai, Finland, Australia, Brazil, and Trinidad and Tobago.

Hundreds of court professionals and judges have supported our mission. I would most especially like to thank my fellow past presidents who have led us for twenty years: Markus, Richard, Cathy, Sheryl, Mark, and Vladimir, as well as current IACA president Luis Palma, and President-Elect, Pamela Harris. One last tribute I would like to make is to Ralph Deloach, one of our founding members, who passed away recently. You were always there for us.

Have we made a difference? Yes. Will we continue to make a difference? Yes. Originally, IACA was merely a dream that so many of us shared. Now it is a reality. I hope that it will continue to represent the successful strengthening of administrative support for our justice institutions and an even more important goal...

"Equal Justice Under Law"

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

Jeffrey A. Apperson

Vice President for International Affairs NCSC, Williamsburg, Virginia, USA

Apperson

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