

SABRE FOUNDATION MOROCCO TRIP REPORT

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I. Background of Casablanca International Book Fair

The 11th Casablanca International Book Fair (Salon International du Livre et de L'Édition: SIEL) took place from the 10th to the 20th of February, 2005. This year's celebration marked the introduction of the Fair as an annual event, where previously it had been bi-annual. Held at the Foire Internationale (International Fairgrounds), SIEL hosted 650 publishers from 56 countries and received over 800,000 visitors. Organized by the Ministry of Culture in collaboration with the Office of Fairs and Exhibitions, the Fair designated the nation of Spain as Invité d'honneur. The special recognition given to Hispanic literature determined the nature of a number of programs at the Fair. The great Spanish author Juan Goytisolo was a guest of honor at the opening ceremonies held on 10 February, in the presence of the Prince of Morocco, Moulay Rashid. This marked the first time the royal family has inaugurated the Book Fair—a move intended to communicate the importance of literacy education in Morocco.



Foire Internationale—Casablanca's International Fairgrounds lie entirely enclosed within a single large building, which stands close to the city's port and directly across from the Mosque of Hassan II, the second-largest mosque in the world.

Dar America (America House), an English-language lending library and cultural center, established under the auspices of the U.S. Embassy, partnered with Sabre Foundation at the Fair. Dar America has attended the Fair for several years and has become a highlight for Moroccan patrons. The Dar America Information Resource Center in Casablanca offers a comprehensive collection of 2,000 books about the United States including books about American history, geography, literature, politics, women's studies, culture, English teaching, art and current events. It also offers periodicals and materials on CD-ROM, as well as access to on-line databases such as Lexis-Nexis.

II. Preparation of Book Donation for Morocco

The U.S. Embassy in Rabat And Consulate in Casablanca handled the administrative aspects of preparation for the Book Fair. Dar America staff in Casablanca registered Sabre Foundation for participation in the Fair, booked accommodations for Sabre staff, and set up the booth for use by both organizations. Additionally, Dar America staff from both Casablanca and Rabat prepared a program of lectures and discussions during the course of the Fair on topics ranging from the U.S.-Morocco Free Trade Agreement to opportunities for studying in the United States. Sabre Foundation's Executive Director, Tania Vitvitsky, agreed to make a presentation on international book donation, as part of this lecture series.

The book selection process took place over the course of a few months and met with some communication difficulties. Sabre made selections based on Dar America's recommendations, but, because of the delay in correspondence, it was necessary to ship the books by air—an unexpected but manageable cost. Once the books arrived in Morocco, Dar America cleared them quickly through customs, inventoried them, and selected out the initial set of titles for distribution at the Fair.

Sabre Foundation booked a staggered arrival for its two representatives; Book Program Officer Ray Huling arriving on the 9th of February with Tania Vitvitsky following four days later. This ensured that Sabre staff would be on-hand for both the commencement and the close of the Fair, but at the same time allowed for flexibility in scheduling meetings with Sabre's other partners in the region.

It should be said here that, despite the overlap in their time at the Fair, Sabre's representatives found that, due to the high demand for English-language books, a third staff member would have made the distribution process much easier to manage. According to the Office of Fairs and Exhibitions, some 800,000 people attended the Fair, and the interest in Sabre's English-language books never abated.

The day before the commencement ceremonies, Mr. Huling visited the fairgrounds with Dar America's Information Resource Center Director, Amina Jaouad. Mr. Huling and Ms. Jaouad, along with Abdelkrim Raddadi, Dar America's Cultural Affairs Specialist, made the final preparations for the Fair, which included the raising of Sabre's banner, seen in the display below.



Alongside Sabre's books, which were distributed at no cost, Dar America sold Arabic translations of U.S. titles on the subject of American politics, history, and culture. Dar America also displayed several shelves of new books in French that would become available at their library following the Fair.

Sabre and Dar America agreed to a cooperative plan of book distribution, one that established a controlled and continuous dispersal of Sabre's books over the entire course of the Fair and drew attention to Dar America's offerings as well. In brief, Moroccan patrons of the Fair had the opportunity to select for themselves a single Sabre book or CD-ROM in English for free as well as a number of CD-ROMs or magazines offered by Dar America. Both organizations distributed informative pamphlets and book marks as well. In this way, Sabre Foundation could sustain interest and meet demands for English-language books for the duration of the Fair and also draw attention to Dar America's books.



Abdelhaq and Aziz Hilmi, International Fairgrounds employees; Tanya Anderson, Director of Dar America; and Amina Jaouad, Dar America IRC Director.

As Sabre has come to expect from its North African partners, Dar America's staff, both American and local, were of the highest caliber. From local hires for the Fair to staffers from the Embassy in Rabat to the Director herself, everyone who stationed the booth worked with perfect professionalism and demonstrated great generosity toward Sabre. The integration of the two organizations took place seamlessly, not only to the benefit of Sabre, but also to the patrons of the Fair.

III. Book Shipment to Morocco

The Morocco shipment, consisting of 2,075 books with a fair market value of \$27,863 shipped from the Sabre Foundation warehouse on 27 January, 2005. Just prior to this shipment, Sabre Foundation provided Dar America with a packing list of the donated books, for review by the Moroccan Ministry of Culture, which quickly granted its approval.

Dar America received the books and processed them through customs on 1 February, 2005. Please see the packing list attached to this report as Appendix I.

IV. Sabre Foundation Book Distribution at 11th International Casablanca Book Fair



Early morning at the Casablanca Book Fair, before the doors opened to the public.

In a repeat of its experience at the Algiers International Book Fair, Sabre found itself the only non-governmental American presence at the Fair. Further, while French publisher Hachette provided a limited selection of titles in English from its Oxford series, only Sabre Foundation offered a significant quantity of books in English. No U.S. publisher participated in the fair.

As this was Sabre's second time participating in an International Book Fair in North Africa, the task of book distribution came much more easily than in Algiers, though eleven-hour days at the stand still added up to a tremendous amount of work. In this regard, the advantages of direct collaboration with U.S. Embassy staff were clear from the outset: from publicity to customs clearance to language skills, the cooperation with Dar America greatly facilitated Sabre's efforts at the Fair.

Another mitigating factor came simply from the very different circumstances of Morocco in contrast with Algeria. Though the two nations share a common dialect of Arabic and have a much entwined history, their recent disputes over Western Sahara and Algeria's troubles with terrorism have resulted in a deep disparity of both infrastructure and social climate. Travel and communication come almost breezily in Morocco when compared with Algeria.

This is not to suggest that Morocco does not have its own difficulties. On May 16, 2003, a series of suicide bombings tore through Casablanca, killing forty-one people (including the thirteen terrorists who carried out the attacks). The social aftershock of these bombings continues to this day, as Moroccans confront the rise of militant fundamentalism in their country. In Casablanca, of course, this issue has a special immediacy. To give a personal example, Said Elkaoukaji, Coordinator of Amideast M.S.P. at Dar America, also teaches English in Sidi Moumen, an impoverished section of Casablanca; four of his former students participated in the attacks of 16 May. Mr. Elkaoukaji stressed that one of the best means to counter the forces of terrorism and anti-Americanism is through education and direct interaction with those at risk, a strategy that prioritizes bringing books to young people.

Sabre Foundation did just this over the course of its time at the Casablanca Fair. A high percentage of the more than three-quarters of a million people who attended the Fair were high school and university students, among whom the study of English is increasingly popular. Their response to Sabre's program of book distribution proved overwhelmingly positive. Despite careful husbanding of Sabre's stock, according to the plan mentioned above, all of Sabre's inventory had been distributed by the 18th of February.

The following titles represent the character of the donation, and it should be noted that Sabre's books in the "Best American" series enjoyed as much popularity as works on women's health and Africa. Please see the packing list attached to this report as Appendix I, for a full accounting of Sabre's titles.

Harvard Guide to Women's Health
Best American Essays 2001
Best American Short Stories 2002
Best American Travel Writing 2002
Day of Ahmed's Secret

Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry
Nelson Mandela and the Quest for Freedom
Curious George
Legacies: Collecting America's History at the Smithsonian

Sabre and Dar America also distributed a great many CD-ROMs, the popularity of which attested to the rapid growth of information technology in North Africa in general and in Morocco in particular. Among the CD-ROMs distributed were the following:

Encyclopedia Britannica Ready-Reference
Reader Rabbit Reading
World Book Encyclopedia
The Way Things Work
Eyewitness Children's Encyclopedia

World Atlas
Physician's Home Assistant
Crosswords for Kids
Eyewitness History of the World
Jumpstart 1st Grade

The Moroccan students who visited the Sabre and Dar America booth were simply astounded to find new English-language books available for free, and they frequently took the time to explain in-depth how extraordinarily difficult it is to obtain books in English in Morocco—at any price, much less free. For young Moroccans, the study of English has taken on a new importance in recent years, but their access to good English-language materials remains limited. From an educational perspective, Sabre's books presented an unheard-of opportunity.

On the side of culture, young people and students took particular interest in these books because they were American—not only did a very high number of these patrons express a desire to study in the United States (one young woman had already decided on Kentucky as the place to be), but a significant number had *already* studied in the U.S. and wanted to maintain their ties to American culture. Perhaps even more importantly, many young Moroccans saw their reading of American books as a means to participate in a dialogue with the U.S. from which they feel they have been excluded. In short, young Moroccans want to engage with the U.S.



Much the same response came from Moroccan professionals—professors, teachers, doctors, lawyers, diplomats, and so on. While certainly less influenced by France than Algeria, Morocco yet retains French as its first foreign language. But study of English has increased significantly in Morocco, especially over the course of the past couple of decades. A sort of Catch-22 exists where English-language books remain rare and expensive, which keeps their sales low, despite the broad audience for them, and these low sales in turn dissuade publishers from increasing the availability of English-language books. Many patrons of the stand pointed out that Sabre’s work helps to resolve this problem by demonstrating that there is a high and continuing demand for English in Morocco.

Sabre staff sought out this kind of commentary, because it speaks directly to Sabre’s basic concern as a book donation organization: providing books according to recipients’ stated needs. To this end, Sabre Foundation initiated the distribution of its new ‘Reader Survey Form’, a one-page questionnaire that provides a means for recipients of Sabre’s books to provide feedback on their quality and usefulness. This questionnaire has been reproduced in Appendix II of this report.

Selected remarks from Fair patrons follow:

How will this book help with your studies or enrich your life?

I write poetry and I love reading literature in general and poetry in particular.
—Samia Wardane

By knowing the style of writing and knowing more vocabulary.
—Saabani Abdelhak

By getting some information about how the American Government is working.
—Driss Ait Nacem

What is your opinion of this book?

It seems interesting because readings in world mythology helps a lot in different domains.
—Zahra Najah

It is a interesting book, since it allows to get some ideas about women's health.
—Ouzidan Nadia

Moroccan students and professionals were very forthcoming with their opinions on relations between the U.S. and the Arab/Muslim world in general and Morocco in particular, as well as about their needs as students. In part, Tania Vitvitsky's presence at the fair facilitated this dialogue, as there remains in Morocco—especially among young people—a wariness in conversation between men and women (though not to the degree experienced in Algeria). The upsurge in conservatism and fundamentalism in Morocco over the past decade has contributed to this climate.



Tania Vitvitsky speaks with a group of Medical Students; each of these young women received a copy of the Harvard Guide to Women's Health

V. Sabre Foundation Presentation at 11th International Casablanca Book Fair

The Casablanca Book Fair offers extensive programming alongside of its publishers' stands. In two lecture halls, as well as in some of the stands themselves, patrons of the Fair attended a broad variety of lectures and seminars. Dar America sponsored an extensive series of presentations on topics ranging from The U.S.-Morocco Free Trade agreement to American theatre to study opportunities in the U.S. for Moroccan students. At the request of Malika El Boury Baiz, IRC Director of the Public Affairs Section in Rabat and with the assistance of Dar America, Sabre Foundation offered a seminar on book donation programs for two dozen members of Morocco's Board of English Language Librarians (BELL). Because of intense interest from patrons of the Sabre-Dar America stand, the seminar also welcomed attendees from the general public. Tania Vitvitsky made the presentation for Sabre, as she has many times in the past. The event went so well that BELL will be Sabre's partner organization for the second shipment of Sabre books to Morocco.

Created in 1993, BELL is an association of Moroccan librarians who manage collections partially or entirely in English. BELL's goal is to enhance information and resource sharing among libraries with English-language collections, in order to improve library services to students of English. BELL has requested books in the following subject areas and will distribute them to over 100 libraries throughout Morocco: encyclopedias, dictionaries, bi-lingual books (English/French or English/Arabic), artistic books for children (painting, drawings, music, theater, games), books on nature and animals, science books, short stories, fiction, English readers.

The first containerized shipment of books to Morocco will be received by Friends of Rabat American School, an alumni association of Rabat American School, students of which will distribute Sabre books to needy institutions and individuals as a community service project.

VI. Sabre Visit to Algeria

Sabre Foundation Book Program Officer Ray Huling made a brief visit with FOREM, Sabre's partner organization in Algiers, from 17-19 February. Mr. Huling met principally with FOREM's Projects Director, Dr. Mohammed Boukheddad. The meeting served to resolve the distribution of the next shipment of Sabre books to Algeria. Both FOREM and Sabre agree that it is of first importance to provide books to under-served universities outside of the greater Algiers region, and Dr. Boukheddad provided a list of target universities, their book and educational material needs, and selected demographics for each of the universities. This list and population figures follow:

UNIVERSITIES	STUDENTS	TEACHERS
BISKRA	12 870	408
OUARGLA	11 675	301
ADRAR	1 686	54
BECHAR	3 751	177
EL OUED	3 201	43
DJELFA	3 770	43
LAGHOUAT	6 213	226
TIARET	10 670	180

Bechar and Ouargla lie on the fringes of what the Algerians call ‘le grand Sud’ (“the Big South”), the vast expanse of arid lands more than twice the size of Texas that stretch deep into the Sahara. Adrar, the smallest of these universities, lies squarely within this region. The balance of the universities fall between coastal and southern regions. All of these institutions receive much less support than the larger universities to the North.

Mr. Huling also met with Professor Mostefa Khiati, Madame Anissa Benameur, and Mr. Mohammed Bendjoudi of FOREM’s board, in order to discuss future collaborations between Sabre Foundation and FOREM. FOREM has applied for a large grant from the Middle East Partnership Initiative to establish learning centers throughout Algeria. Literacy training will be a main focus of these centers, as will English-language instruction.

Although this trip was very brief (and the weather exceedingly bad—the worst, in fact, that Algeria has experienced in fifty years), FOREM once again proved themselves consummate hosts and dynamic professionals. Sabre looks forward to continuing this partnership in country in the midst of recovering from profound difficulties.

VII. Future Sabre Foundation Participation in Book Fairs

Sabre’s programs at both the Casablanca and Algiers International Book Fairs received such an overwhelmingly positive response from Sabre’s partners, patrons of the fair, and the U.S. Embassies in both countries that Sabre Foundation plans to continue and expand its participation in Book Fairs, with particular attention to predominantly Muslim nations.

Specifically, Sabre proposes a book donation initiative in seven Islamic countries: Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, Lebanon, Tunisia, Jordan, and Indonesia. Each of these nations holds a large, well-respected International Book Fair that receives many tens (often hundreds) of thousands of visitors over the course of roughly a week and is little attended or not attended at all by American organizations of any kind. Further, these countries in general and their International Book Fairs in particular suffer a lack of English-language educational material and professional resources. Sabre Foundation would help both to meet the demand for English-language books and establish an American presence at these Fairs.

In carrying out this project, Sabre Foundation will cooperate with the U.S. Embassy in each country. The degree of this cooperation will depend on the situation of each state, post, and Fair, but the model will be Sabre’s collaboration with Dar America at the Casablanca Book Fair. Dar

America provided Sabre Foundation with crucial resources and services at every stage of the process, from book selection to staffing of the stand at the Fair. Sabre realizes that not all posts have the resources to commit to this project that the Consulate in Casablanca does, but the standard of excellence set by Dar America will continue to be ultimate goal of Sabre's work with the posts at these Fairs.

The same can be said with regard to in-country NGOs and Sabre's partner in Algeria, la Fondation FOREM. Sabre relies on partner organizations in each country where it works as a matter of course for its standard program of book donation. Participation in Book Fairs, however, requires another sort of commitment and investment of resources altogether. FOREM has set the bar for indigenous organizations, much as Dar America has for U.S. Embassies.

Operating under these models, then, Sabre plans to offer much greater quantities and varieties of English-language books and CD-ROMs at these Book Fairs, as Sabre's experience in Algiers and Casablanca has shown that demand for these materials is very high.

Additionally, Sabre will provide programming for these Fairs by recruiting experts to make presentations on such topics as the role of university presses, intellectual property rights, publishing in the U.S., librarianship, and management of book foundations.

In all, these initiatives will have the effect of opening new markets for American publishers, furthering U.S. public diplomacy by means of direct, person-to-person interaction, and meeting the growing demand for English-language educational materials in these countries. Each of these goals will be met through Sabre's collaboration with both U.S. Embassies and in-country organizations, in accord with the strategies developed through Sabre's participation in Book Fairs in Casablanca and Algiers, as well as through Sabre's experience conducting major international conferences on Book Donation Programs in Accra, Budapest, and Dar es Salaam.