

Major hearing centres team up

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London, Singapore and Toronto (Credit: Shutterstock/ESB Professional/aneek.soowannaphoom/AevanStock)

Three leading international arbitration hearing centres, the International Dispute Resolution Centre in London, Maxwell Chambers in Singapore and Arbitration Place in Toronto and Ottawa, have joined forces to form a new alliance offering “global hybrid hearings” in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

The International Arbitration Centre Alliance (IACA), which they have formed, will offer “unprecedented global collaboration of physical, technical and professional resources... aimed at reducing the distance, time-zone, and countless other challenges associated with planning and conducting international arbitration hearings and ADR proceedings during these extraordinary times - and in the ‘new normal’ that will be with us for some time,” according to an announcement yesterday.

In a joint statement, the CEOs of the three centres, **Damian Hickman** of the International Dispute Resolution Centre (IDRC), **Katherine Yap** of Maxwell Chambers and **Kimberley**

Stewart of Arbitration Place, say: "The alliance breaks barriers and builds international bridges, providing the platform for our partners to connect globally, allowing a seamless and smooth dispute resolution experience."

"This is something the dispute resolution world desperately needs right now because of covid-19 travel and assembly restrictions. We also firmly believe it's the way of the future. International arbitration practitioners are becoming comfortable with virtual hearings. Longer-term, even when global travel restrictions are eased, virtual will be used regularly to reduce travel time and cost."

The IDRC has been operating for over 20 years in London and is the UK's leading facility for arbitration and other forms of ADR. Maxwell Chambers, centrally located in Singapore's business district, is the world's first integrated ADR complex, housing hearing facilities as well as the local offices of international ADR institutions, law firms and ancillary services. Arbitration Place combines state-of-the-art hearing facilities and hybrid hearing facilities in Toronto and Ottawa with real-time court reporting, concierge-level administrative support, client-service teams, and a roster of renowned arbitrators.

Together as IACA, the three partners promise to provide "global hybrid hearings through a combination of physical and virtual attendance methods so all parties, counsel, arbitrators, arbitral secretaries, witnesses, arbitral institutions, court reporters and translators can participate fully and easily, no matter where in the world they are located."

Some will attend the IACA facility closest to them and participate either in a group room with distancing protocols, or in private technology suites with videoconferencing connections, the announcement explains. Others will connect remotely using a secure virtual platform.

In investor-state arbitrations that are fully or partly open to the public, the IACA can also make hearings widely accessible around the world.

"IACA's fully integrated global hybrid hearings will provide everything that international arbitration has come to expect from traditional single-site physical hearings, including real-time court reporting, simultaneous translation and breakout rooms for each party and for the arbitral tribunal," the announcement promises. "It also provides technical support before and during hearings, including technical rehearsals, monitoring, and enhanced cyber-security measures."

"This innovative approach will enable the international dispute resolution industry to be prepared for whatever form the 'new normal' may take. It is also inherently 'greener', as its simplicity, ease of access, and time and cost efficiencies encourage less international travel."

Speaking to GAR, Canadian arbitrator Bill Rowley describes the alliance as “important news”.

“It will be an enormous help to parties and tribunals in connecting disparate geographic components of a virtual/ semi-virtual case hearing in covid-secure spaces which have all the technology and IT back-up to make virtual hearings work effectively,” he says.

“I understand that certain other centres will be invited to come into the grouping. This is an important step forward in the time of covid-19 but it also offers enduring efficiencies in a post-covid world.”