To do international business and to practice international commercial law, it is necessary to know who the other players are. This means, of course, competitors and customers, but it also includes the institutions and organizations that in large part define the terms under which one engages in that business. Multilateral institutions (MIs)—those that are composed of members who are sovereign states (or sometimes also semi-autonomous territories) and whose members pay the institutions' bills, determine admission of other members, and establish the institutions' agendas—and multinational organizations (MOs)—those that exist privately and independently of sovereign states (although sovereign states may be participants or members) and are composed of members and participants from many nations and deal with international issues—are among the entities that set the rules, rights, and limits on international trade and commerce. This book's purpose is to name the most important of those players, to categorize them according to their subjects of principal focus, and then to describe them in some detail in order to acquaint the reader with what they are, what they do, and how they do it. With that information, the reader will be prepared to consult the appropriate institutions and organizations with which the reader's business is closely involved in order to obtain information, assistance, or support that will permit the reader to engage in that business more effectively, more efficiently, and more profitably.

Although the names of many of the institutions and organizations described here will be familiar, most readers will not be fully aware of the interests and activities of these MIs and MOs. Even the existence of some will have escaped the reader's notice. Nonetheless, these organizations and institutions often exert a major influence on the way business is conducted internationally. Even where the reader has been knowledgeable about each and every entity and its functions as described here, this book may present to the reader for the first time an understanding of how each institution cooperates with other institutions in an allocation of responsibilities.
and activities in order to create the international business environment with which the reader is primarily involved.

Since the subject is multilateral institutions and multinational organizations, the reader may sometimes feel that he or she has fallen into a huge vat of alphabet soup. Consequently, the table of abbreviations, acronyms, and shortened names found that follows this foreword will undoubtedly prove to be of great benefit, both in the reading of this book and in subsequent dealings with its topic, as will the list of web sites available for further or more current information. For brevity’s sake, web site URLs will be given only once in the text and an abbreviation, acronym, or shortened name will normally be used throughout the rest of the book without reference again to the longer title for which it stands.

Far from being merely of interest (however specialized), the information contained in this book may prove to be vitally important for the conduct and direction of the reader’s business activities.

National governments and their branches and agencies are not covered. Neither are regional economic groups. Each of these (in the former case only regarding the United States) will be the subject of later books in this series.

This is the third in a series of books on international commercial law topics to be published by Transnational Publishers, Inc., with G. Gregory Letterman as author or co-author. “Basics of International Intellectual Property” and “Basics of the International System of Customs and Tariffs” were the first two books in the series. Others will quickly follow. This book adheres to the format and methodology of its predecessors and successors. The title of each begins with the words “Basics of,” reflecting a similarity in the nature and degree of detail of coverage of each topic. The full range of topics to be included in this series remains fluid. Those with suggestions for topics for subsequent books in the series are invited to contact Mr. Letterman through Transnational Publishers.

Of course, readers that have noted errors or information that should have been included, or those with suggestions for other improvements in any or all the books in the series, are encouraged to communicate with Mr. Letterman through Transnational Publishers. This invitation may be particularly appropriate for the subject of this book, since there are so many multilateral institutions and multinational organizations that I am completely unaware of, some that I should have named, and others that I may have unwisely
chosen not to name. For any such acts of omission or commission, I am truly contrite.

As with all other books in the series, this book will not—and could not in its limited length—treat all aspects of its general topic; all the details of specific topics subsumed within its larger topic; or post-publication developments regarding the topic. The book is targeted for practicing attorneys, law students, academics or scholars, or those engaged in international commercial dealings. The book is intended as an introduction to the topic, and allows readers to be better informed with regard to basic issues related to multilateral institutions and multinational organizations engaged in economics and commerce, as well as to use that understanding to formulate informed questions for legal counsel, to engage in independent research on details and recent developments regarding particular aspects of those entities and the subjects with which they deal, and to contact appropriate entities with special relevance to the reader's business or interests.

This book will not suffice as the reader's only guide to those multilateral institutions and multinational organizations; it will serve as an effective large-scale map of the topic from which the reader may identify and understand narrower areas of particular interest. Once oriented in this manner, readers may progress to make use of the many and excellent information resources available on relevant detailed aspects of these entities and what they do. This should prove more efficient and fruitful for a reader who has made preliminary use of this book before engaging in further inquiries.

G. Gregory Letterman
Kansas City, MO
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