

# KUWAIT

## NATIONAL LIBRARY OF KUWAIT

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The National Library of Kuwait was formally established by Royal Decree in 1994, although its history goes back to the early 1920's. It is currently located in one of Kuwait's oldest buildings, in the very center of the old town. This building originally a school, was chosen as a symbol of Kuwait's culture and heritage, but is no longer suitable to meet growing challenges posed to libraries in the information age. Thus the project of a new, modern building has already been approved, and the site allocated.

The new library will occupy a 20,000 square-meter area prominently positioned on the Arabian Gulf, opposite to the Amir of Kuwait's governing palace (Sief Palace), and the Council of Minister complex, and next to the National Assembly building, the National Museum, and other historical monuments and buildings. It will rise four floors with a storing capacity of 1.26 million volumes (extensible to 2 million), and a seating capacity of 770.

The building will be completely free of architectonic barriers, and the library will cater also for the physically handicapped, the blind, and other special users such as children. Special Information Centers are being established in accordance with the library goals and objectives.

They will include a Kuwait Information Center, Iran and Gulf Studies Center, Arabian Studies Center, and Islamic Studies Center. The Library is committed in establishing a variety of documented agreements with other libraries and information centers in Kuwait and in the Gulf area.

In this setting, the Library will provide a landmark structure for the people of Kuwait, integrating past and present in state-of-the-art facilities and equipments. Linking Kuwait's past to its future, a tall, sweeping Atrium will connect the new library to the surrounding historical monuments and buildings. Work on the new building is due to start in 2003, and the inauguration is expected in 2005.

The new library can be divided into two major components: cultural domain and library domain. The former will have an auditorium with 250 seating capacity, multipurpose meeting hall, conference and training rooms, cultural 'diwaniya' (typical Kuwaiti meeting and discussion place), and exhibition spaces. The latter will have spacious reading rooms with plenty of natural light and rooms for researchers, lending and handicap library services, *Kuwaitiana* collection (published materials on Kuwait), children's library, heritage center, non book and other special collections, manuscript center and an advanced database center for the books.

Mission of the National Library of Kuwait is to preserve the heritage of the nations; to improve bibliographic information services to researchers and citizens of Kuwait; to collect and make accessible a comprehensive collection of materials pertaining to the Gulf States, the Arab World and culture, and Islam. After partial recovery and new acquisitions following the criminal Iraqi occupation in 1990-1991, the Library is now offering about 290,000 books and 1,300 titles of periodicals in all languages, and collections in microfilm, video, audio, CD-Rom and other formats. These collections are expected to increase dramatically with establishment and implementation of the above-mentioned Information Centers in the new building. One of the Library's special collections, known as *Kuwaitiana*, is aiming at safeguarding the Kuwaiti heritage in all its aspects. Another one includes extensive documentation of the Iraqi invasion and occupation. Other collections came from notable private donations. The new building will allow ameliorating storing and preservation of additional collections, made up of special materials such as maps, oversized materials, art works, stamps, rare non-book materials, photographs and more.

The National Library of Kuwait took up a leadership role in developing information policies and services. At a national level, the Library acts as the National Bibliographic Center, including all the related fields of activity (National Depository, Copyright Office, National Union Lists, UN Depository Library, ISBN Agency). Currently the Library is aiming to link about 50 libraries in Kuwait's public sector into a well-coordinated network. Up to now, 25 libraries have participated in this project covering, in its first phase, 120,000 titles of books and 12,500 titles of periodicals and series. This project includes a text format retrieval interface of the *Kuwaitiana* collection.

The National Library of Kuwait reports to the National Council for Culture, arts and Letters of the State of Kuwait. It is a member of various international bodies, including the International Federation of Library Associations, the Arab Union for Library and information, the American Library Association, and others.

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