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Pacific Science, Volume 60, Number 1, January 2006, pp. 147-149 (Article)

Published by University of Hawai'i Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/psc.2005.0054>



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Association Affairs

PACIFIC SCIENCE ASSOCIATION

ACTIVITIES

28th ICSU General Assembly

PSA Executive Secretary Burke Burnett represented the Pacific Science Association at the International Council for Science (ICSU) 28th General Assembly held in Shanghai and Suzhou, China from 17–22 October 2005. The General Assembly (GA) was graciously hosted by the Chinese Academy of Science and Technology (CAST). PSA President Dr. Kiyoshi Kurokawa (President of the Science Council of Japan) and PSA Executive Board members Dr. Congbin Fu (Vice President of the China Committee for ICSU, CAST) and Dr. Prof. Chang-Hung Chou (President, National Pingtung University of Science and Technology, Taiwan) also attended in the capacity of their respective institutions.

The General Assembly consisted of both plenary sessions and sessions for National Members and Scientific Union Members. The first day of the GA was held in conjunction with CAST in Shanghai. After opening remarks by Dr. Sun Honglie (ICSU-China), the first session topic was “Science and Human Well-Being”, chaired by Prof. Yiming Shao of China’s Center for Disease Control and Prevention. The keynote presentation by Dr. Hal Mooney conveyed the results of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, followed by brief presentations and a panel discussion by Prof. Marian Addy (University of Ghana), Prof. Zengyi Chang (Beijing University), Prof. Pierre Richie (University of Ottawa), and Prof. Lan Xue (Tsinghua University). The second session on “Science for Sustainable Development” was chaired by Prof. Peter Tyson, Vice President of ICSU. Prof. Congbin Fu gave the keynote lecture, followed by brief presentations and a panel discussion including Prof. Qiheng Hu (V.P., CAST), Prof. Yonglong Lu (Chinese Academy of Science), Dr. Jane Lubchenco (President, ICSU), and Dr. Graham Pearman (GP Consulting). All lectures and presentations were very well-received.

The second day of the GA involved no plenary sessions but convened forums for National Members and Scientific Union Members. These meetings were held to discuss the status of ICSU’s programmes and obtain input from members. Among the items discussed were a proposed dues increase for ICSU, a planned reduction in ICSU’s Grants Programme, and a wide variety of topics of concern to various Scientific Unions and Interdisciplinary Bodies. There were also several presentations providing reports on various ICSU initiatives such as “The Environment and its Relation to Sustainable Development”, “Science and the Policy Context”, and “The Universality of Science”.

The final three days of the GA involved plenary sessions. Dr. Jane Lubchenco presided over all the presentations and resulting discussions. The third day began with various briefings on the current status of ICSU, including the Secretary-General's Report (Ana Maria Cetto), a presentation of the new ICSU Strategic Plan for 2006–2011 (Thomas Rosswall), a Union Member Forum Report (Michel Denis), and a National Member Forum Report (Hernan Chaimovich). Each presentation was followed with time for various attendees to comment and provide input. Presentations were also given on several ICSU initiatives: by Dr. Ian Allison on the new International Polar Year (2007–2008), a joint initiative of ICSU and World Meteorological Organization; by Dr. Gordon McBean on the ICSU initiative on "Natural and Human-Induced Hazards"; by Dr. Brian Walker on "Science and Technology for Sustainable Development". Dr. Hal Mooney gave a second presentation on the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, focusing on the structure and processes behind the writing of the MEA reports.

The next day of the GA saw presentations on ICSU's programme on "Challenges in Implementing the Universality of Science" (Dr. Peter Warren), a "Priority Area Assessment on Scientific Data and Information" (Dr. Roberta Balstad), "Capacity-Building in Science" (Dr. Ranjan Ramasamy), a report from the ICSU Policy Committee on Developing Countries (Dr. Marian Addy), and an ICSU Financial Report (Dr. Roger Elliott). Ample time for input and comments from the various members was solicited, and votes were taken to ratify modifications to various proposed elements in the ICSU strategy.

Elections were held to determine the new ICSU Executive Board. The new incoming officers are: Dr. Catherine Brechignac (France) – President-Elect, Dr. Khosto Mokhele (South Africa) – Vice President for Scientific Planning and Review, and Hernan Chaimovich (Brazil) – Vice President for External Relations. Dr. Ana Maria Cetto (Mexico) and Dr. Roger Elliott (UK) ran unopposed and will continue as Secretary-General and Treasurer, respectively.

The final day of the GA included reports on the new ICSU Regional Office for Africa (Dr. Gabriel Ogunmola) which opened in Pretoria, South Africa in 2005, the new ICSU Regional Office for Asia (Dr. Anupam Varma) which will open in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 2006, and the ICSU Ad Hoc Committee on Membership Issues (Dr. Lucie Lapointe). Dr. Goverdhan Mehta, incoming President of ICSU, gave an Address to the GA on the future of ICSU, which was very warmly received.

One important outcome of the GA was the formal approval of the new ICSU Strategic Plan (2006–2011), which provides a strong mandate and direction for the organization in their mission to provide a greater role for science in public policy decisions worldwide, and to strengthen international science for the benefit of society.

ICSU also announced several new initiatives and resolutions, including:

- The ICSU Natural Hazards Initiative, which will establish an international collaborative research and communications programme. This initiative, spanning a decade or more, is aimed at providing interdisciplinary scientific input to manage and reduce the risks associated with natural and human-induced environmental hazards.
- A call for new approaches to data management and access in the legal, regulatory, and technical arenas, in order to facilitate continued scientific progress and more equitable access to information for scientists in the developing world.
- A reaffirmation of ICSU's commitment to the "Universality of Science", at a time when many scientists face growing restrictions on freedoms to associate, collaborate, and publish. Visa restrictions, politically motivated boycotts against countries or institutions, censorship or self-censorship, and other circumstances threaten the freedom that is fundamental to the scientific endeavor. ICSU remains committed to protecting the rights of scientists and promoting the responsible exercise of research.
- The ICSU / World Meteorological Organization-led International Polar Year (IPY),

which is an ambitious global programme for polar research that will assemble, coordinate, and facilitate a burst of internationally coordinated research from March 2007 to March 2009. IPY will focus on dramatic and disturbing changes occurring in the polar regions and analyze their broader environmental and economic importance for the planet. For more information, visit <http://www.ipy.org/>.

For more information on these initiatives and announcements, please visit http://www.icsu.org/3_mediacentre/GA.html. As for the GA as a whole, there was widespread agreement that ICSU and the Chinese hosts at CAST did a magnificent job at organizing the meeting and making participants feel welcome.

The ICSU GA meeting provided the opportunity for Kurokawa, Fu, Chou, and Burnett to discuss PSA business. In addition, there were numerous fruitful discussions to discuss potential collaborations and the upcoming Pacific Science Congress in 2007. These involved Dr. Montri Chulavatnatol, Vice-President of the National Research Council of Thailand and Secretary General of the 20th Pacific Science Congress, other representatives from PSA Adhering organizations, including the Science Council of Japan, the Malaysian Academy of Sciences, the Singapore National Academy of Sciences, CAST, National Academies Forum (Australia), National Research Council of Thailand, as well as officials from ICSU, The Academy of Science for the Developing World (TWAS), and many others.

PSA Biodiversity Task Force

During the third quarter of 2005, the Biodiversity Task Force addressed regional bioinformatics issues through the development of the Pacific Biodiversity Information Forum (PBIF) that is focused on the development of a website that includes information and photographic images of animals, plants and various Pacific Islands. In addition, PBIF completed a survey of regional taxonomic capacity. This will be published next year. PBIF is working to provide informatics support to the Pacific Islands Roundtable for Nature Conservation and with National Biodiversity Strategic Action Coordinators. Finally PBIF is organizing a workshop, planned for February 2006 in New Zealand, to review the taxonomic status of major groups of plants and animals in the tropical Pacific region. This will result in the publication of taxonomic checklists, literature databases and analysis of regional patterns of species richness and endemism.

PSA Website Update

The Pacific Science Association has continued to revise and improve the PSA website (www.pacificscience.org), with the goal of becoming the primary information portal for information concerning science, technology, and sustainable development in and of the Asia and Pacific region. The second version of the PSA website was completed in August 2005. Unfortunately, technical issues delayed the implementation of the secure-server for individual membership (originally scheduled for mid-2005), but should be completed by the time of this publication.

We hope to make the new PSA website as useful for researchers and other stakeholders as possible, and welcome your comments and suggestions. In particular, we invite submissions for "Upcoming Meetings and Conferences in the Asia-Pacific" (<http://www.pacificscience.org/meetings.html>) which is the only site to combine information on any and all meetings either in, or concerning, science and sustainable development in the region. Please email any notifications to Burke Burnett at <mailto:burnett@bishopmuseum.org>.