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ICSU Insight

Newsletter, September 2006, vol 4, n° 3

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Planning and Coordinating Research

Hazards and Disasters

Although we can't actually stop hurricanes, tsunamis or other extremes of nature, we should be able to use science to prevent these events from becoming economic and human catastrophes. This was the theme of ICSU's first conference on environmental hazards and disasters, which was organized by its Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific on 18-19 September in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. "It's time to change the mindset that natural disasters are inevitable," says Gordon McBean, Chair of the ICSU Scoping Group on Environmental Hazards and Disasters. UNESCO, through its Regional Office for Science in Jakarta and the Academy of Sciences of Malaysia co-sponsored the conference. ➤

International Polar Year (IPY), 2007-2008

IPY is attracting enormous interest amongst scientists and the public at large. David Carlson, Director of the IPY Programme Office in Cambridge in the UK reports that many countries have now set up specific processes to fund IPY science and have received an extraordinary number of proposals. For example, 10 countries have already announced more than €250M new science funding for IPY and it is expected that more will make similar announcements in the next few months. Moreover, the international IPY Education and Outreach Sub-Committee has received positive support from teachers, museums, science centres, and journalists and an international IPY Youth Committee has put forward ambitious plans for conferences and contests. ➤

Human Health

Human health is a new strategic priority for ICSU and the Committee on Scientific Planning and Review (CSPR) has now established an *ad hoc* Scoping Group, which held its first meeting in June. Taking into account existing initiatives within the ICSU community, the preliminary assessment is that there may be a unique niche for the Council in encouraging a "systems

analysis” approach to health issues. ICSU will explore this further in consultation with interested Members and Interdisciplinary Bodies over the next year. [↗](#)

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) follow-up

ICSU is working with UNESCO and UNU (United Nations University) in a new activity to follow on from the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) - a major five-year effort to assess the consequences of ecosystem change for human well-being. The follow-up will assess the gaps in scientific knowledge identified through the MA. A 15-member committee, chaired by Hal Mooney of Stanford University, has been established, and will hold its first meeting in early 2007. The effort is being supported with funds from the Zayed International Prize for the Environment, which was awarded to the MA in 2005.

The terms of reference for the Follow-up Group are now available online. [↗](#)

Review of the ICSU-UNESCO Grants Programme

Following consideration of nominations from ICSU Members, the Committee on Scientific Planning and Review (CSPR) has finalized the composition of the Review Committee for the Grants Programme. The Review Committee will meet on 9-10 November and will consider input from Members and UNESCO. [↗](#)

Brief reports on the outcomes of interdisciplinary grants awarded in 2004 and 2005 are now also online. [↗](#)

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Science for Policy

International Science Panel on Renewable Energies (ISPRE)

Renewable energy is a “hot topic” these days and ICSU, together with the Renewable Energy Policy Network (REN21) and the International Council of Academies of Engineering and Technological Sciences (CAETS), is forging ahead in establishing an International Science Panel on Renewable Energies. ISPRE’s mission is to provide strategic guidance for renewable energy R&D efforts worldwide by carrying out assessments and identifying gaps in existing efforts. ICSU recently finalized the Panel membership and hopes to hold the first meeting by the end of the year. [↗](#)

Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-15)

The 15th session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-15) will be held from 30 April to 11 May 2007. CSD-15 will focus on energy, climate change, air pollution and industrial development, and the meeting will result in policy recommendations that government delegates will agree upon. ICSU is also currently preparing documents for the UN Secretary General about the CSD-15 process, as well as Policy Priorities identified by the Scientific and Technological (S&T) Community. [↗](#)

Biosecurity and the Life Sciences

ICSU co-sponsored an international meeting on “Science and Technology Developments and the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention” (BTWC), which was hosted by the British Royal Society in London on 4-6 September. Several Scientific Unions were represented at this meeting, which will provide input to the formal review of the BTWC by governments in November - an initiative that will stress the importance of openness in science in enhancing security. Conference participants also acknowledged the urgent need to raise awareness and engagement within the scientific community on “dual-use” issues and bio-safety. [↗](#)

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Universality of Science

Regional Office for Africa

The second ICSU Consultative Forum for Africa was held in Johannesburg on the 25-27 September. It was an opportunity to discuss provisional plans for regional initiatives on human health, energy, hazards and global change. ❖

Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

This Regional Office was inaugurated on 19 September by the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, Y.A.B. Dato' Seri Najib Tun Abdul Razak. The new office will promote the development of science throughout Asia and the Pacific and help strengthen the voice of developing countries in this region. It will also ensure that its scientists become involved in those aspects of the ICSU 2006-2011 Strategic Plan that are especially relevant for this area. ❖

The official inauguration was accompanied by the 2nd Meeting of the ICSU Regional Committee for Asia and the Pacific and the Regional Conference on Natural and Human-Induced Environmental Hazards and Disasters (18-19 September), mentioned at the beginning of this newsletter, and the 3rd meeting of the ICSU Policy Committee on Developing Countries on 17 September.

Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean

This office will be hosted by the Academia Brasileira de Ciências (ABC) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and a Director will be appointed in mid-October. The Regional Committee for the office has been set up and it will have its first meeting in Panama on the 15 October. The list of members on the Committee is also available: ❖

The First ICSU Regional Meeting for Latin America and the Caribbean will be held in Panama on 16-17 October. ❖

Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)

ICSU has agreed upon a programme for an international conference in Chisinau, Moldova, on 4-5 May 2007. Participants will discuss broad strategic themes such as science and sustainable development, mitigation of natural and human-induced environmental disasters, gender issues in science, and science education. UNESCO is co-organizing the event through its Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe (BRESCE) based in Venice.

European National Members Meeting

A meeting of the European National Members of ICSU will be held on 20 October to discuss coordination at the European level. Representatives from the European Commission and European Science Foundation will attend. It is hosted by ICSU but organized by ICSU's National Members in France, Spain, the Netherlands and the UK.

Persecution of scientists in Iraq

Following a number of reports in the scientific press, ICSU has released a statement condemning violence against scientists in Iraq. This reaffirms ICSU's commitment to the plurality of science and opposition to discrimination against scientists for political, religious or any other reasons. ❖

Data and Information

ICSU's overall strategic goal regarding data and information is "to facilitate a coordinated global approach...that ensures equitable access to quality data and information for research, education and informed decision-making." As part of the process towards achieving this, an *ad hoc*

Strategic Committee on Information and Data (SCID) is being established. This committee, whose terms of reference have now been agreed, will initially focus on the future role of several of ICSU's existing Interdisciplinary Bodies. [↗](#)

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ICSU Governance and Policies

Officers Meeting

A meeting of Officers was held at the ICSU Secretariat on 3-4 July. This included important policy discussions relating to: the universality of science; the relationship between ICSU and various global networks of science academies; and, working with industry. A full record of decisions made at the meeting is now available. [↗](#)

Scientific Planning and Review

The Committee on Scientific Planning and Review (CSPR), which guides the implementation of the ICSU Strategic Plan, met on 1-2 September. In addition to matters highlighted elsewhere in this newsletter, CSPR considered the future role of social sciences within ICSU. It also began an important debate on the future role of the Regional Offices in implementing and developing ICSU's global strategy. The decisions will be made available on the website. [↗](#)

75 Years of ICSU

Anniversary Event, 4 July, Paris

Biodiversity, sustainable development, international research and Africa, education, and communication. These were some of the important topics tackled at the ICSU Science Symposium hosted by the French Academy of Sciences, which took place on 4 July at the Paris Town Hall. The event was attended by some 200 participants, including the French minister for National Education, Higher Education and Research. Webcasts, a brief report of the Symposium sessions and texts of speeches are now available. [↗](#)

Young Scientists Conference

ICSU is organizing a conference for young scientists that will allow them to discuss and address some of today's important scientific challenges in a multidisciplinary and international environment. Preparations for this event are well underway and the Council is now inviting all Members and Interdisciplinary Bodies to nominate and sponsor an outstanding young scientist to attend the conference, which will take place in Lindau in Germany on 4-6 April 2007. The conference, called "Global Scientific Challenges: Perspectives from Young Scientists", will bring together about 200 leading young scientists from around the world and will focus on topics such as environmental change, sustainable development, human health and basic research. [↗](#)

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ICSU Secretariat


New Staff

The Secretariat is pleased to welcome Belle Dumé, who has joined the staff as Science Communications Officer. A journalist by training, Belle was previously science writer at *PhysicsWeb* and *Physics World* magazine. She will help design the future communications strategy of ICSU as well as take responsibility for producing its regular publications and communications. [↗](#)

ICSU website

The Secretariat is starting to explore how to communicate breaking news and developments from Members and Interdisciplinary Bodies on ICSU's website. Members will be consulted on this in the coming weeks. An example of a story now live on the ICSU homepage is given below.


IAU 2006 General Assembly: Results of the definition of a "planet"

The IAU held its 2006 General Assembly in Prague on 13-15 August. Among the important decisions taken by IAU members were the "demotion" of Pluto from planet to "dwarf planet" status. 

Another piece of important news was that the IAU had elected its first woman president, Catherine Cesarsky.

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