

A CONCISE REPORT ON THE 28TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF ICSU WHICH WAS HELD IN CHINA

Date: 16-22 October 2005

Venue: Shanghai and Suzhou, China

A-Shanghai, China (16 October 2005):

On Sunday, 16 October 2005, several meetings, including those of the Executive Board and Unions (clusters) were held in Shanghai. I was invited to attend the Geo-Unions (IGU, INQUA, ISPRS, IUGG, IUGS and IUSS) forum which was held at the Geological Survey of Shanghai. Much of the discussion by this group was centered on their common programs and future cooperation between the six unions. I invited them to introduce or intensify their activities in Africa, a request which was warmly received and we are soon going to chart out activities for the African scientists linked to these six and other unions.

On Monday, 17 October 2005, the host of the 28th General Assembly, the China Association for Science and Technology (CAST), in collaboration with ICSU organized a one-day scientific forum whose theme was, "Science, Development and Humankind." Very educative and interesting presentations on, "Science and Human Well-being; and Science for Sustainable Development", were given by eminent scientists from China and USA. Lively discussions on each of these two subjects emerged from the numerous panelists and the general audience. It was clearly demonstrated, based on facts and figures, that international scientific cooperation is urgently needed for the benefit of the global community. The most remarkable observation is that this forum dealt with subjects which are relevant to the ICSU Regional Office for Africa. Details on these presentations and others from the General Assembly may be accessed through the ICSU website (www.icsu.org).

B-Suzhou, China (18-21 October 2005):

The main part of the General Assembly was held in Suzhou where the first day (Tuesday, 18 October 2005) had two parallel sessions, (a) National Members forum and (b) Unions Members forum. In both fora, members made the initial discussions on the ICSU Strategic Plan (2006-11), matters of their common interests and importance, and undertook the initial elections of Members of the Board of ICSU in their respective domains. On the same day (18:00-18:30 hrs), the President of ICSU, Prof Jane Lubchenco, the host (President of CAST, Prof Zhou Guangzhao) and the State Councillor of Suzhou delivered their opening remarks and the Assembly was declared open by the President of ICSU.

On Wednesday (19 October 2005) to Friday (21 October 2005), delegates deliberated on the agenda of the General Assembly. This meeting was highly successful, especially on the clear determination and desire of the ICSU family and its partners to start implementing its strategic plan for the benefit of society.

C-Election of Members of the ICSU Executive Board:

The race for the different positions in the Executive was very tough bearing in mind that all of the candidates were highly qualified for the positions they vied for within the Board.

Dr Khotso Mokhele (South Africa) was elected to the position of the Vice President for Scientific Planning and Review of ICSU, whereas Prof Francis Gudyanga (Zimbabwe) was elected to continue as an Ordinary Member of the Executive Board of ICSU. One may say that the world (i.e. the ICSU family) has decided to give Africa an opportune moment for accelerating the development and growth of science in the continent.

D-Visibility of the ICSU Regional Office for Africa:

The Regional Office for Africa is seen as a model for the realization of the objectives of the ICSU family, especially its strategic plan, in the developing world. There was great recognition and appreciation of the achievements which have been registered by the Regional Office in such a short span of time of four months. The four heavy banners we mounted during the Inauguration Ceremony (01 September 2005) were a magic of its own at the General Assembly.

The Chair of the Regional Committee (Prof Gabriel Ogunmola) made an excellent presentation which touched every delegate present in the assembly hall. He did a highly appreciated and commendable job on the behalf of the Committee and Africa in general. Africa, ICSU Members and Partners have high expectations from the Regional Office, as was evidenced from statements given in many speeches (e.g. of the out-going and in-coming Presidents) made to the General Assembly.

E-Contacts and future partnerships:

The Director of the Regional Office for Africa made time and effort to discuss with officials of each of the ICSU Unions that were present at the General Assembly (27 Unions) and met some key and strategic national members (e.g. China, Japan, USA, UK, Germany, France, Canada and India). He held numerous discussions, for instance, on the priority areas of the Regional Office and applications for full membership of ICSU, with all African National Members and

delegates present at the 28th GA (e.g. Nigeria, Ghana, Togo, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Mozambique, Madagascar, Senegal, Zimbabwe and Egypt).

D-Proposed projects for the Regional Office for Africa:

The Director of the Regional Office for Africa made several attempts to informally solicit projects from the ICSU family and its partners and the following informal agreements were made in China:

(i) ICSU (Africa) and TWAS (Africa) joint projects:

The Executive Director of TWAS (Prof Mohammed Hassan) and the Director of the Regional Office held a fruitful discussion which leads to the establishment of the MoU between the two Regional Offices (ICSU and TWAS). It is planned that this document should be ready and its announcement made in Alexandria (Egypt) in December 2005 during the General Conference of TWAS. The Director of the Regional Office will work with his counterpart in Nairobi and prepare the draft of this document which will be circulated to the Regional Committee for consideration and endorsement.

(ii) Regional Office and China-capacity building programmes:

The Director of the Regional Office met two senior officials of CAST and the Government (former Minister) and explored avenues of getting scholarships to African youths to study science in China, especially at the post-graduate level. It was jointly agreed that this is a very good idea and it should be worked on and a formal request be submitted to the appropriate organs in China for consideration.

(iii) Regional Office and USA-capacity building programmes:

The Director of the Regional Office met with officials from the National Academy of Sciences (USA) and explored avenues of cooperation, especially in areas of joint scientific research projects and capacity building programmes. Ideas and projects will be developed through time. USA, like China, declared its full support to the activities of the Regional Office. Numerous countries, e.g. Sweden, through IFS (International Foundation for Science), expressed their desire to cooperate with the Regional Office in promoting science in Africa.

(iv) Regional Office and UK-assistance for African Membership:

The Royal Society (UK) has indicated that it is willing to meet annual subscription fees of African membership. This offer will be worked on, especially on our effort to increase the African Membership to ICSU. Such an offer has also been given

by TWAS. It is now up to the Regional Office and the Regional Committee to expeditiously utilize these offers as soon as possible. The Director of the Regional Office has been invited to visit the Royal Society.

(v) Regional Office and ICSU Unions and Other Affiliated Bodies:

The most exciting proposal made by the Director of the Regional Office was the invitation of all Unions and Affiliated Bodies of ICSU to establish their respective (or sister) networks in Africa – an idea highly appreciated and very well received by all! It is through these networks that Africa will realize the objectives (including the four priority areas of the Regional Office: health and human-well being; sustainable energy; natural and man-induced hazards and disasters; and global change) of individual countries and the Region in general. Preparations for this exercise will commence very soon.

Chinese Hospitality: as expected the hospitality of the host country was overwhelming! Exotic dinners, music and visits characterized the highly successful 28th General Assembly of ICSU which was held in China in October 2005.

Time has now come for Africa to match forward at full throttle!!

Sospeter Muhongo
25 October 2005