

CONFERENCE REPORT– 16TH GENERAL MEETING OF THE ACADEMY OF SCIENCES FOR THE DEVELOPING WORLD (TWAS)

Bibliotheca Alexandria (BA):

TWAS organized its 16th General Meeting at the Bibliotheca Alexandria (the new Library of Alexandria) which is built near the ancient library of Alexandria (Egypt). It is at this same locality where the greatest adventure of the human intellect was unfolded. The great thinkers of the age, scientists, mathematicians, and poets from all civilizations came to study and exchange ideas at this library which was launched in 288 BC by Ptolemy I (Soter) under the guidance of Demetrius of Phaleron. One of the greatest and still outstanding recorded ancient achievements from this library is the accurate calculation of the size of the planet Earth. The BA is much more than a mere library because it contains museums; art galleries; planetarium; a conference center; a center of internet and its archive; and hosts a forum for dialogue and discussion. It receives more than 870,000 visitors a year and holds hundreds of cultural events every year.

Excellent Meeting:

The just-ended TWAS meeting was held at the BA from 29th November to 3rd December 2005. It attracted over 200 participants (Fellows, Associate Fellows and invited guests) from all over the world. On Wednesday, 30 November 2005, H.E. Mohamed Hosni Mubarak, the President of the Arab Republic of Egypt was the guest of honour who officially opened the 16th General Meeting of TWAS in Alexandria. The Egyptian hospitality and generosity will be remembered for many years to come. The presentations and discussions were based on modern scientific concepts, knowledge and analytical techniques. Thus, they were very educative and it was repeatedly demonstrated that scientists from the developing world (notably China, India and Brazil) have a recognized claim in the contemporary global scientific achievements.

This highly successful TWAS meeting was intellectually decorated by the very first three distinguished and highly respected scholars (invited lectures), who spoke on subjects ranging from the application of S & T in solving societal problems; power of international dialogue and cooperation; women in S & T; and biodiversity and sustainability in the developing countries. The three keynote speakers were, (i) Prof Paula Dobriansky (USA), Under Secretary of State for Democracy and Global Affairs; (ii) Prof Ismail Serageldin (Egypt), Director of the BA and former Vice President of the World Bank (1992-2000); and (iii) Prof Peter Raven (USA), President Elect of Sigma X and Director of the Missouri Botanical Garden. Prof Sospeter Muhongo was highly privileged and honoured to be the Rapporteur of this opening plenary session.

The S-S and N-S scientific partnerships were emphasized. The Indian government's decision to launch a small satellites in 2006 (TWASSAT), will allow scientists from the developing world to collect enormous amount of data on natural resource conditions within their own countries and regions. It was also resolved that young scientists and social scientists will have space and time in the future TWAS programmes and activities.

TWAS Members: 2004-Candidates Election for membership:

A total of 68 new members were elected for the TWAS membership for the year 2004 and the breakdown for the African membership (total of 11) is as follows: Benin (1), Cameroon (2), Ethiopia (1), Malawi (1), Mauritius (1), South Africa (2), Tanzania (1), Togo (1) and Uganda (1).

TWAS Members: 2004 – ICSU Regional Office for Africa:

It has to be noted, with joy and scientific appreciation that two members of the ICSU Regional Committee for Africa, Prof Vincent Titanji and Prof Sospeter Muhongo, are amongst the 68 new fellows of TWAS for the year 2004. It is equally important to note and recognize that the Immediate-Past President of ICSU, Prof Jane Lubchenco (USA) has been elected as An Associate Fellow of TWAS (2004). This is the highest level of scientific recognition by TWAS for scientists coming from the developed world.

TWAS Members: 2005-Candidates Recommended for Election:

It has to be remembered that election to TWAS membership is purely and solely based on scientific achievement, especially publications in journals with measurable impact factors/citation index. Thus, it is a highly competitive scientific venture!

A total of fifty (50) candidates have been recommended for election into the TWAS membership for the year 2005. The break down for membership from Africa (a total of seven) is a follows: Egypt (1), Ghana (2), Kenya (1), Madagascar (1), Rwanda (1) and South Africa (1).

The World Academy of Young Scientists (WAYS):

The WAYS is setting up regional units around the world and WAYS (Arab Unit) has now established its Regional Office within the TWAS Regional Office which is hosted by the BA in Alexandria (Egypt). The WAYS (Africa Unit) and the ICSU Regional Office for Africa have come into partnership agreement and details on the joint work-plan will be finalized by March 2006. The former will hold its first planning meeting at the ICSU Regional Office on 9-10 February 2006. Its official

launch (a network for the African Young Scientists) will take place in August 2006 in conjunction with the 2nd ICSU Regional Consultative Forum which will be held in Pretoria, South Africa. The WAYS (Africa Unit) has submitted an application for having its Regional Office being hosted by the ICSU Regional Office for Africa – the decision on this application will be made by the ICSU Regional Committee in January 2006. The WAYS is jointly being supported by TWAS and ICSU.

The African Young Scientists (below 40 years of age) are strongly urged to join this network, and details on the objectives of the WAYS (Africa Unit) may be obtained from its President (Dr. Gaell Mainguy, ways@sztaki.hu or president@waysnet.org); the Board Officer from Zambia (Dr. Shadreck Chama, schama@cbu.ac.zm or shad_chama@yahoo.com) or from a Member of the Steering Committee (Ms Berth Waweru, Kenya - bethsnowy@yahoo.co.uk).

New Contacts from Alexandria:

The Director of the ICSU Regional Office contacted all the participants from the Sub-Saharan Africa who attended the 16th TWAS General Meeting in Alexandria. These included very prominent scientists such as Professors Edward Ayensu (Ghana), Etim Essien (Nigeria), Aderemi Kuku (Nigeria/USA), Ahmed Elhassan (Sudan), Fredrick Kayanja (Uganda), Kofi Allotey (Ghana), Raelina Andriambololona (Madagascar), Patricia Berjak (South Africa), Ahmed Azad (South Africa/Australia), Mawuena Gumedzoe (Togo), Lydia Makhubu (Swaziland), Christopher Chetsanga (Zimbabwe) and Vincent Titanji (Cameroon). The Director took time to report on the progress made by the Regional Office since its establishment in April 2005. He also explained the four priority areas of the Regional Office. Some promotional materials were distributed to the participants of this TWAS meeting. The response was very positive and all of the contacted African scientists have expressed their willingness to closely work with the Regional Office. They find the priority areas to be well defined and focused; and have urged the Regional office to speed up the preparation of an action-plan for combating health problems facing the continent, especially on malaria and HIV/AIDS.

Strategic partners:

The Director of the ICSU Regional Office for Africa, in collaboration with the Immediate-Past President of ICSU (Prof Jane Lubchenco) and the Executive Director of ICSU (Prof Thomas Rosswall) held several meetings with some influential persons who would promote the realization of the priority areas of the Regional Office. Again, the response from these persons was positive and they expressed their strong willingness to collaborate with the Regional Office. They include, several scientists from India, China and Brazil; Prof Peter Raven (USA,

see above), Prof Richard Bissell (The National Academies, USA), Prof John Campbell (InterAcademy Council, The Netherlands), Prof Farouk El-Baz (Center for Remote Sensing, Boston University, USA), and Prof Mohamed Hassan (TWAS, Italy).

ICSU and TWAS partnership:

The 16th General Meeting of TWAS was informed by the TWAS Executive Director that an agreement on cooperation has been reached between the ICSU Regional Office for Africa (based in Pretoria, South Africa) and that of TWAS (based in Nairobi, Kenya). The Director of the ICSU Regional Office was invited to brief the meeting on the recorded progress on this endeavour. He said that a joint work-plan for the two Regional Offices will be available by March 2006, and that this work-plan will have to be endorsed by the two respective Regional Committees of the two offices. An official meeting (on joint work-plan) will be held in Nairobi (12-16 December 2005), in conjunction with the forthcoming meeting on "Energy in Africa" which is being organized by the African Academy of Sciences (AAS).

The next TWAS meetings:

The 10th General Conference and the 17th General meeting of TWAS will be held on 3-6 September 2006 in Rio de Janeiro (Angra dos Reis), Brazil.

Sospeter Muhongo
05 December 2006