



INTRODUCTORY NOTES TO THE 29TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Welcome to the 29th General Assembly of ICSU. We hope you will find these introductory notes useful. They explain what the Assembly is for and how it is conducted.

In addition to all the formal parts of the Assembly, there are many opportunities for informal discussions with other participants, Members of the Executive Board and the Secretariat, and, equally, opportunities for meeting our hosts and learning about aspects of science in Mozambique. Such discussions contribute importantly to building up a sense of active belonging to the ICSU global community, which we hope will be a significant feature of the Assembly.

The Assembly will set the direction of ICSU's future influence on world science and we look forward to a successful week.

Highlights of the 2008 General Assembly

The General Assembly is held every three years and is the ultimate policy-setting process for ICSU. Representatives of all the Members of ICSU (the Scientific Unions and the National Members), of the Associates, Observers, Interdisciplinary Bodies and Joint Initiatives, are entitled to attend the General Assembly. In addition, representatives of a number of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations with which ICSU cooperates are invited.

The formal sessions at the Assembly are essentially of two types: those concerning what ICSU has been doing and will be doing in future, and those concerning how ICSU is resourced and structured so that it can deliver its plans. There are also plenary addresses by the President and the President-Elect, and opportunities for members to meet in groups to discuss the future of ICSU.

Scientific strategy

This year's General Assembly will review progress in implementing the six-year Strategic Plan adopted at the last General Assembly in Suzhou in 2005 and will agree on priorities for the ensuing triennium.

The Plan sets out a prospectus for how ICSU should be working to deliver its core mission of strengthening international science for the benefit of society. This involves focusing our efforts on three broad themes:

- a) facilitating international and interdisciplinary collaboration in research;
- b) ensuring that science interacts effectively with policy-making processes; and
- c) promoting the universality of science, which includes working to ensure the full participation of scientists from across the world in ICSU activities and helping countries to develop their capacity to engage with global science.

Much of the work of the Assembly on the Wednesday and Thursday will be devoted to discussions of the major activities resulting from the implementation of the Strategic Plan:

- the International Polar Year (2007–2008)
- Integrated Research on Disaster Risk
- Ecosystem Change and Human Well-being
- Health and Well-being in the Changing Urban Environment
- reviews of Global Environmental Change Programmes and the Earth System Science Partnership
- universality of science
- involvement of social sciences
- scientific data and information

ICSU infrastructure (finance and governance)

The General Assembly deals also with those matters of infrastructure without which ICSU cannot deliver its objectives. So Friday will see the presentation of the Report on the Dues Structure by the Chair of the *Ad hoc* Working Group, and reports from the Treasurer and the Chair of the Finance Committee, with key decisions to be made both on the dues structure and on the budgets for the next three years.

The election of the Officers for the ensuing triennium will take place on the Thursday afternoon, and the election of Ordinary Members of the Executive Board on Friday afternoon, followed by decisions on applications for admission to membership.

Plenary Addresses

On the Tuesday evening the President, Goverdhan Mehta, will open the Assembly and deliver his Presidential Address, in a session that will include also statements from the President of Mozambique, the host organization, AICIMO, and other key partners. On the Friday afternoon, Catherine Bréchnignac, who takes over as President at the end of the Assembly, will give her incoming Presidential Address.

Members' fora

Immediately prior to the formal Assembly, on the Tuesday, separate fora are organized for the Union Members and the National Members. They have two functions: to discuss substantive items of interest to each group, and to propose the slate of candidates for election as Ordinary Members of the Executive Board. This year the substantive discussion in both fora will focus on the implementation of the Strategic Plan 2006–2011 and the Regional Offices.