

Press release

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At Pivotal Event in China, the International Council for Science Releases New Strategy to Strengthen International Science for the Benefit of Society

***Launching of a major polar research programme, a new interdisciplinary
initiative on disaster mitigation, and long-term actions on other key
challenges for science and society***

Suzhou, China—Acknowledging that the world of scientific research has not lived up to its full potential in addressing some of society's most pressing concerns, including the terrible impact of natural disasters, the International Council for Science (ICSU) today announced at its 28th General Assembly an ambitious plan of action to strengthen international science for the benefit of society. It will focus on interdisciplinary science in key areas of policy uncertainty, including sustainable development, and efforts to mitigate the impact of disasters such as the recent earthquake in Kashmir, Hurricane Katrina and the tsunami in the Indian Ocean. A major international research programme in polar science will provide new insights into planetary processes and how they are influenced by human behaviour.

"Scientists need to do a better job of communicating what they know to world leaders, but they also need to find out what information those policymakers would find useful," said ICSU President Jane Lubchenco, who is also Wayne and Gladys Valley Professor of Marine Biology and a Distinguished Professor of Zoology at Oregon State University.

"The tsunami and Hurricanes Katrina and Rita have demonstrated the devastating consequences to people and property of the removal of natural storm surge barriers such as wetlands, mangroves, and coral reefs," said Lubchenco. "When coastal development ignores scientific information about the critical protecting functions of these ecosystems, people are at greater risk." "The world needs natural, social and economic scientists to work together, tailor their research and share their findings more effectively," she continued.

Lubchenco notes that scientists around the world are committed to delivering on the promise of science— to, reduce the impact of natural and manmade hazards, address the threat of climate change, and help overcome health and economic inequities.

"With this strategic plan we are adding significant weight to our mission statement – to strengthen international

science for the benefit of society,” said Thomas Rosswall, Executive Director of ICSU. “We must continue to be involved in assessing rapidly changing conditions worldwide, and making sure that the message of scientists gets to intergovernmental institutions, as well as to the leaders of individual countries. At the same time, we are also saying that we have to get policymakers on board from the outset, so they can help us respond to what they need.”

The new plan is based on several expert reports and on consultations over the past three years with working scientists and scientific institutions worldwide. The strategy builds on ICSU’s current programmes to coordinate environmental research, protect scientific freedom, and open up access to data and information, while launching new initiatives that will bring scientists together from a many disciplines and countries. The following actions are being taken at 28th General Assembly, as part of implementation of ICSU’s new strategic plan:

- ◆ Launch of the International Polar Year (IPY) 2007-2008: Reminiscent of galvanizing endeavors such as man’s ventures into space and the Human Genome Project, this ambitious global programme for polar research—which is being co-sponsored by the World Meteorological Organization—was officially launched at the General Assembly. It already has attracted more than 1000 research proposals submitted by scientists from around the world.
- ◆ Approval to initiate the detailed planning for a major new programme on Natural and Human-Induced Hazards: Responding to a world where natural disasters are increasingly disrupting nations, rich and poor, the ICSU General Assembly approved a new initiative that focuses on using science to prevent natural hazards from becoming catastrophic events.
- ◆ Data and Information: Against the backdrop of a growing knowledge divide between rich countries and poor and commercial barriers that prevent access to scientific data, ICSU’s General Assembly adopted ambitious plans to promote better management and diffusion of scientific data and information,
- ◆ Universality of Science: Warning that changes in the global political climate and concerns about international terrorism pose new challenges to scientific freedoms, ICSU’s membership adopted a renewed and revised commitment to the organization’s bedrock Principle of the Universality of Science. This Principle calls for an end to political and commercial restrictions on the freedom to pursue science. A statement on threats to the Principle was formally presented by ICSU’s Standing Committee on Freedom in the Conduct of Science to the General Assembly.

Rosswall noted that ICSU and its partners will continue to monitor emerging international research issues of importance to science and society, and respond in a timely manner when necessary. The new strategy also commits the organization to take into account the impact the important role of research on human health in planning future activities with its partners.

Founded in 1931, the International Council for Science (ICSU) is a non-governmental organization representing a global membership that includes both national scientific bodies (103 members) and international scientific unions (27 members).

Through this international network, ICSU coordinates interdisciplinary research to address major issues of relevance to both science and society. In addition, the Council actively advocates for freedom in the conduct of science, promotes equitable access to scientific data and information, and facilitates science education and capacity building.

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See also http://www.icsu.org/3_mediacentre/GA.html