

Press release

27 June, 2006

Back to the Future: 75 Years of International Scientific Collaboration

The International Council for Science celebrates its 75th anniversary by launching an ambitious new strategy that addresses major global challenges

Paris: On 11 July 2006 the International Council for Science (ICSU) celebrates its 75th anniversary. Originally founded by a small number of Science Academies from the Western World, ICSU has grown into a worldwide organisation representing over a hundred countries and numerous disciplines. During this period, it has had a major impact on international and interdisciplinary research collaboration, on the integration of science into policy development, and on protecting the freedoms of scientists. After three years of intensive consultation, ICSU has now published its new strategy for 2006-2011. This builds on ICSU's historical strengths and identifies a number of important priorities for future international interdisciplinary collaboration.

The International Geophysical Year, which was sponsored by ICSU in 1957-58, was the most complex and ambitious exercise in international research collaboration undertaken in peacetime up to that point. Fifty years later, ICSU has produced the Framework for the International Polar Year, 2007-08. More than 200 collaborative research proposals, involving over 60 countries and an estimated 50,000 scientists, have already been endorsed by IPY.

The first ICSU programme on environmental change – the Global Atmospheric Research Programme was launched jointly with WMO in 1967. The successors to this programme, focussing on climate change and the functioning of Planet Earth, provide the scientific basis for the assessments of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). New joint projects on food, water and human health are being implemented to provide a sound scientific basis for policy development in these critical areas.

Other new initiatives that are already being planned or about to be launched include an International Science Panel on Renewable Energies (ISPRES) and an interdisciplinary programme, linking natural and social sciences, on Natural and Human-induced Environmental Hazards and Disasters. In order to ensure that these activities are truly inclusive of the whole international science community, the establishment of an ICSU Regional Office for Africa in 2005, will be followed by the inauguration of a new Office for Asia and the Pacific in 2006.

Several of these topics will be the focus of an international Scientific Symposium hosted by the French Académie des Sciences on July 4th, which will be attended by the Minister for Education and Research, Gilles de Robien.

Founded in 1931, the International Council for Science (ICSU) is a non-governmental organization representing a global membership that includes both national scientific bodies (104 members) and international scientific unions (29 members). Through this international network, ICSU coordinates interdisciplinary research to address major issues of relevance to both science and society.

For further information on ICSU past and future, see http://www.icsu.org/10_icsu75/75ANNIV_Intro.html

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