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Address at the Opening Ceremony
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Excellencies, distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentleman

It is a memorable evening and it is my singular pleasure to welcome H.E. President Armando Emilio Guebuza and H. E. Minister Venancio Simao Massingue and other distinguished guests for gracing the occasion. Excellencies, I warmly greet you on behalf of the extended ICSU family. It is immensely satisfying for all of us that the ICSU GA is being held for the first time in sub-Saharan Africa, in this welcoming country. We are grateful to our host organization, represented here by Dr. Patricio Sande for inviting us and for the hospitality. It has provided us a very timely opportunity to interact with fellow scientists, policy makers and others in Mozambique and the region. The informative and insightful sessions on 'Science in Africa', have generated a much needed, better understanding of the manifold challenges that the region faces and underscores the need for further strengthening the scientific connectivity with ICSU family. ICSU would endeavor to enhance its efforts in this direction.

Let me now say what a great privilege it has been for me to serve ICSU, an organization deeply committed to its unique mission of advancing and promoting international science for the benefit of the society. ICSU has an impressive worldwide presence and access to the very best intellectual resources with 114 national members (comprising mostly of National Science Academies), covering 134 countries, that bring unique interdisciplinary strength and 29 scientific unions contributing enormous disciplinary depth and extensive outreach.

ICSU's working strategy is to identify emerging global issues, source and network the leading experts in the field and catalyze the process of employing the best available science to make predictions/find solutions or open a new frontier and sensitize the society and policy makers. In this context, it may be worth recalling ICSU's role in the launching of the International Geophysical Year some 50 years ago, an event that triggered interest in the study of planet earth and of IPCC which has awakened the world to the lurking dangers of global warming and climate change.

Fortunately, my tenure as President has coincided with a period of major strategic transition at ICSU and the celebration of its 75th anniversary.

At the last GA in Suzhou, the first ICSU Strategic Plan, an exceptional document in terms of its breadth and depth involving key scientific issues and reflecting the distilled 'collective wisdom'

and aspirations of the ICSU fraternity, was enthusiastically endorsed. The GA identified the priorities within the strategic plan with three interrelated themes namely, international research collaboration, science and policy, and the universality of science, being at the vanguard, and set the agenda and timelines for the implementation. In the intervening three years, EB and CSPR (Committee for Scientific Planning and Research) have strived to deliver on the GA's general directions and expectations.

Over the next few days you will be presented with the progress in respect of the implementation of ICSU's strategic agenda. This will reflect on how far we have traversed the path as we cross the halfway mark in ICSU's first strategic plan. In this regard, I would like to acknowledge the energetic efforts of CSPR and its Chair Khotso Mokhele in steering the Strategic Plan implementation process. At this GA, we will be looking forward to your valuable inputs and guidance to ensure that the aims and objectives of the strategic plan are fully realized. The evolving contours of ICSU's second Strategic Plan for 2012-2017 will also be unveiled for your comments and directions.

I will now venture to provide you a few snap shots of some of the key happenings at ICSU in pursuit of its strategic objectives. ICSU continues to strengthen its engagement in the environment and ecosystem arena through global change research programmes involving observation and monitoring systems and timely and topical assessments. An international, multi-disciplinary research programme leading to more effective global societal responses to the risks associated with natural and human-induced hazards is being crafted. This initiative will have a strong interdisciplinary connect with the social sciences. As part of the ICSU initiative on human health and well-being, a programme on urban health and well-being is being proposed.

Universality of Science has been the founding principle of ICSU and it has an established reputation as a 'guardian' of non-discrimination and equity in the pursuit of science. To enhance the ambit of this lofty commitment to universality, the last GA sent out a message that freedoms in the conduct of science also imply responsibilities. Following this direction, another important new acronym has been added to the ICSU family in the form of CFRS (Committee on Freedom and Responsibility in the conduct of science).

The ICSU vision is of a world, where universal and equitable access to scientific data and information is a reality and all countries have the scientific capacity to use them. In this quest, ICSU continues to advocate the cause of full and open access to scientific publications and data and efforts are on towards reforming international data and information structures.

A central piece of the ICSU Strategic Plan was the establishment of four Regional Offices to ensure that the voice of developing countries influences the international agenda setting and that scientists from the south are not only involved in research in frontier areas but also have the capacity to address problems of local and regional context. Three regional offices of ICSU—in Pretoria for Africa, in Kuala Lumpur for the Asia-Pacific and in Rio de Janeiro for Latin America and the Caribbean—are fully operational and involved in networking, priority setting and developing regional science plans. I am pleased to note that our regional office for Africa has been very active in promoting science and capacity building in the region. Likewise other regional offices are active in their respective regions.

A few significant events that took place during the last triennium merit special mention. As part of the 75th anniversary celebration of ICSU, a conclave 'Global Scientific Challenges: Perspectives from Young Scientists' was held in Lindau with participation from 142 scientists from 71 countries. This was a remarkable meeting where the future generation of scientists debated and identified the major scientific challenges of the 21st Century. This event needs to be periodically repeated and replicated by others interested in the promotion of international science and nurturing the future generation of scientific leadership.

Another important event was the launch in March 2007 of the 'International Polar Year', an intensive burst of internationally coordinated, interdisciplinary, scientific research and observation driven initiative, focussed on the earth's Polar regions with participation from 60 countries. You will hear more about the impressive scientific outcomes from IPY as well as the legacy issues but this effort to me is a shining example of power of networking, interdisciplinarity and good science, converging to address major scientific issues.

A significant happening this year was that ICSU moved into a new home in Paris at an exquisite location, a few minutes walk from the Arc de Triomphe and the Champs Elysées. We are most grateful to the French government for generously making these new premises available to us.

Let me now turn to some future issues. Since the last GA, our world has changed, much more than one could have predicted or anticipated, but not necessarily for better. Banking on the strength of good science, the fourth IPCC assessment report has reinforced the forebodings of global warming and the spectre of climate change is looming large. Ironically, the IPCC report indicates that poor countries, particularly in Africa will be hardest hit by climate change although they contribute least to the problem. There are forebodings that southern part of Africa may lose 30% of its maize crop by 2030.

The predictions of an ice free Arctic, sighting of penguins in warm waters, the agony of polar bear falling into icy waters and the possible onset of the sixth great extinction of species, no longer takes one by surprise. Increasing cycles of hurricanes, ravaging floods, draughts, earthquakes and other natural disasters are symptomatic of a stressed planet. The Millennium eco-system assessment and its follow-up studies further reinforce this view. The situation with regard to energy needs, food and nutritional security, water scarcity, emergent diseases and migrations continues to be a serious challenge to sustainability. Adding to these woes is a world mired in conflicts and violence and the global economy is receding following an unprecedented financial crisis. This emergent situation is likely to deepen the knowledge and socioeconomic divide further and the poor and developing countries face grim prospects. Let me also recall that many developing countries of the world are already lagging behind even in achieving the modest Millennium Development Goals. Last week's prestigious Man Booker Prize winning novel 'The White Tiger' chronicles the 'lights and shadows' and the 'dark heart' associated with the current growth and development paradigms.

What can science do in this scenario? How should science re-position itself? Can science and technology bring hope, remedy the drift and help secure a better future? Admittedly, these are debatable issues and answers are bound to be contestable. My personal conviction is that science imbedded in the seamless unity of knowledge and in harmony with society is the only way to make our world better and sustainable. For this realization, the domain of science needs to be recalibrated without diminishing its centrality. However, I must hasten to add a few caveats to justify my optimism.

Thomas Carlyle, the well known Scottish philosopher had famously remarked and for good reasons and I quote: 'Science must have originated in the feeling that something was wrong'. As our planet slides towards instability, it is becoming quite apparent that something is really wrong. Therefore, scientific enterprise must reposition itself to look beyond discovery and focus on universal human needs, societal concerns and sustainability of our planet. Scientists will be well advised to remember the words of George Bernard Shaw and I quote: 'The worst sin towards our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them. That's the essence of inhumanity'. The paradigm shift in the pursuit of science and technology to embrace and focus on the human needs and concerns will ensure better and sustainable science-society connects. Let me recall the words of Gandhi, who regarded 'science without humanity' as one of the cardinal sins.

Progress in science must be grounded in the principle of inclusiveness and benefits of science must reach one and all, particularly to those who have been either denied or left out of its ambit. Primacy and focus of science for 'public good' must be reinforced and universally accepted.

Science must jettison its splendid isolation and connect and cohabit with other knowledge streams. There is need for rapid and effective globalization of science and to evolve a 'universal scientific temper' a concept that Nehru propagated over half a century ago. In the present day, one may perhaps rephrase it as 'global scientific consciousness' which needs to be inculcated in every citizen. Although recent financial sector meltdown might have raised question marks on the efficacy of the term globalization in the economic arena, but scientific knowledge is endowed with unlimited assets and liquidity to be shared and practiced globally. We only have to recognize that in the 21st century national interests and international partnerships in S&T are not contradictory but intrinsically complementary.

To fully harness the benefits of S&T for the development and to achieve goals of sustainability, active engagement with policy makers is of paramount importance. Just as we need policy for science, science must be a key driver of policy. An extraterrestrial entity watching from far away will be dumbstruck to find that despite such spectacular advances in science and technology and a resource rich earth, why are the shadows of instability lengthening on this planet? Science has armed society with the ability to fine-tune the planet's physical, chemical, biological and geological environments at local, regional and global scales. The challenge is to ensure that such interventions are orchestrated wisely and in a sustainable manner. A policy connect and good science backed decision making should enable political leaders to balance global needs with global greed, available resources with consumption patterns and chart a course towards an inclusive and non-exploitative world order and arrest the drift towards instability.

In this far from rosy present day scenario, I see new opportunities for a multifaceted organization like ICSU to promote science in many innovative ways to serve the society and help secure the environment. Our Strategic Plan provides a good platform to rely on.

ICSU's connect with the scientific community through our National Members and particularly through Scientific Unions is enormous and extraordinary. However, our reach and visibility among national Governments, civil society, international financial institutions, philanthropic foundations and industry needs considerable enhancement to enable ICSU to play a more effective role. We need to explore the possibility of establishing a framework for periodic structured dialogue with the political leadership both regionally (EU, AU, OIC...) and globally (G-20). This could be done in partnership with other organizations like IAP/IAC and TWAS with whom we share many common values and objectives. Given our strong links, the UN route could also be an option. In short, ICSU needs some sort of 'rebranding' so that its visibility is further enhanced and it is widely accepted as the voice of international science.

ICSU has always performed with limited finances and sometimes even with shoestring budgets. The scope and priorities of the implementation of the Strategic Plan have been largely determined by the availability of resources. ICSU's resource mobilization efforts have remained somewhat stagnant and there is heavy dependence on the membership dues. We need to explore new innovative ways to secure additional assured funding from philanthropic foundations and other international institutions to sustain and amplify our activities.

ICSU needs to pay greater attention to strengthening our interactions with other international organizations like UNESCO, IAC/IAP, TWAS etc, as well as regional groupings of Academies to explore the vast 'synergy space'. Additionally, we need to engage with greater vigour the engineering, technology and medical sciences based international organizations. ICSU has made some headway in connecting with the social sciences community and these efforts need to be augmented.

I have repeatedly mentioned that ICSU over the years has greatly benefited through the involvement of a large number of eminent scientists, and we have these 'ICSU veterans' in all parts of the world and we are truly proud of them and grateful for their contributions but it is time to assiduously cultivate a new generation of young scientist and get them involved in ICSU activities for the future of our organization. This must be orchestrated with a clear focus.

Before I conclude, I wish to thank and record my appreciation for the efforts of the outgoing Executive Board and particularly the officers; all of them have whole heartedly and generously contributed through their time and ideas.

The activities of ICSU are facilitated and coordinated by a very congenial and dedicated staff under the Executive Director. To all of them, I owe profound thanks and appreciation. Last but not the least, I am most delighted to welcome and pass on the baton of ICSU Presidency, at the end of this GA to my distinguished dynamic successor Catherine Bréchignac. Good luck and all the best to you Catherine.

Once again my deepest gratitude and thanks for giving me the opportunity to serve ICSU. May God bless you all.