

UNESCO 34th General Conference
General Policy Debate
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Statement by Professor Thomas Rosswall
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Mr. President, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The Nobel Peace Prize for 2007 has been awarded to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The UN Secretary-General has noted that, largely thanks to the IPCC's lucid and well-documented findings, it is now established beyond doubt that climate change is happening, and that much of it is caused by human activity. The IPCC is one of many examples of the importance of providing scientific understanding as a necessary basis for sound policy making.

The International Council for Science (ICSU), together with UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) and the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), is a sponsor of the World Climate Research Programme (WCRP) that provides the international planning and coordination of scientific research that underpin the IPCC assessments. WCRP was initiated by ICSU and WMO 27 years ago and since then ICSU has helped establish three complementary international and interdisciplinary research programmes dealing with crucial global change issues. ICSU and its partners are responsible for the international planning and coordination of these programmes at a cost of about 10m US\$ per year. In comparison, the research funding for these programmes, generated primarily through national funding agencies, is estimated as totalling about 2bn US\$ annually.

In addition to partnering on climate change research, ICSU is collaborating with UNESCO in developing the Global Climate Observing System, the annual meeting of which was held earlier this week in Paris. We thus welcome the Inter-Sectoral Task Force on Global Climate Change created by the Director-General of UNESCO and offer our considerable expertise in developing the interdisciplinary framework and platform for contributions by UNESCO, as called for by the Director-General.

In February 2005, ICSU and UNESCO organized a press conference to launch the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA), which focused on the importance of ecosystem services for human well-being. The topic was also covered in a side-event yesterday organized by the Man and the Biosphere programme of UNESCO. The MA has provided crucial inputs to the UN Conventions on Biodiversity, Convention to Combat Desertification, the Wetlands Convention and the Convention on Migratory Species. Together with UNESCO and the United Nations University, ICSU is identifying the gaps in scientific understanding on linked ecological and social system based on the important findings of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment. This collaboration will hopefully lead to a major new activity led by

ICSU and UNESCO, and in collaboration with UNU, to bring together the best natural and social scientists worldwide to address the importance of ecosystems for human well-being.

The fundamental basis for the development of science, both in Member States and internationally, was clearly articulated in the principal documents adopted at the UNESCO-ICSU World Conference on Science in 1999. In addition, the 60th UN General Assembly high-level plenary meeting, the World Summit 2005, concluded that “science and technology, including information and communication technology, are vital for achievement of the development goals”. The Summit’s General Assembly Resolution provides an important platform on which UNESCO should build in developing its Major Programmes II and III.

ICSU welcomes the Review of Major Programmes II and III and considers this an excellent opportunity to re-focus on what is the appropriate role for the “S” in UNESCO. ICSU submitted written and oral statements to the Review Committee and we are pleased that most of our views were taken up by the Review and included in the report. We are confident that the review findings will provide necessary guidance for the development of a strategy for the future of the UNESCO Science Sectors. ICSU pledges to support the implementation of the recommendations in any way that UNESCO may find useful.

Science is essential to provide best available knowledge for wise decision making and it is also an important driving force for technological development and national innovation systems. As UNESCO is the only UN agency with Science in its name, the international science community expects UNESCO to play a major role as a platform for governmental discussions on science for policy and policy for science. Member States of UNESCO should make science a high priority because of its importance for reaching the Millennium Development Goals.

Mr. President,

the International Council for Science (ICSU), an organization with 29 International Scientific Unions and 113 National Members, representing 124 countries, is the premier organization for (i) planning and coordinating international and multidisciplinary research, (ii) serving as the international voice for science in international policy contexts, and (iii) safeguarding the principles of Universality of science. ICSU celebrated its 75th anniversary last year and has been a key collaborating partner for UNESCO ever since the latter’s establishment 60 years ago. UNESCO and ICSU are natural partners in a world where governmental and non-governmental partnerships are becoming increasingly important.

One of ICSU’s key new priorities is a programme to address the science of natural and human-induced hazards. We note with appreciation the leadership role that the IOC is playing with regard to early warning systems for tsunamis. There is, however, an urgent need to expand the research on hazards, and ICSU is taking the lead in an effort that will tap into the best scientific knowledge in both natural and social sciences to address this crucially important area. UNESCO can be a major contributor to such an effort, especially if it is possible to strengthen collaboration between the Natural and Social & Human Sciences Sectors.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I would like to stress the importance of regional collaboration. ICSU has recently established Regional Offices for Africa (Pretoria), Asia and the Pacific (Kuala Lumpur), and Latin America and the Caribbean (Rio de Janeiro). A similar office will be established in and for the Arab Region, although it has not yet been possible to identify a suitable host country and institution. The Offices will ensure that the science communities in developing countries have a stronger voice and fully influence the international agenda setting. The Regional Offices will also strengthen the involvement of scientists from the

region in ICSU programmes and activities. The Regional Offices are primarily funded by the host countries, with only a small financial contribution from ICSU. This demonstrates the importance of science in many countries of the developing world. We are working closely with the UNESCO Regional Offices for Science in Nairobi, Jakarta and Montevideo and earlier this year in Moldova we had a major conference for academies of science in Eastern and South-eastern Europe, in cooperation with the UNESCO Offices in Venice and Moscow. The initiatives are fully consistent with the ICSU strategy to involve scientists from all regions and countries in the international scientific endeavour.

ICSU and UNESCO have long-standing collaborative agreements. It is my hope that these can be strengthened as part of the next UNESCO Medium-Term Strategy. A new Framework Agreements must take due account of the priorities of both organizations, as well as their relative strengths. Much more can, and should, be done. On behalf of ICSU I pledge our support to make this happen. The ICSU mission is to strengthen international science for the benefit of society, which provides an excellent platform for the development of joint efforts that will also benefit the science communities in all Member States of UNESCO.

Thank you.