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ICSU Insight

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Looking back, moving forward

As 2007 draws to a close, it is timely to reflect on the achievements of what has been a busy year implementing the ICSU Strategic Plan. The Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean was inaugurated in April, joining the Regional Offices for Africa, and Asia and the Pacific. Efforts to establish an office in the Arab Region continue and it is hoped that 2008 will see positive steps towards this end.

Many important events were held this year including the young scientists' conference investigating Global Scientific Challenges from the perspective of those who will play a leading role in international research over future decades. The launch of the International Polar Year (IPY) in March marked the onset of one of the most ambitious coordinated international science programmes ever attempted. Thousands of scientists from over 60 countries are involved in more than 200 projects to discover more about the Polar Regions and their critical influence on the rest of the planet. ICSU's Scientific Unions met in Rome to discuss 'ICSU and its Unions working together to deliver the ICSU strategy'.

In looking forward to 2008, ICSU will hold its 29th General Assembly (GA), which will visit sub-Saharan Africa for the first time. At the GA, ICSU will report on the first three years of implementing the Strategic Plan and Members will be invited to support a major new international initiative on Natural and Human-induced Environmental Hazards and Disasters. 2008 will also be a busy year for ICSU's environment programmes, with the Scientific Committee on Problems of the Environment, the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme and the World Climate Research Programme undergoing reviews.

The year ahead will be one of challenges as we enter the third year of implementing the

Strategic Plan, but also, one which ICSU looks forward to with optimism and excitement.

The ICSU secretariat would like to thank the many organizations and individuals who have helped make this an exciting and productive year in 'strengthening international science for the benefit of society'. We look forward to working with you all again over the next 12 months.

Best wishes for 2008.

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Planning and Coordinating Research

Hazards and Disasters

The Planning Group for the new ICSU initiative Natural and Human-induced Environmental Hazards and Disasters is putting the finishing touches to its draft report following a Consultation Forum in Paris on 29 October. The draft report will be sent to Members for a final review in early 2008.

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International Polar Year

The ICSU-WMO Joint Committee that oversees the International Polar Year (IPY), held a progress meeting in Quebec, Canada, in October. The Committee resolved to produce a brief report summarizing the status of the IPY and the achievements to date. The report will be available in January.

The second International Polar Day, dedicated to Ice Sheets and their future in the face of global climate change, was held on 13 December. The International Polar Days generate an enormous amount of interest from educators and media around the world and are proving to be an excellent tool for raising awareness of IPY. More information on Ice Sheet Day and other activities is available on the [IPY website](#).

The first in a series of major interdisciplinary IPY global conferences will be held in St Petersburg, Russia 8–11 July 2008. The conference will explore changes in the Polar Regions, people and resources at the poles, the poles as a vantage point for observations and the latest polar discoveries. Details are available on the [conference website](#).

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Millennium Ecosystem Assessment — Follow-up

The ICSU-UNESCO-UNU group charged with defining research needs based on the results of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) held its last meeting at UNESCO in December. They developed plans for a set of research-driven sub-global assessments that will be established based on a common methodology. The draft report will be circulated within the ICSU family for review in early 2008. A review article is also being prepared for *Science* and presentations will be made at the [3rd World Congress of Biosphere Reserves](#) in Madrid in February and the ICSU sponsored [Resilience Alliance Conference](#) in Stockholm in April.

ICSU is also partner in discussions regarding implementation of the MA findings and preparations for a possible second assessment of ecosystem services. The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) organized a meeting hosted by the Swedish Ministry for the Environment in

October at which time the key partners agreed to a way forward. Following the meeting, a [message](#) was sent to the last IMoSEB Consultation, held in Montpellier in November. The [final report](#) from that consultation proposes that UNEP convene an intergovernmental consultation on IMoSEB and the future of MA.

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Global Observations — Systems

ICSU attended the GEO Plenary and Ministerial Summit in Cape Town, South Africa, in November. The Ministerial Summit considered the progress report *The First 100 Steps to GEOSS* and adopted the [Cape Town Declaration](#). ICSU's Statement to the Ministerial Summit and a Joint Statement by FAO, UNEP, UNESCO (including IOC) and WMO are [available online](#).

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Grants Programme

Applications are invited for the 2008 ICSU Grants Programme. The Programme Statement and Schedule, as well as the Application Form are available in the [Member Zone](#) of the ICSU website. The deadline for receipt of applications is **1 March 2008**.

The ICSU Grants Programme is strictly reserved for ICSU Scientific Unions and Interdisciplinary Bodies.

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Science for Policy

Sustainable Development

IICSU and the World Federation of Engineering Organizations have submitted a [Discussion Paper](#) to the 16th session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-16) as official input from the Scientific and Technological Community. The Discussion Paper focuses on agriculture, land, rural development, and drought and desertification, which will be the topics under review by CSD-16 in May 2008. Throughout the paper special attention is paid to Africa, the regional focus of this CSD biennial cycle.

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Universality of Science

Regional Office for Africa

The ICSU Regional Office for Africa *2006-07 Annual Report* and the *Natural and Human-induced Hazards and Disasters* science plan are now [available online](#).


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Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

November was a busy month for the ICSU Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific with the fourth Regional Committee meeting and the second ICSU Regional Consultation both being held in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Sixty participants from 17 countries attended the Regional

Consultation, and for the first time, Bhutan, Laos and Myanmar sent representatives.

The Regional Office also represented the Asia and Pacific science and technology community at the Regional Implementation Meeting for CSD-16, which was held in Jakarta. The meeting was organized by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, and will feed into the work of CSD-16 by providing a regional perspective and identifying challenges in implementation of the topics under review (see Sustainable Development).

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Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean

The Director of the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean attended the third meeting of the ICSU Spanish Commission, which was held at the Ministry of Education and Science, Madrid, in November. Potential collaborations between the Spanish Commission and the Regional Office were discussed. The first meeting of the Scientific Planning Group on Natural Disasters took place in Manizales, Colombia, 5-6 December.

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The Arab Region

The first ICSU Regional Meeting for the Arab Region will take place in Amman, Jordan on 16–17 March 2008. The location of the Regional Office will be a major item for discussion.

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Freedom and Responsibility

The [report](#) from the third meeting of the Committee on Freedom and Responsibility in the conduct of Science (CFRS) is now available. The report contains an analysis of the interactions between politics, science policies and scientific practice—a major focus of the Committee's future work. It also includes summaries of a dialogue session on science and ethics, with academic leaders in Taiwan, and a workshop on [Emerging Infectious Diseases](#) in the Asian region.

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Research Integrity

The [report](#) of the first World Conference on Research Integrity, which was organised by the European Science Foundation and US Office of Research Integrity, in partnership with ICSU, is now available.

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Availability of Scientific Publications

In September, the [International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications](#) (INASP) welcomed Tag (Mary) McEntegart as the new Director. A major focus of Tag's efforts will be strengthening partnerships with other organisations, including ICSU Members and Interdisciplinary Bodies, with an interest in improving the accessibility of scientific information. Tag replaces Anne Luetcke, who stepped in as interim Director, following the departure of the founding Director Carol Priestly in 2006.

ICSU Governance and Policies

Meeting of the Scientific Unions

The report from the ICSU International Scientific Unions meeting in April is now available in the [Member Zone](#) of the ICSU website.

29th General Assembly

The First Circular and the Draft Agenda for the 29th General Assembly in Maputo, Mozambique, 21–24 October 2008, have been sent to Members. The documents are also available in the [Member Zone](#) of the ICSU website.

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