

Report on the Founding General Assembly of the International Science Council
Paris, France, 3-5 July 2018
by John G. Hildebrand

Delegation Members: John Hildebrand (chair), Robert Axelrod, Melody Brown Burkins, Emilio Moran. Kathie Bailey attended as an observer.

The Founding (first) General Assembly (GA) of the International Science Council (ISC), marking completion of the merger of the International Council for Science (ICSU) with the International Social Science Council (ISSC), took place at the Maison des Océans in Paris. The first day was devoted to preliminary meetings of Member Organizations and Union Members and Associations at which key achievements since the joint meeting of ICSU and ISSC in Taipei (in 10/17) were reviewed, elections and voting procedures were explained, and initiatives for the new ISC Council were considered in break-out sessions (Members and Unions). Suggestions raised by one or both groups included:

- Building public trust in science, emphasizing the critical role of fundamental research.
- A focus on scientific publishing and its problems, perhaps based in a standing committee.
- ISC as a coordinating body for capacity-building endeavors.
- Rethinking STEM education for the 21st Century, integrating with social sciences.
- Artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, and big data and advising governments on AI.
- A focus on indigenous and local knowledge.
- A focus on mobility and migration.
- A focus on sustainable urban living, with links to education and other ongoing initiatives.

The GA *per se* took place on the second day, devoted mainly to election of officers of the Governing Board, election of Ordinary Members of the Governing Board, and voting for the date and location of the 2nd GA. Beginning with introductory formalities (including appointment of a Resolutions Committee and Tellers and agreement on the Statutes and voting procedures), the election process unfolded throughout the rest of the day. Each nominee was given an opportunity to speak briefly to the GA about her/his interest and qualifications for election. There was a remarkably large number of nominees on the ballot: two for President, two for President-Elect, four each for the two Vice Presidencies (one from social sciences and one from natural sciences), three for Treasurer, three for Secretary, and fifty-four (including three proposed by the NAS) for ten Ordinary Member slots. This demonstrates a very high level of interest and engagement by the Member Organizations and Union Members and Associations. The election results were as follows:

President – Daya Reddy (South Africa)
President-Elect – Peter Gluckman (New Zealand)
Vice President (Social Sciences) – Elisa Reis (Brazil)
Vice President (Natural Sciences) – Jinghai Li (China)
Treasurer – Renée van Kessel (Netherlands)
Secretary – Alik Ismail-Zadeh (Russia)

Ordinary Members – Geoffrey Boulton (UK), Melody Burkins (USA), Saths Cooper (South Africa), Sirimali Fernando (Sri Lanka), Ruth Fincher (Australia), James Liao (China-Taipei), Martin Visbeck (Germany), Natalia Tarasova (Russia), Anna Davies (Ireland), Pearl Dykstra (Netherlands)

It is noteworthy that NAS President Marcia McNutt was one of the four members of the Elections Committee, and one of the three candidates nominated by NAS for the Governing Board (Melody Burkins) was elected.

Proposals for hosting of the Second ISC General Assembly in 2021 were presented by Canada (Montreal) and Oman. Oman won a majority of votes.

Day 3 was devoted to inauguration of the ISC. Opening addresses by Sébastien Candel (President of the French Academy of Sciences), Daya Reddy (newly elected President of ISC), Audrey Azoulay (UNESCO Director General), and Thierry Coulhon (Advisor to the President of France for Education, Higher Education, Research and Innovation) set the tone for this celebratory day. Thus, in the words of Dr. Coulhon: “Two world learned societies representing the two cultures on which humanity has built its intellectual history decided to merge and settle in Paris. ... The importance of deliberative scientific understanding to society has never been greater.” Presentations by Craig Calhoun (Berggruen Institute), Esther Duflo (MIT) coupled with a panel discussion, Ismail Serageldin (Emeritus Librarian of the Library of Alexandria), and Cédric Villani (member of the French National Assembly and the French Academy of Sciences) completed the day’s program. The GA concluded with a festive reception at the National Museum of Natural History, Gallery of Evolution.

In conclusion, this inaugural ISC GA was highly successful and energizing. It underscored the importance of a global voice for science, to advocate for the values of science and for its support and advancement as a global public good. Bringing together 39 international scientific Unions and Associations and 141 national and regional scientific Member Organizations (Academies and Research Councils), the new ISC is the only international non-governmental organization combining the natural and social sciences and the largest global science organization of its type. The opportunities and promise of the ISC are great, and it is important that the USA be prominently represented by the NAS as the country’s Member Organization, by key players in several of the member Unions, by an elected member of the Governing Board (Dr. Burkins), and by a member of the Election Committee (Dr. McNutt). Funding from NSF to the NASEM’s Board on International Scientific Organizations has made this investment in the launching and leadership of the ISC possible.

In order to make a difference in the regional and global geopolitical arenas, the ISC must translate its general goals into specific, targeted efforts. To fulfill its potential – to provide science (writ large) for policy for the governments of the world’s countries -- the ISC must succeed in its aspiration to integrate the social and natural sciences and to overcome deeply rooted cultural and political obstacles. Currently it seems that there are more barriers than open pathways, and yet there surely is no challenge more important for the ISC.

There is no science without freedom and no freedom without science. (Ismail Serageldin)