

Conference Call

the most important international gatherings of polymer scientists in Russia. They provide a venue in which young scientists and more experienced researchers have the opportunity for close, friendly contact with the leading specialists in the various domains of polymer science.

The symposium included 21 plenary lectures, 60 oral presentations, and more than 210 posters by attendees from 29 countries in Europe, Asia, and the Americas. The primary focus was on the structure and dynamics of polymer systems that combine order and pronounced molecular mobility (i.e., systems with so-called "soft" order). Many such systems arise under certain conditions during the process of self-organization, and many change their structure in reaction to even small changes in these conditions.

Such systems are in the mainstream of modern polymer science and are the reason for the high level of interest in the symposium by both Russian and foreign scientists. Numerous scientists working in theoretical physics and the computer modeling of polymers also traditionally attend these meetings. Many studies presented at the symposium were conducted as collaborative efforts between Russian and Western researchers within the framework of international scientific projects and grants.

In addition, special effort was made to attract young scientists. More than 50 students presented their results at poster sessions. Reduced registration fees for young scientists and for some researchers from less-developed countries promoted their participation in the symposium. Financial sponsorship by IUPAC made it possible to partially cover the expenses of young participants from countries of the former Soviet Union.

Plenary lectures were presented in the White Hall of the palace. Contributed talks were held in two parallel sessions. Two eminent specialists from Russia and abroad chaired each session.

The symposium program covered six broad topics:

- Macromolecules in Solutions, Melts, and Networks Oriented and Stretched in Strong External Fields
- Liquid Crystalline Polymers
- Copolymers and Polymer Blends
- Polymer Layers and Micelles
- Polymer Complexes and Membranes

- Polymer Networks of Different Topologies, Branched and Star Polymers, and Dendrimers

Information from the symposium program can be found online at <www.macro.ru>. A selection of contributions (some plenary lectures and selected oral/poster presentations) appear as full papers in volume 237 (March 2006) of *Macromolecular Symposia* <www.iupac.org/publications/macro/2006/237_preface.html>.

Anatoly Darinskii <adar@imc.macro.ru>, head of the laboratory of the theory and modeling of polymers at the Institute of Macromolecular Compounds, Russia Academy of Sciences (IMC RAS), served as chairman of the symposium.

Chemistry in Kenya—Its Contribution to a Healthy Environment and Socio-Economic Development

by Sidney F.A. Kettle

In July 2005 the Kenyan Government announced a 5-year plan under which, by 2010, 50 percent of all university students will be scientists. This project served as a fitting background for the 5th Annual International Conference organized by the Kenya Chemical Society, which took place at Kenyatta University, Nairobi, on 22–26 August 2005. The author also attended the first of these meetings and was thus able to make a comparison that showed a clear evolution over the last several years.

Funds are most readily available for research relevant to the Kenyan economy, and so it is understandable that a good portion of the papers presented at the conference dealt with local plant products (particularly those with medicinal potential) and local environmental issues (particularly turning waste into useful materials). However, between the two meetings that the author attended, there has clearly been an increase in collaboration between Kenyan scientists and research groups in developed countries. This collaboration enabled, at the most recent meeting, presentations reporting on work entailing the use of

Conference Call

state-of-art techniques. Thus, the structures of some local plant products were described at a level of detail and certainty that was absent 12 years ago. It became clear that Kenya has no shortage of able and aware chemists who can be expected to make an increasing contribution to future chemical research worldwide.

Although there were poster sessions at the conference, virtually all presentations were oral. Although about half of the presentations were made by research students or those who had only recently completed their work, there was no problem with stage fright—one student even offered to answer questions on behalf of her research supervisor, who had to be absent at the time. The general interest in the meeting was reflected in the attendance levels, which were good from start to finish, with no evident falling-off with time. On the final day, in fact, lunch had to be pushed back an hour because of the number of questions.

About a third of the 16 plenaries were presented by Kenyan chemists, and like those presented by scientists invited from abroad, they tended to focus on chemistry topics with local relevance. Topics included the use of clones to gain insights into long-term fertilizer use (Owour), phytochemical studies on popular Kenyan medicinal plants (Midiwo), and, surprising but relevant, the possible use of rice husk ash for low-cost housing (Kamau). Less surprising, but no less relevant, were plenary lectures on the use of indigenous herbs for treating malaria (Chhabra) and tuberculosis (Rajab). There were also presentations that had potential political implications: Wandiga on vulnerability to climate-induced highland malaria, Getenga on pesticide residues, and, clearly, Karanja on the need for a new approach to university research and technological development in Kenya.

Among the lecturers from outside of Kenya, Carles Codina (Barcelona) dealt with natural antioxidants, Keremire (Uganda) reviewed the health benefits of anthocyanins, and Masaaki Kai (Nagasaki) described some very new and sensitive methods of detecting DNA. Chawla (New Delhi) detailed some very simple but effective methods of extending the shelf life of fruit and vegetables without using refrigeration. Liebscher (Berlin) lectured on some novel cyclic peroxides for use as antimalarial compounds. More theoretical were Kruger (Durban), who reported on related

preparative and ab initio work on simple acetylation reactions, and Kettle (Norwich), who discussed symmetry and spectroscopy.

There were more than 60 contributed papers, the majority from Kenyans, of course, but also including plenty from authors of other countries: South Africa, Spain, Uganda, Norway, Germany, Madagascar, the Ivory Coast, the United States, Tanzania, Sweden, Botswana, Japan, Belarus, and the United Kingdom. Some of these same countries also appeared on the list of sponsors. The author suspects that world interest in chemistry in Kenya will continue to increase. One plenary commented that the threat of litigation in many developed nations—together with health and safety controls—has severely limited the "hands-on" experience of chemistry students in these countries. No such restrictions exist in Kenya, and, with the backing indicated at the beginning of this article, in the future it will be the most evidently able students who study chemistry. Scientists of more than 12 nationalities, representing about one in 10 participants, attended this meeting, and the author believes that participation in future meetings in this series will increase considerably.

Sidney F.A. Kettle <s.kettle@uea.ac.uk> is professor at the School of Chemical Sciences at the University of East Anglia in Norwich, UK.



The Kenya Chemical Society is an Associate National Adhering Organizations of IUPAC. Prof. Shem O. Wandiga, chairman of the society, can be reached by e-mail at <sowandiga@iconnect.co.ke>.

In September 2006, an IUPAC-sponsored conference on Occupational Health and Safety Management in East Africa will take place in Nairobi—see *Where 2B&Y*, p. 36.