

Council Round Table Discussions: Actions Arising from Torino

On 10 August 2007, four round table discussions were held for the first time during the General Assembly to allow small groups of Council delegates to debate subjects of mutual interest in a setting conducive to the easy exchange of ideas. A consensus emerged among the 67 participants that IUPAC should assume a leading role in ensuring that 2011 is proclaimed the International Year of Chemistry by the United Nations. Doing so, participants felt, would help IUPAC meet a number of other objectives, including generating publicity, increasing public appreciation of chemistry, encouraging students to pursue chemistry, and increasing interactions and linkages between IUPAC and governments.

The day after the four round table discussions, all the delegates met for the Council meeting. Council delegates who had attended the round tables reported back that the initiative was a worthwhile exercise for initiating and facilitating communication among delegations. The topics of the roundtables were as follows:

- How can we help regions and small countries to have a more effective voice within IUPAC?
- How can we interact more effectively with governments and other decision makers? How can we improve our interactions with industry, other unions, ICSU, UNESCO, etc.?
- How can we attract more students to chemistry? Do we need to modify the curriculum? Can IUPAC play a role?
- How can we increase the global visibility of chemistry, enhance public understanding of chemistry, and improve its public image? How can we improve the visibility and image of IUPAC?

The setting for the round table discussions allowed for numerous exchanges of ideas and suggestions. Many participants were able to exemplify activities carried out locally, and envision how these could be performed in other places or at different levels.

One group stressed that a good way to become involved with IUPAC is to be an active participant in a project, such as the young observers were doing at the General Assembly. The group concluded that this idea should be further promoted and every project

should encourage the participation of a member of a small country. The group also discussed ways that IUPAC could support free access to scientific information. One suggestion was to encourage workshops for librarians to enable easy internet access and literature searches of all chemistry resources.

There was a clear consensus in one of the round-table groups that IUPAC needs more interactions with governments and other decision makers in order to broaden knowledge of IUPAC and its role, to increase the visibility of chemistry, to ameliorate its public image, and to attract more students. Participants felt that IUPAC must show governments and decision makers that it can provide a focused approach to problems. IUPAC needs to be more proactive in these areas for the next several years they concluded.

Participants expressed a range of ideas about how IUPAC should establish new ties with governments and other organizations. Some stated that IUPAC must not forget the applied part of its name and that means that the relevance of its activities depends, in part, on closer ties with industry. Others pointed out that the great asset of IUPAC is its objectivity and independence. Therefore, it is in a good position to play a role in establishing ethics involving chemicals.

There was widespread agreement that each potential linkage with a new partner would require different attention and potentially could lead to different outcomes. Potential partners include the ICSU, World Health Organization, UN Environment Programme, national research funding agencies, federations of national chemical societies, industry, and other government agencies and decisionmakers.

Another common theme of the round table discussions was the urgency for IUPAC to improve its communications. Pursuing joint projects with other groups outside chemistry and working to make 2011 the International Year of Chemistry would facilitate this goal.

In its relations with individuals and in particular with young scientists, it was noted that IUPAC is already involved in providing opportunities for committed chemists to meet and share encouraging approaches to the young. The activities of the Committee on Chemistry Education and others that aim to improve public appreciation of chemistry should be helpful in bringing young people into the chemical profession. These efforts involve enhancing the image of chemistry by publicizing its importance and the creative capacity of chemists. Therefore, once again, participants felt that the single most important action for IUPAC in this



regard would be the successful implementation of a year of chemistry.

When the idea of a year of chemistry resonated from all groups as a chance to try something new, the formulation of a proposal for designating 2011 as the International Year of Chemistry become a priority.

The initial strategy planning task group, led by Peter Mahaffy, has made significant progress in producing a clear rationale and objectives for an International Year of Chemistry. It is expected that the year of chemistry will accomplish the following:

- serve as a focal point for activities by national chemical societies, educational institutions, and nongovernmental organizations
- enhance the understanding and appreciation of chemistry among the public
- promote the role of chemistry in contributing to solutions to many global problems
- build capacity by engaging young people with scientific disciplines
- serve as a catalyst for international cooperation.

Following the endorsement by the IUPAC Council, the Union has invited all Adhering Organizations, Associated Organizations, and other chemical societies to help establish an International Year of Chemistry in 2011. Such a designation would create a strategic opportunity to communicate the central importance of chemistry in every facet of modern life. This is a "once in a lifetime" opportunity for national and regional chemical societies, educators, industrial associations, and others to join together to raise the profile of chemistry around the world.

The development of this strategic issue is highly supported by the IUPAC Executive Committee. IUPAC's role in ensuring the proclamation of 2011 as the International Year of Chemistry shall be closely followed and regular updates will be reported.

Questions and suggestions can be forwarded to Peter Mahaffy <peter.mahaffy@kingsu.ca>, chair of Committee on Chemistry Education, or John M. Malin <jmalin023@comcast.net>, chair of the IYC strategy planning committee.

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