

Secretary General's Column



by *David StC. Black*

I am writing this column in Sofia, Bulgaria, where the IUPAC Bureau met on 17–18 April 2010. Prior to that, there were meetings of division presidents and standing committee chairs, the project and evaluation committees, the International Year of Chemistry Management Committee, and a meeting with presidents of nearby national chemical societies. I can

say with certainty that this Bureau meeting was unique, as it coincided with a burst of activity from an Icelandic volcano, whose plumes of ash caused the grounding of flights across Europe, with concomitant disruption across the world.

While the majority of Bureau members successfully arrived in Sofia, some failed to depart from other European airports, and one arrived without any baggage (not surprisingly flying via Heathrow). Those of us who did arrive then had the problem of leaving, and readers would be quite impressed with the degree of ingenuity shown. European-based members have resorted to bus and train travel, usually about 36 hours in duration, and some managed to set off for the coast in the hope of picking up boats (So far they have not been heard from!). Members from further afield have had little option but to wait for flights to resume. Several got out of Sofia, only to be seriously delayed in other European airports. The rest of us are slowly trickling out as normal services return.

Sofia is a beautiful city with many things to see, but during the meeting the weather was very damp and wintry. Those of us with an enforced stay here have been very fortunate to see the onset of beautiful spring weather. In my case, it allowed the possibility of sketching the splendid St. Aleksander Nevski Memorial Church, with its golden and copper domes, and also attending a chamber music concert by the local Dimitri String Quartet playing Haydn, Schubert, and Schumann, a performance of Puccini's *Turandot* by the National Opera, and the Sofia Philharmonic Orchestra playing Mozart and Mahler. Despite the very warm hospitality of our Bulgarian hosts and the historical, cultural, and scenic attributes of Sofia, it has been difficult to switch to holiday mode and clear our minds (and conversation) of travel concerns. President Nicole Moreau commented that her presidency will remain in the annals of IUPAC folklore, whatever else eventuates!

Incidentally, the Bureau and ancillary meetings dealt with a wide range of issues, many related directly to the International Year of Chemistry. We are now launching vigorously into fund-raising mode for the global events, and an informational leaflet with details of sponsorship opportunities has been sent to our Company Associates initially, and other recipients will follow. Please contact the Secretariat or treasurer if you have suggestions about further possible recipients. We appreciate that each country will undertake its own national programs, publicity, and fundraising.

The IYC website <www.chemistry2011.org> is now fully operational and it is important that all national events, as well as global ones, are listed on that site. The process is simple and clearly outlined, and the accumulation of all events will not only enable good ideas to be transferred, but add greatly to the impact of the IYC. An excellent publicity brochure has also been produced for distribution at all IUPAC conferences. The opening launch of the IYC in Paris in January 2011 and the closing event in Brussels are steadily taking shape, and there was very productive discussion about the organization of unifying events and global experiments.

At this stage there is extensive involvement of the three operational standing committees, the Committee on Chemistry Education, the Committee on Chemistry and Industry, and the CHEMRAWN Committee (Chemical Research Applied to World Needs). The divisions are raising their levels of activity as well. Links with the chemical federations are also designed to enhance the impact of chemical publicity during the IYC 2011. The IYC Management Committee will meet once more in November 2010, at the Secretariat Office in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, but a serious amount of work will take place between now and then. The IYC Management Committee raised the question of further strengthening the Secretariat staff, to cope with the IYC activity, and the Bureau encouraged a consideration of feasible possibilities: this will now be undertaken swiftly.

The World Chemistry Leadership Meeting (WCLM) is planned for a whole day (Tuesday 2 August) at the General Assembly in San Juan next year, and will address key issues related to IYC 2011. It will present an opportunity for representatives of chemical societies and industry to share thoughts on national events, as well as for IUPAC to expand on future international events. The WCLM will also incorporate the usual round table discussions into the second part of its program. The Congress program for San Juan promises to

be of the highest caliber, with an unprecedented line-up of Nobel Laureate speakers and special sessions.

One of the features of the Bureau meeting was a preview of the Vice President's Critical Assessment, which will be presented to Council next year in San Juan by Kazuyuki Tatsumi. His focus will be on mechanisms to capitalize on the momentum of IYC 2011 into the future. This is a vital issue, both globally and nationally, and already we must seriously think about and plan for "beyond IYC."

In my previous column (May-June 2009 *C/*), I mentioned that the United Nations' approval for designating 2011 as the International Year of Chemistry was made easier because it came under the banner of the long-term UN program on Sustainable Development. Following our initial engagement with the UN Economic and Social Affairs Council, IUPAC will participate in some of the technical meetings relating to chemistry as part of the 18th Session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-18), to be held early in May 2010. The themes of CSD-18 are chemicals, mining, the 10-year framework of programs on sustainable consumption, and production, transport, and waste management. Although all of these topics are strongly related to chemistry, one of the major issues for discussion is the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management

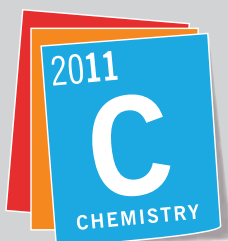
(SAICM). IUPAC has become involved in an NGO advisory capacity in this area, including participation in the related International Conferences on Chemicals Management. It is very important that technical expertise become inserted into discussions at the earliest possible stages, in order to assist in the most sensible and effective future regulations.

The Bureau expressed its sympathy for our Chilean colleagues, who suffered the recent severe earthquake based close to Concepción, where the Executive Committee met in October 2009. Fortunately, none of our friends were directly affected by loss of life, but the Chemistry Department in the university was destroyed by fire, and the hotel where we stayed collapsed.

It was originally intended that both John Jost and his successor as executive director, Terry Renner, would attend the Bureau meeting, but John withdrew because of his mother's imminent death. The Bureau offered its sympathy and condolences to John and his family. In John's absence, Terry did a splendid job coping with all the unexpected circumstances. 🌟

IUPAC Secretary General David StC. Black <d.black@unsw.edu.au> has been involved in IUPAC since 1994 as a committee member of the Division of Organic and Biomolecular Chemistry. He served as division vice president during 2002–2003. He has served as secretary general since 2004.

Celebrate Chemistry



International Year of CHEMISTRY 2011



Goals of the International Year of Chemistry:

- Increase the public appreciation of chemistry in meeting world needs
- Increase interest of young people in chemistry
- Generate enthusiasm for the creative future of chemistry
- Celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Madame Curie Nobel Prize and the 100th anniversary of the founding of the International Association of Chemical Societies

The International Year of Chemistry–2011 will celebrate the achievements of chemistry and its contributions to the well-being of humankind.