

Physiology Without Borders 2

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IUPS speaks for the international community of physiological scientists, with adhering member societies, associations, and academies from over 50 countries worldwide. Its council has members drawn from all continents. Through its nominating committee, IUPS tries to ensure that it is carefully balanced by region, subject areas, and gender. This is essential not only because it is an obvious requirement of any democratic institution to be balanced in terms of the interests of its members but also because the council forms a large part of the International Scientific Program Committee (ISPC) for each world congress. The need for such balances in the ISPC is obvious. It must plan a congress that is balanced, and it has done so very effectively for the 2013 Congress.

The congresses are held every 4 years in different parts of the world, and they attract up to 5,000 people, many of whom are young scientists from developing nations funded by bursaries. The education committee, chaired by Xian Wang (China), has regularly organized successful and popular teaching workshops, whereas its membership committee, chaired by Saeed Semnanian (Iran), is actively expanding the reach of IUPS to countries that have not formerly been members. These initiatives have included reaching out to some of the most difficult regions of the world, politically and economically. An essential aspect of this outreach is that IUPS is perceived to be neutral with regard to some of the more difficult political issues. It can achieve what a national society may find difficult and may not even be aware of the underlying reasons for which the difficulty arises.

Through adherence to the International Council for Science (ICSU), IUPS defends the free movement of scientists and the freedoms from discrimination enshrined in ICSU's Statute 5. Those principles have needed defending since political situations in various parts of the

world have challenged them. IUPS has met these challenges successfully over the whole period of its existence from 1953. Just in the last year, we have been active in negotiating with governments to secure free movement and to solve repeated visa problems. Also recently, IUPS has played an active role in the formation of a bio-unions cluster within ICSU to defend and develop the role of biological science in this international forum recognized by UNESCO and the UN.

We therefore welcome whole heartedly the initiatives outlined by the presidents (current, past, and elect) of the American Physiological Society in a previous editorial (*Physiology Without Borders*). That society, together with The Physiological Society in the UK and one or two other large societies, are unusual in the IUPS family. They have substantial resources that are devoted very productively to charitable work in physiology. Most societies, however, like IUPS itself, exist on minimal funding that cannot do much beyond administering the core activities. We know that we could do much more in terms of helping physiology in the less well developed parts of the world if we had the resources to do so. The proposal therefore by the two largest societies, which are themselves now strongly international in character, to collaborate with IUPS in achieving these aims is excellent. Indeed, we have already made proposals for this kind of collaboration during the 2011 meetings of the International Scientific Program Committee for the 2013 Congress in the UK. We hope that this congress will be ground-breaking in the extent of outreach to, for example, Africa, parts of Asia, and South America.

Physiology should indeed have no borders, which is the principle enshrined in ICSU Statute 5, also called the Principle of Universality.

In our approaches to potential new member societies in the developing world, we are repeatedly challenged by the

question, "How can our voice be heard?" If you are a nascent society (perhaps even just a group of enthusiastic individuals in a present or former war zone) with just a few dozen members, it is natural to feel overwhelmed by the presence in IUPS of societies with thousands of members and substantial resources. The reply to this has usually been, "You can send delegates to the general assembly." But this reply is less convincing in the internet age. We have therefore made use of the constitutional fact that the general assembly continues to exist between congresses, although it no longer meets. Voting on proposals does not therefore need to wait for 4 years before the next congress. Voting on the amendment to the constitution to enable the general assembly to function more effectively and to give member societies more say in IUPS affairs was completed as this editorial went to press. The result, on an 100% turnout, is that the amendment to allow the formation of a board of the general assembly passed with 73% of delegates voting for it. Once the newly constituted board has organized itself and developed a set of procedures and bylaws, both the board and IUPS Council will be pleased to consider further suggestions for improving IUPS governance and operations from all member groups. Specific concrete proposals for actions to be taken should be made timely so that they can be fully discussed and considered. Further voting that may be needed should take place at the general assembly in Birmingham.

We hope that collaboration in outreach with the large US and UK societies may eventually lead to collaborative initiatives with other societies that can also act as resourceful poles of influence in their parts of the world. This is essential if we are to fulfil our mission in physiology. The physiological sciences are where the central action is now to be found as biology seeks to match successful reduction with powerful integration. Combining the two approaches is the essence of our science. IUPS wishes, in association with its members, to actively defend the interests and roles of physiology worldwide. ■