

# The Future of the IAG

First of all let me say that over the last four years, and under the dedicated leadership of Mario Panizza (Italy), the IAG has undertaken some important activities which should continue. I particularly think of the splendid programme of grant provision to support young research workers, particularly from developing countries, to go to conferences and workshops, including this Congress. The role of Professor Mauro Soldati (Italy) in this has been crucial and I am delighted that he will continue in this role on the new Executive Committee. I also appreciate the importance of having an active and informative web site and a full list of the world's geomorphologists, and salute the work done on our behalf by Dr Zbigniew Zwolinski (Poland). He too is willing to continue this role over the next four years. In a similar vein, Carol Harden (USA) has done great work on producing the Newsletter with regularity and on time and I am delighted that Mike Slattery (USA) is willing to take on this role. I also remember with admiration the organization of the regional Conference that was run by Irasema Ayala Alcantara in Mexico City. The Committee, and especially Denes Loczy (Hungary), our most able outgoing Executive Secretary, has also been active in encouraging the establishment of active geomorphological bodies in many countries, particularly less favoured ones. Through the good offices of President Mario Panizza (Italy), the IAG had a major presence at the International Geological Congress in Florence in 2004, and this is another initiative that needs to be repeated in Oslo in 2008. We also had a major presence shortly before that at the International Geographical Congress in Glasgow. The last four years has also seen a substantial number of IAG publications produced, and I am particularly grateful to those colleagues who waived their royalties or fees so that the publisher of the Encyclopedia of Geomorphology (Messrs Routledge) could pay in around 32,000 Euros to IAG accounts. Our working parties have also been active, and over the next four years these will be coordinated by Mike Crozier (New Zealand).

With regard to the future, in addition to continuing the good work we are already doing, we need to take geomorphology forward in some new directions, and I have selected five collaborative research themes:

- 1) The landscape is one of God's greatest gifts to mankind, and landscape is the province of the geomorphologist. Landscape inspires the young and the public in general, but is I believe also becoming increasingly important in policy terms at the national and international levels. Increasing levels of foreign travel are exposing more and more people to great landscapes. The IAG needs to recognise the importance of World Heritage Site designations, of geosites and geoparks and of new agreements such as the European Landscape Convention. The developing fields of Geodiversity and Geomorphological Integrity are ones that need to be pursued. The IAG has been invited by IUCN to be involved in World Heritage Site selection, and we will be establishing a small ad hoc

committee to take this forward, involving among others Denys Brunsten (Founding President, UK) and Piotr Migon (former Executive Secretary, Poland).

- 2) Geomorphology is useful, and we need to encourage the development of applied or engineering/environmental geomorphology through publications, setting appropriate standards of conduct, through developing our arsenal of techniques, and by transference of best practice. In the same vein, geomorphologists need to speak out more as geomorphologists and with alacrity when great natural disasters occur. Our web site could be developed to that end. We will establish a new working group on Geomorphological Hazards, under the leadership of Professors Irasema Ayala Alcantara (Mexico), Sunil De (India), and Mohamed Benazzouz (Algeria).
- 3) The world faces Global Change. The geomorphological community has not been sufficiently involved with the burgeoning global change agenda either in terms of the science, the policy or the management. Our input to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has, in comparison to that of life scientists and social scientists let alone climatologists, been modest, and it shows in IPCC reports. In sensitive areas, 'geomorphological hotspots', geomorphological changes may be enormous. I think of the recent paper in *Nature* by David Thomas and his colleagues, which suggests that by the end of the century almost the entire mega-Kalahari will become a reactivated aeolian landscape. Streamflow in many semi-arid areas will probably be reduced by 60% or more – what are the geomorphological implications? The IAG should produce, as a collaborative endeavour, a major statement on the geomorphological implications of future global change, and we will establish a new working group, chaired by Olav Slaymaker (Past President, Canada).
- 4) We need to reach out more than we have to the geophysical community, most especially in the USA, where the AGU is not affiliated to the IAG. The work that is being done on denudation rates and geochemical cycling in relation to tectonics and climate is hard science of great importance, and the IAG needs to engage with its practitioners. Related to this is the need to be engaged in Earth System Science, and Professor Lothar Schrott (Germany) will chair a new working group in this area, which I hope will build upon the meeting to be held in Loughborough, UK, in 2006.
- 5) Planetary scale studies are another other frontier for geomorphological research. The remote sensing images coming back from Mars, and the information that can be gained about the nature of our sea floor from side-scan sonar and 3D seismic studies, are staggering. The latter area is connected with the exploitation of the sea floor for hydrocarbon resources, and areas like the Congo Fan and the Nile fan have the most extraordinary mass movement, fluvial and salt tectonic features. I have also been struck by the increasing availability of free images of our own home planet - the NASA Zulu website of Landsat 7 images, the new Google Earth site, the University of Maryland site and MODIS images, enable us to recognise

and map global distributions of phenomena, such as the world's great ergs, dust storm hotspots, the oriented lakes of the tundra, the world's deflation depressions, and many others. Here is another clear area for international collaboration.

So then, I have highlighted five main areas for development: landscape conservation; the application of geomorphology; the geomorphological implications of global change; the role of geomorphological processes in Earth System Science; and the development of planetary scale studies of Mars, our ocean floors, and our land surface using the new technologies associated with remote sensing.

We need to get the message across that geomorphology is an important and active discipline, and I am pleased to say that Professor David Higgitt (Singapore) will be our first Communications Officer.

However, I am very worried by the financial viability of the IAG. I believe that we need to continue to increase the financial resources of the IAG, which are still modest. Publications can do this, and I welcome the decision to produce a Handbook of Geomorphology under the chief editorship of Basil Gomez (USA), royalties from which will come to the IAG. How about a manual of applied geomorphology? How about a guide to the world's most spectacular landform sites? We should also consider a legacy programme and approaches to foundations and major corporations. It may also be that national subscriptions should be increased, at least in line with inflation but also to bring them more in line with comparable bodies such as INQUA. That will be something for Council to consider at its next meeting. André Ozer (Belgium) has been an excellent Treasurer over the last four years and will be handing over to Francisco Gutierrez (Spain).

I am thrilled to have been given the honour to be President of the IAG, and I hope that you will all feel that you can approach me with ideas for taking the discipline forward between now and the next congress in Melbourne (Australia) in July 2009. We have a very full series of regional meetings scheduled for the next four years and will have 12 working groups operating over that period as well. Finally, may I pay a tribute to Mateo Gutiérrez-Elorza (Spain) and his colleagues for running such a splendid congress in Zaragoza? They will be a hard act to follow.

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