

Dear members of the IGU community

The recent IGU e-newsletter contained a brief “from the President’s desk” message. However, I don't really feel that such a short piece was able to do full justice to the Extraordinary International Geographical Congress celebration that was held in celebration of our centennial. Therefore, I am writing to the entire IGU community today to offer a few more reflections on the event and, in so doing, mention a few highlights from the General Assembly that took place in association with the Congress.

There is no doubt that the pandemic over the last three years has disrupted organisations such as ours enormously. Our plans to hold the 34th International geographical Congress in 2020 in Istanbul had to be put on hold for a year, and even the postponed Congress that was held in 2021 had to be held in online format. It was with some trepidation that we entered the year 2022 the year of our Centennial with the hope that the Extraordinary International Geographical Congress to be hosted in Paris in July would go ahead face-to-face as hoped. There is little doubt that such uncertainty placed a huge amount of pressure on the local organizing committee. Understandably many in the IGU community hedged their bets as to whether or not an excursion to Paris to join in the celebrations would be possible at all. This meant that many of us delayed registration until the last possible moment and - as understandable as that was under the circumstances, the difficulty of predicting final numbers was a real challenge for the organizers. In the end, however, the outcome was a veritable triumph, as almost 2500 delegates, including a small percentage who attended online, were able to participate in the Congress and join in what transpired as a fantastic 100th birthday celebration.

It was an immense privilege for me, personally, to have been able to oversee the 100th anniversary event in celebration of the distinguished and illustrious history of a great geographical organization. The success of any large and complex event such as this is the product of enormous amounts of hard work. That work could never be effective without partnerships, collaboration and, of course, leadership. The local organizing committee in Paris proved to be the real engine room of the Congress and it provided an example par excellence of the importance of partnerships to accomplishing success. The collaboration between geographers from numerous universities in France, under the auspices of the French National Geographical Committee (CNFG), in partnership with the IGU, proved to be the linchpin of a massively positive outcome. Partnerships need leaders, and we were extremely grateful to have had the steadfast and indefatigable support of CNFG President Amaël Cattaruzza and Secretary-General Jérôme Verny as key members of the relentlessly diligent and highly effective Congress executive. I think in Paris we witnessed a landmark event that truly demonstrated how a local geographical community can harness its strengths to advance the discipline globally. On behalf of the international community of geographers, I wish to express my deep appreciation for the work of the CNFG and the entire local organizing team in facilitating such a fitting celebration of IGU history in Paris.

In addition to the rich and diverse scientific and social programme at the Congress, we also held a General Assembly. Over and above the usual business of, for example, reports from the President and Secretary-General, we also took two very significant decisions at the meeting. The first of these centred on the membership of the IGU Russian National

Committee. Earlier this year, in response to the illegal invasion of Ukraine by Russian military forces, the IGU executive committee took the unprecedented step of suspending Russian membership, pending a formal decision to be taken at the Paris General Assembly. Following a robust discussion in which inevitably the issue of academic freedom was raised the General Assembly voted '*nemine contradicente*' to expel the IGU Russian National Committee indefinitely. The full text of the resolution adopted is appended to this letter. I wish to reaffirm that this is in no way intended to isolate geographers in Russia and we encourage all our colleagues in that country to maintain their highly valued contributions to the IGU - through its commissions and task forces, its congresses and regional and thematic conferences and with all its broader activities - in their individual capacities. A second important, albeit largely technical, decision was taken by the assembly to revise formally the duties and responsibilities of the Secretary-General and to establish a separate position of Treasurer. Accordingly, the Executive Committee has appointed IGU VP Professor Holly Barcus as Treasurer for the period 2022 to 2024.

As the celebration in Paris demonstrates, IGU at 100 is a strong and growing organization but one that needs to find ways to further expand and deepen its sphere of influence. The glorious heritage of the organization provides ample evidence of the sustenance it has given to our discipline, and I anticipate with confidence that it will continue to do so for the next 100 years and more. Thank you all for your ongoing support.

Michael Meadows, IGU president
Cape Town, South Africa
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