

INAUGURAL MEETING OF THE INTERAMERICAN NETWORK OF ACADEMIES OF SCIENCES (IANAS) SANTIAGO, CHILE, MAY 5 – 7, 2004

The founding meeting of the InterAmerican Network of Academies of Sciences (IANAS) was held on May 5 – 7, 2004 in Santiago, Chile. Having as a fundamental objective the support of national scientific and technological development in the hemisphere, by increased interaction among the Academies, the member academies agreed to cooperate towards the strengthening of science and technology as a tool for advancing research and development, prosperity and equity in the Americas. The main goals, stated in the statutes of the network, are: to assist in the building of national scientific capacities by strengthening science and technology relationships among the countries of the Americas, as a tool for societal development; to cooperate in building capacities of the Academies of the region, through exchange of information and experience; to aid in the creation of new Academies in those countries of the Americas desiring assistance in the establishment of a Science Academy; and to influence the scientific decision-making processes in the Americas, with the goal of promoting prosperity and equity in the hemisphere.

The following Science Academies were represented at the meeting: Latin American Academy of Sciences (ACAL); National Academy of Exact, Physical and Natural Sciences (Argentina); National Academy of Sciences of Bolivia; Brazilian Academy of Sciences; Caribbean Academy of Sciences; Royal Society of Canada; Caribbean Scientific Union; Chilean Academy of Sciences; Colombian Academy of Exact, Physical and Natural Sciences; National Academy of Sciences (Costa Rica); Cuban Academy of Sciences; Academy of Sciences of the Dominican Republic; Academy of Medical, Physical and Natural Sciences of Guatemala; Mexican Academy of Sciences; National Academy of Sciences of Peru; US National Academy of Sciences; and Academy of Physical, Mathematical and Natural Sciences of Venezuela.

The Academies approved the creation of IANAS, and the statutes governing its operation. Dr. Hernan Chaimovich Guralnik (Brazilian Academy of Sciences) and Dr. Howard Alper (Royal Society of Canada) were elected as Co-Chairs of the network for a period of three years. The Academies from Chile, US, Mexico, Venezuela and the Caribbean Scientific Union were also elected as members of the executive board.

Two programmes were established as the first IANAS initiatives: Science Education and Water.

The Science Education Programme, inspired by experiences developed by Academies in the region, will be coordinated by Dr. Jorge Allende, of the Chilean Academy of Sciences. The Chilean Academy is also responsible for coordinating the InterAcademy Panel (IAP) Science Education Programme. This initiative includes a global review of the teaching of science to children at the school level. Science education is the most important way through which societies of all countries learn about science, its values, concepts and objectives, and through which they can understand the importance of scientific endeavor for their cultural and socioeconomic development. There is an urgent need to address the high rates of scientific illiteracy existing in the hemisphere. With an initial five years scope, the general objective of this program is to improve the level and the relevance of science education in the hemisphere, through the active participation of members of Science Academies of the Americas, working together with teachers and educational authorities. Specific objectives are to promote collaboration and synergy in the implementation of science education projects sponsored by Science Academies in the countries of the Americas; to stimulate the sharing of materials and experiences among projects dedicated to Inquiry-Based Science Education (IBSE); to develop

common methods, mechanisms and guidelines to evaluate the progress of the individual projects; to create a forum for the discussion of the optimal materials and methods that should be used in science education; and to stimulate collaboration among academies in the organization of science fairs, scientific Olympics and science prizes for children. The initial focus of the program will be on elementary level science education. However, worthwhile activities on secondary and tertiary science education will also be considered. The Academies will appoint a representative to the Hemispheric Council for the IANAS Science Education Programme by June 15, 2004. Each participating Academy will generate a National Committee for the IANAS Programme. These National Committees should include educators and scientists with expertise in the different disciplines involved in science education and should serve as a nexus with the national authorities, with responsibility for science education (Ministers of Education, Science Councils, etc). The National Committees have the responsibility to implement the initiatives that the Academy of their country will propose and to disseminate other activities of the program to insure the participation of the appropriate persons and institutions of that country.

The second initiative will be the Water Programme. Access to clean water is one of the major problems faced by humanity at the beginning of the 21st Century. This problem is exacerbated by a long history of excessive and inadequate use of this natural resource, as well as pollution and increasing demands. The Science Academies of the Americas have decided to establish a regional programme to aid national governments in addressing this matter. The challenges of water scarcity require a vigorous scientific, technological and managerial action in order to: adequately and better use the existing supplies; recover degraded surfaces and groundwater reserves; and secure for the future generations the

necessary water resources. It is clear that water scarcity will be a major cause of the loss of opportunity for economic development in the years to come. To face this situation, it is necessary to improve programmes of conservation and to provide scientific and technological tools to assure a more rational use of water supplies. Thus, the development of new strategies for water uses, water recycling, and conservation of rivers, lakes and reservoirs represent a most important challenge. Crucial components to this programme include: capacity building for water resources management; the development of research that will result in new water management strategies; and the education of society on the need for a more rational use of the existing water supplies. The Brazilian and the Mexican Academies of Sciences will coordinate this programme. The Brazilian co-chair will be Dr. José Galizia Tundisi, who also coordinates the IAP Water Programme. The Mexican Co-Chair will be Dr. Luis Ernesto Marín Stillman. A steering committee was established which includes: Dr. Raúl Lopardo (Argentina); Dr. Fernando Urquídí (Bolivia); Dr. Winston Mellowes (Caribbean Academy of Sciences); Dr. Gabriel Roldán (Colombia); and Dr. Ignacio Benavente Trullenque (Peru). The steering committee will, by May 31, 2004, present a detailed action plan for the water initiative.

Finally, it is important to note the positive reception that IANAS received from important multilateral organizations that were present at the meeting. All of these organizations (OAS, UNESCO, IDB, IAP, ICSU) demonstrated a great interest in working together with IANAS. IANAS will be a key player in fostering science and technology in the Americas, and consequently, in enhancing the quality of life of its citizens.