

CHAPTER III

TWENTY EIGHTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY CLOSING CEREMONY

Thursday, 30 August 2012, 16:30-18:00

China National Convention Centre, Beijing

1. Welcome by Norio Kaifu, IAU President

The incoming IAU President, Norio Kaifu, welcomed the participants to the Closing Ceremony of the XXVIIIth General Assembly.

2. Invitation to the XXIXth General Assembly, Hawai'i, USA, August 2015

A video movie was shown on the screens, presenting the venue and attractions of the next General Assembly, and welcomed the participants in advance.

3. Address by the Retiring President

Prof. Robert Williams

The retiring IAU President expressed his warmest thanks and deep appreciation for the welcome and organization of our Chinese colleagues, and noted the healthy state and successes of Chinese astronomy. He congratulated the Local Organizing Committee, under the leadership of Prof. Gang Zhao, for the smooth running of the General Assembly. He also extended an enthusiastic welcome to the participants to the next General Assembly in Honolulu, Hawai'i.

4. Address by the Retiring General Secretary

Dr. Ian Corbett

It has been privilege and a pleasure to serve the Union as General Secretary for the past three years, and I am very grateful to everyone who has helped me in this task - too many to mention by name but I will single out the President and the members of the Executive Committee, the Division, Commission and Working Group Presidents, and the Secretariat, and above all to Vivien Reuter, without whom the job would have been almost impossible. I will return to this later.

In my incoming speech at Rio de Janeiro three years ago, I said there were four challenges facing us in the triennium that has just finished.

The first was to implement the Strategic Plan endorsed so enthusiastically at Rio. Here we have made spectacular progress: we have established the Office of Astronomy for Development in Cape Town under an agreement with South Africa's National Research Foundation, we have appointed its Director, Kevin Govender, we have established three Task Forces exactly as envisaged in the Strategic Plan, we have signed agreements for two Regional Offices, with more to follow, and we have substantially increased the budget for education and development in the 2013-2015 triennium. All this has required the work of many people, but I must make specific mention of George Miley, the architect and 'builder in chief' of the whole enterprise, and Kevin Govender, who as OAD Director has demonstrated unlimited energy and determination in setting up the OAD programme. With people like that behind it, how can it be anything other than a resounding success. I wish to thank them publicly here for all that they have done, and I am delighted that George will continue to be heavily involved throughout the next triennium.

The second was to complete the International Year of Astronomy 2009 and build on its legacy. IYA 2009 was an overwhelming and unprecedented success. It has received great publicity so I will not dwell any further on this other than to record my thanks to the late Franco Pacini, whose idea it was, to Catherine Cesarsky, who as President did so much to make it happen, to Pedro Russo, who did such a great job in the IYA Secretariat, and to everyone else I cannot name who worked tirelessly to ensure we exceeded even our most optimistic expectations. Its legacy continues in visible form in the programmes of the OAD and its Task Forces, and in less visible forms in the many and diverse activities sparked off by IYA which continue to flourish all over the world. It was truly a 'transformational' event.

The third was the more open ended need for the IAU to develop and (I quote) "reflect the needs and aspirations of its community". There is no better demonstration of this than the development of the proposal to restructure the Divisions of the Union to reflect better the state of modern astronomy and the interests of our members. This was an enormous task, initiated by the Executive Committee which established a Task Group led by the AGS, Thierry Montmerle. The process involved extensive consultation with Divisions through their Presidents and active discussion between the EC and the DPs before the final proposal could be put to the GA earlier today. I am delighted that the enabling Resolution was passed and we can move on to the next phase, as always in close cooperation with the new Division Presidents and their members. I would like to thank the members of the Task Group, the Division Presidents, and especially Thierry for their sterling work in bringing this about. This was not the only item of progress - we introduced electronic voting, to enable and encourage wider participation in Division and Commission affairs, and this has proved very popular. I am delighted that the first session approved the changes to the Statutes and Bye-Laws which will allow the EC to put scientific matters at the GA to an electronic vote of all individual members, thus empowering the whole membership and widening the franchise. I only hope it does not reduce the attendance at the plenary sessions of the GA!

Finally, the fourth challenge concerned this 28th GA itself. Here I had no fears.

Every General Assembly is remembered for something - in the past few years, Sydney for kick starting the International Year of Astronomy, Prague for Pluto, Rio de Janeiro for the Strategic Plan. I thought that Beijing would be remembered for the restructuring of the Divisions and for the impressive progress we have made in implementing the Strategic Plan. But I was wrong! Above all Beijing will be remembered for the unobtrusive but

impeccable organization, the overwhelming generosity of our hosts, the smiling teams of volunteers, and the impressive CNCC.

Organising a GA starts more than six years in advance. First, the proposal has to be prepared, which involves a lot of background work. Then, once approved, the real work starts and it never stops, reaching a peak in the first few days of the actual GA. There is the National Organising Committee, the Local Organising Committee, the Professional Conference Organisers, the Convention Centre, which all have to blend together into a seamless team. And this has been done to perfection in Beijing.

In parallel, the IAU has to solicit proposals for the scientific programme, select the best, and plan the schedule, all the time maintaining very close relationships with the local organisers to make sure that everything is planned and all eventualities are covered. We also have to prepare, select and distribute the IAU grants, to a record number and amount. These grants are a vital part of IAU's programme: they enable people, especially young people or those from developing countries, to benefit from the "GA experience".

All this work has paid off. Nearly 3000 people have passed through the doors. Everything that I have seen or heard says that the GA has been a great success, scientifically and organisationally. Our hosts astounded us all by securing the Vice-President of the Peoples Republic of China to make the opening speech at the Inaugural Ceremony, and we were delighted by the things he said, all highly relevant and encouraging. The performances which followed at the Inaugural Ceremony were a breathtaking display of skill and artistry.

The science programme was outstanding. We were fortunate in having such excellent speakers for our four Invited Discourses, of course, but there were many other outstanding contributions, as the Proceedings which will appear next year will certainly show. We also managed the Young Astronomers Lunch, the Women in Astronomy day and many other special events.

I cannot thank everyone by name, much as I would like to do so, and so I thank everyone who had anything to do with the organisation and running of this wonderful GA. It has been a memorable experience.

So I conclude where I started. It has been a privilege to serve you as General Secretary. I look forward to seeing you in Hawai'i in 2015.

5. Address by the Incoming President

Prof. Norio Kaifu

It is a great honor to be elected President of the IAU, one of the most time-honored and active international scientific organizations. I have enjoyed my many years of service to the IAU— as a Vice-President, as a member of the Working Group of IYA 2009, and as one of four officers since 2009. I have particularly appreciated my association during these years with members of the IAU Executive Committee: Bob, Ian, Catherine, Karel, Thierry and the six vice presidents.

I especially thank outgoing President Robert Williams for guiding the Executive Committee and Officers in a very powerful and democratic manner. He led the establishment of the IAU strategic Plan of Astronomy for Developing World, and he also strengthened ties with many other organizations. I also deeply thank Ian Corbett, outgoing General Secretary, for his dedicated hard work in serving the IAU by dealing with many complicated tasks. He made also the operating procedures of the IAU simpler and clearer. I

extend my sincere thanks to Vivien Reuter, the IAU's Head of Administration, who used her outstanding experience and skills to manage the IAU secretariat office in Paris.

The Division restructuring was just adopted by the General Assembly, Thanks to attendants, and to Thierry Montmerle for his leadership as a Chair of the Task Force. The registration of the Division members, and discussion on Commissions and Working Groups under the new Divisions will start immediately. Next year the Executive Committee and the Division Presidents will discuss the basic plan of updated structure of the IAU. The implementation of this change will produce more flexible IAU activities. Therefore I am very much looking forward to working with new EC members and new Division Presidents throughout the next three years.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this address, the IAU is one of the most active international unions of basic sciences. Among the many remarkable characteristics of the IAU, I will highlight three that fuel its activities. Obviously the first of these is its exciting and continuous progress in understanding the Universe. A second distinctive feature of the IAU is its individual members. Most international scientific organizations have only national members, but the IAU has ten thousand and further growing individual members who firmly support the growing and evolving activities of IAU. A third characteristic of the IAU relates to the appealing nature of astronomy itself. The wonders of the Universe attract the interest of people worldwide. This is why the IAU can attain such broad and global contact with teachers, parents and a vast number of amateur astronomers.

Let me expand on this third point a bit. When the IAU held its first General Assembly in 1922, only two of the 15 national members were affiliated with areas beyond the so-called 'Western World': Mexico and Japan. In contrast to this earlier time, the IAU now has 70 national members from all over the world. Although we have a rather good regional distribution, there are still large regional gaps. Let us recall that the United Nations has 192 member countries. In the IYA 2009, however, 148 counties and territories formally joined 'a number more than double the national members of the IAU and nearly 80 percent of the total membership of the United Nations. This participation clearly taught us that the wonder of the Universe attracted everyone, and also demonstrated that we could bridge research and education; professions and children; and cutting-edge science and the developing world. The prospect of such possibilities opens the door to a bright future for astronomical research worldwide.

The objective of the IAU since its establishment is to promote astronomy in all its aspects. One of our long-term missions now is to advance astronomy by widening foothold around the world. The IAU has already begun to implement such mission. We have entered the second three-year term of the IAU's Decadal Strategic Plan, "Astronomy for the Developing World", which aims to promote research, education, and popularization of astronomy in the developing world. The Director of the Office for Astronomy Development, Kevin Govender, has made excellent progress in organizing support teams and task groups, so we are stepping into the second phase of 'Astronomy for the Developing World' with a firm foundation on which to build further implementation. Together with exciting frontiers of astronomy, and rapid growth of astronomical researches in the developing world, we are opening a new era of the IAU and the promotion of astronomy worldwide.

Finally, I express my sincere thanks to all attendees and to all organizers and supporters of this very successful General Assembly in Beijing. I look forward to seeing you all at our next General Assembly in Honolulu, Hawai'i in 2015.

Thank you for attention.

6. Address by the Incoming General Secretary

Dr. Thierry Montmerle

“As a man sows, so shall he reap.
A thousand-li journey is started
by taking the first step.”
(Chinese Proverb)

Dear Colleagues,

My term as General Secretary will begin at the end of this week, under the best possible auspices.

First, I have the honor to succeed Ian Corbett, to whom the IAU owes a great deal. Not only has he (and Executive Secretary Vivien Reuter) put the Secretariat back on track after many difficulties, but he also contributed a lot to the organization and success of this General Assembly, along with our Chinese colleagues.

Second, thanks to the support of the Executive Committee and the active participation of the Division Presidents, we have conducted a major restructuring of the IAU Divisions, put before the General Assembly in the form of Resolution B4, which has been approved here almost unanimously.

This talk is perhaps the opportunity to look back and explain in more detail the reasons for this restructuring, and its consequence for the future triennium, the reform of the Commissions.

As a brief historical note, the Divisions were created nearly 20 years ago. At that time, they were introduced as administrative “umbrellas” to put the 40 IAU Commissions into a limited number of more or less similarly topical “baskets”. The twelve resulting Divisions had their own “Organizing Committees”, chaired by a President and a Vice-President. Their structural role, as defined in the statutes, was to monitor the evolution of their Commissions over limited time scales, starting with six years, then renewed if justified for three more years (Bye-laws, Art. 23). But the fact is that, in spite of the tremendous evolution of astronomy over this period, and except for very minor changes, the 12 Divisions and the 40 Commissions did not really evolve, even though most of them were indeed active, producing reports, recommendations, etc., and, perhaps more visibly, selecting IAU Symposia each year.

This situation has long been thought to be unsatisfactory, and after the huge and extraordinarily successful effort of the International Year of Astronomy (IYA) which culminated in 2009, the year of the last GA in Rio de Janeiro, the newly elected Executive Committee (EC) decided to attack this problem. An “EC Task Group on Division Restructuring” (“TG” for short in what follows), chaired by myself, was established at the first meeting of the new EC after the GA, which took place in Baltimore in May 2010, with the goal of presenting to the Division Presidents (DPs), at the following EC meeting in Prague in Spring 2011, a full-scale project for a new Division structure.

The vision underlying the new structure, as proposed by the TG, was entirely different from the initial approach. Instead of being purely administrative structures, the new Divisions had to reflect the scientific policy of the IAU, and to promote its adaptation to a rapidly changing world on two grounds: astronomy (for professional scientists), as well as society (for the public, to follow up on the IYA). The first draft of the restructuring consisted not only of a reduction in the number of Divisions, but also in the creation of Divisions of a different nature, as explained below. This draft was strongly supported by the DPs, who immediately urged the TG to continue its work and reflect on the opportunity to also reexamine Commissions and Working Groups.

To make an almost three-year story short, the TG worked very closely with the DPs and the EC, refining the names and scope of the Divisions, and preparing suggestions for the future evolutions of Commissions and Working Groups. The result has been Resolution B4, discussed at the last EC meeting, and proposed for a vote here in Beijing, since any modification to the Divisions must be approved by the General Assembly.

What were the proposed changes? Apart from “merging” existing Divisions (sometimes in an obvious fashion, like “Stars” and “Variable Stars”), perhaps the most visible change is the introduction of a new Division: Division “C”, on Education, Outreach, & Heritage, areas which were before within the purview of Commissions. After the IYA2009, this “promotion” seemed more than justified, but above all made more visible the increasing involvement of the IAU in Educational projects, in particular with the creation of the Office of Astronomy for Development (OAD) in Cape Town, to implement the Strategic Plan voted by the General Assembly in Rio three years ago.

The other most notable change is the introduction of a large (but not the largest) Division related to Instrumentation in the broadest sense, from laboratory to observation and interpretation; Division B: “Facilities, Technologies & Data Science”.

Div.B indeed has a very broad scope. Its ambition is to be the common “forum” where large facilities, multiwavelength instrumentation (without explicit distinction between ground and space), large surveys and databases (data mining, astrostatistics, etc.), as well as computer science and mathematical methods, etc. can be discussed and expertise exchanged.

Altogether, in essence the proposed Divisions will be the visible backbone of the IAU. Their scientific role will be much increased compared to that in the existing structure. With the help of the newly established “Division Steering Committees”, the Division Presidents will be the natural points-of-contact between the community and the EC: as a result, they will collectively constitute a de facto “Advisory Committee” to the Executive Committee. This is the approach that was already adopted in practice by the TG and DPs in the present reform initiatives, and it has proved to work very successfully.

In view of the positive GA vote, a slate of new DPs and DVPs, with significant “new blood”, has been presented by the EC and approved by National Representatives. These colleagues are committed to making the proposed Restructuring successful.

How will the restructuring be implemented? The approval of the new Divisions structure implies other important structural reforms.

First, the “main membership” of the IAU will be by Divisions (one or more), and not by Commissions as was the case until now. Membership of Commissions will come next, but it will be perfectly acceptable to belong to a Division, and not to a Commission, if those existing Commissions are not relevant to one’s research or activity. This is a good incentive to create new ones (likely starting by a Working Group)! The procedure will be by electronic voting, so easily accessible to everyone.

Second, the Divisions will be run by “Division Steering Committees”. Their exact composition will be discussed between Division Presidents and with the Executive Committee, on a case-by-case basis. These new Committees will include “at-large” members, i.e., members from the community, not necessarily with a great experience of the IAU -it will be a good training for future responsibilities within the Union. The Division Steering Committees will have a much more scientific role than the current “Organizing Committees” of the Divisions.

Third, as the name implies, once elected the Division Steering Committees will have the primary task of “steering” the evolution of the Divisions, in particular of their Commissions (reexamining their role, goals, issues, etc.), under the supervision of the Executive

Committee. Note that in the new structure a Division will be larger than the sum of its Commissions (contrary to the founding definition of Divisions).

The Divisions will start working immediately, with the Commissions that are currently existing, reassigned as proposed in the approved new structure. However, in parallel with “steering” their Commissions, a prime task of the Division Steering Committees, in cooperation with the Commission Presidents and Organizing Committees, will be to reform the Commissions, that is, to bring them more in line with the latest scientific developments in astronomy. Perhaps new ones will be created, perhaps some will disappear.

This will open a new chapter in the history of the IAU. We hope to see at the next General Assembly a different Commission structure than now. It will be a challenge, but I have no reason to doubt that the community will be up to it, as it has been the case here in Beijing for the Divisions.

I look very much forward to seeing you again in Honolulu in 2015.

7. Traditional Chinese “Thousand Hands” Dance

Performance by the Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics.

8. Closing remarks

Dr. Gang Zhao, co-Chair, NOC and LOC of the IAU XXVIIIth General Assembly

Good afternoon, dear participants, dear distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

The General Assembly of the International Astronomical Union is first time hold in China since the Chinese Astronomical Society join IAU in 1935. During the past days, near 3,000 astronomers from more than 70 countries or regions have gathered in Beijing, exchanging the latest progresses in all fields of astronomy, and discussing the future development of astronomy worldwide. This is a great event in the history of Chinese astronomy, and it will for sure have a profound impact on the development of Chinese astronomy, and promote and expand the international collaborations.

Many people have made enormous efforts in planning, preparing for, and organizing this General Assembly, and at this special moment, please give me the honor to express my sincere appreciations to the following:

Thanks to the IAU, for the first time, allowing us the opportunity to hold such an important astronomical event in Beijing, China.

Thanks to all participants, you sitting here or those not sitting here, for your sincerely supporting us and for your warmly joining us in all the programs.

Thanks to CNCC for your professional service and friendly work during the assembly.

Thanks to all sponsors, exhibitors and partners for your generous supports to this General Assembly.

Thanks to all MCI colleagues as our PCO, who have assisted this General Assembly with their heart and energy.

Thanks to all the volunteers for your careful working and warm services at the registration and conference rooms. Your early arrival and late departure, your friendly smile and genuine help have made the assembly a warm family for all participants. Let's welcome them to stage!

Thanks to the medical supporting staff, especially Dr. Sheng Haiying, who have also contributed a lot to the General Assembly. In past days, they have kindly treated about 80 participants who were not feeling well, and helped relieve their symptom efficiently. Please invite them to stage!

Thanks to the supporting staffs of the website and network team led by Dr. Cui Chenzhou, which set up and maintain the website of the General Assembly and the WiFi system. The webpages have been visited more than 750,000 times during the last one year. 120,000 requests have been connected to the WiFi system during the last 8 days, with maximum concurrent connection number of 1000 on August 23. Please welcome them!

Thanks to the newspaper team led by Prof. WANG Jinxiu. Altogether they have published 10 issues, with a total of 68 pages. For the seemingly “small” pages, the editorial team worked till late night every day, sometimes even till 2 hour in the morning. Let’s invite them to stage!

Last but not least, thanks to all my colleagues, LOC members, for your hard working and close cooperating all these months in the past years. It is only because all your efforts and devotion, the IAU 28th General Assembly can be going so well and so exciting until now. Now, please join me with the warmest applause to invite all LOC members to stage!

Thank you, everyone on the stage, and at the audience, or those staffs and participants who are not here. Your enthusiasm, devotion and supports have made this general assembly a successful, enjoyable, and great event! Thank you very much!

9. Handing out the IAU flag

The General Assembly was adjourned after a Ceremony to hand the IAU flag, created by the LOC, to the hosts of the next General Assembly, after which Norio Kaifu called for a vote of thanks to the LOC, while the LOC team (about 100 volunteers and professionals) was assembling on the stage.

10. Image Archive

Images taken during the General Assembly can be viewed and downloaded from the IAU web site:

http://www.iau.org/public/images/archive/category/general_assembly_2012/