Beijing 1996

Earth scientists from around the world are now preparing for the 30th International Geological Congress, to be held in Beijing, China, 4–14 August, 1996. The conference is also under the sponsorship of the International Union of Geological Sciences, and is co-hosted by the Geological Society of China, and the Chinese ministries of Geology and Mineral Resources.

This special issue of *Episodes* is devoted entirely to the geology of China and is being distributed to all participants in the Congress as well as to the regular *Episodes* subscribers. The 21 articles cover all aspects of the geology of a country with a rich, varied and complex geological history and a considerable mineral resource endowment. Written by leading Chinese geoscientists, the articles reflect the extraordinary geological diversity, and the issue as a whole will provide a valuable introduction and overview not only for Congress participants but for all who are new to the geology of China.

Turning to the Congress itself, while the programme will cover most aspects of modern earth science, special symposia will be concerned with:

- The origin and history of the Earth
- Geoscience and human survival, environment and natural hazards
- Global change and the future environment
- Structure of the lithosphere and contemporary lithosphere motions
- Global tectonic zones—orogenic belts
- Basin analysis
- Energy and mineral resource for the 21st century
- New technology for geoscience
- International geoscience projects

An extensive programme of field trips which cover most of the nation is planned, both pre- and post-congress. Many local tours are also available for accompanying members. Altogether, it will be a unique opportunity to learn a little about this vast and rapidly developing nation. We congratulate all those who have been concerned with organising the Con-

gress. We are living at a critical time for the earth sciences. As human population continues to expand, and moves to over ten billion in the next century, there will be vast new stresses placed on our planetary support systems. How do we produce the needed mineral resources of all types, the energy resources, and conserve the soil and water needed for reliable food production? How do we deal with the vast range of waste products, particularly in a world dominated by urban development, and how do we avoid social-economic catastrophes from natural hazards on this planet?

I am very pleased to see that attention is being drawn to the problems of new technologies. We can improve the way we extract materials from the earth, and we can improve the ways we deal with waste products, from plutonium to carbon dioxide. We cannot continue to degrade our environment, our atmosphere and water resources. I am sure that many new ideas will be produced by those present at Beijing.

Never before in human history has the wise use of the Earth been so needed at the centre of the planning process. We must learn to communicate with all sectors of society and, particularly, with the economists and engineers. This Congress must play a major role in moving us towards truly intelligent development of the resources needed for the future generations.

The scale of changes that have occurred since 1900, and that will continue at least to 2100, have never before been faced by society, and we all must be involved in the new opportunities and challenges. Earth scientists from all nations deeply appreciate the efforts of our Chinese hosts in making this opportunity for cooperation in the geosciences possible. We must prepare now for the next century, a century with respect for this planet.

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