Earth Sciences in the New Century

During the past century, geologists inherited and increased the knowledge of the Earth gained by their predecessors, and moreover widened their horizons by exploring the polar regions, ocean beds and outer space, as well as probing thousands of meters into the Earth. Earth sciences opened up for the world an immense area for resources utilization, thereby supplying over 90% of the energy and 80% of the raw materials needed for the industrial era. However, mankind has come to the realization that it is far from rational to improve human welfare solely by exhausting natural resources. Today, how to realize coordinated development of economy and society with resources and environment has become an issue of paramount importance and of global concern. Earth sciences are called upon to serve mankind not only by finding out more and better mineral resources, but also by providing a scientific basis for the protection of ecosystems, the alleviation of natural hazards, and the improvement of living conditions. Earth sciences are becoming increasingly fundamental for sustainable development. Solutions to the resources and environment crises and problems that human beings are facing depend on the work of the world's geoscientists in their efforts to penetrate nature's mysteries and on the ever-growing contributions of the earth sciences.

China is now entering a stage of particular historical importance. On the basis of the deepening of the policies of reform and opening-up, accelerated structural adjustments and sustained stability, and in the spirit of being responsible to history and the world, the Chinese Government has adopted the sustainable development strategy and implemented the policies of 'invigorating the nation with science and education' and 'developing the western regions.' These efforts not only put higher demands on China's geologists, but also create new opportunities for the development of China's earth sciences sector.

The Ministry of Land and Resources (MLR) is one of the major departments in the Chinese Government, responsible for the planning, management, protection and rational utilization of land, mineral and marine resources of China. The accomplishments made in the earth sciences have been essential for the MLR in policy-making and administration. The MLR attaches great importance to the development of the earth sciences, and emphasizes their integration with the management of land and resources in resolving the major issues concerning sustainable development. On this basis, a comprehensive plan for a new round of surveys of land and resources

has been worked out. It is expected that with the unfolding of the basic geological survey plan, the land resources survey project, the mineral resources survey and evaluation project, the geological hazards forecasting and warning project, the digital land project, and the resources investigation and utilization technologies project, China's geoscientific research, both basic and applied for the general benefit, will be elevated to a new level.

China has been increasing its demands on geoscientific research, and many important problems remain to be solved. It is believed that the solutions to China's geological issues will contribute greatly to the advancement of global earth sciences as a whole. The Earth operates as a system. We wish to make further contributions in this respect and, at the same time, look forward to the assistance of geoscientists from all over the world in China's geological work. We are fully aware that, under the umbrella of IUGS, *Episodes* has been playing an important role in promoting international geological exchanges. The MLR will continue to lend support to the preparation and publication of the journal in China, to ensure its further progress.

The 31st International Geological Congress will be held in Brazil in August this year, coinciding with the turn of the century and of the millennium. This will be the most important geoscientific event of the year worldwide. The theme of the Congress—Geology and Sustainable Development: Challenges for the Third Millennium—appropriately reflects the mission that earth sciences are facing in the new era. As the new Minister of Land and Resources of China and on behalf of China's earth sciences sector, I would like to extend greetings to the world geoscientific community from the host country of the previous session of the International Geological Congress, and wish the 31st IGC every success.

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