The 50th Anniversary of the IUGS

On 21 February 2011 UNESCO Headquarters in Paris was the site of a celebratory programme commemorating the 50th anniversary of the International Union of Geological Sciences. The celebration began with a viewing of a new video, which vividly demonstrates the role of our sciences and of our Union in serving society worldwide. (Readers can see the video at iugs.org.) After the video, participants were greeted by remarks from the Executive Director of ICSU, Deliang Chen; UNESCO's Assistant Director General for Natural Sciences, Gretchen Kalonji; and myself as IUGS President. Keynote speaker Iain Stewart, University of Plymouth, UK, discussed how Earth made us. Most of the rest of the day-long session was filled with presentations looking forward to an increasingly important IUGS.

The celebration of the creation of the IUGS was more than a remembrance of an historical event. It was an expression of the will of the international geoscientific community to continue the services, which began 50 years ago, and thereby to build a future with the goals, principles and structures that gave meaning to the past.

The place, timing and guests of the celebration were particularly fitting. Almost 50 years to the day, on 2 and 3 of March 1961, the IUGS was created at UNESCO Headquarters in the presence of the then Director of UNESCO's Natural Science Department, Victor Kovda, and of the then Secretary General of ICSU, Nicolai Herlofson. The formation of the Union crystallized a proposal first raised by Sir Julian Huxley, who was then UNESCO Director General, during the 18th International Geological Congress (London 1948), the first held after the Second World War. Thus, IUGS may be considered as a sprout of UNESCO and ICSU.

Initially, 30 countries supported the IUGS. Representatives of 11 countries formed the Organizing Committee at the 21st International Geological Congress (Norden 1960) and were instrumental to the building of the Union. These individuals were:

K.A. Lindbergson, Chairman (Sweden)
J.A. Dons (Norway)
V. Marmo (Finland)
A. Noe-Nygaard (Denmark)
H.M.E. Scharmann (the Netherlands)
R. Lafitte (France)
L. Hawkes (U.K.)

E. Clar (Austria)
W. Smulikowski (Poland)
N. Belyaevsky (USSR)
J.M. Harrison (Canada)
B.C. Roy (India)

During the initial sessions in March 1961 the first Executive Committee was elected. Some of those chosen had played key roles in organizing the Union:

President:
J.M. Harrison (Canada)
Vice Presidents:
I. Gorsky (USSR)
L. Hawkes (U.K.)
T. Kobayashi (Japan)
J. Lombard (France)
B.C. Roy (India)
Secretary General:
T. Sorgenfrei (Denmark)
Treasurer:
J.A. Dons (Norway)

Arne Noe-Nygaard (Denmark) was asked to serve as *de facto* Past President because of contributions he had made as President of the IGC in Norden.

It was not until 1964 that affiliated organizations were incorporated as a component of IUGS. The first eight to affiliate were: the International Association of Hydrogeologists, the Association of African

Geological Surveys, the International Association of Sedimentologists, the International Paleontological Union, the International Mineralogical Association, the International Association for Clay Research, the International Association for Geochemistry, and the International Association on the Genesis of Ore Deposits. Half of these continue to be affiliated with IUGS today.

Since the early 60's, thanks to the work of 13 Executive Committees formed by 86 persons from 37 different countries, the IUGS has grown to represent 122 countries and 50 affiliated organizations, aiming permanently to unite the global geological community in promoting the development of the Earth sciences and applying the results to improve the prosperity of nations and the quality of human life. During this same period 13 International Geological Congresses have been held on a regular basis in different parts of the world.

In 1978, IUGS launched *Episodes*, which has developed into a prestigious journal and a forum for the international geoscientific community. Current and all back issues are available online for anyone interested in our fields or our activities. The IUGS also co-publishes more extensive studies through arrangements with commercial and society publishers. Publication is another way

Representatives of Austria, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, France, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, Madagascar, Norway, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland, Tunisia, UK, UNESCO, USA, and the USSR in front of the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris during the initial meeting of the IUGS 50 years ago.

IUGS fulfills its mission.

As noted by the first IUGS President J.M. Harrison in the initial 1978 issue of *Episodes*, in the early days of the IUGS “everything was growing, countries and associations were quickly joining the Union” and “we left to our successors the problems of integration”.

Throughout the years the IUGS, with the help of UNESCO, ICSU, other GeoUnions, National Committees and Affiliated Organizations has tried to integrate its constituency through the development of, and/or participation in, a series of initiatives, programmes and projects. Examples are the International Geosciences Programme (IGCP), Geological Applications of Remote

Sensing (GARS), the International Lithosphere Programme (ILP), the International Year of Planet Earth (IYPE), Geoparks, One-Geology, and the Group on Earth Observations (GEO). More information can be found at the IUGS website; all have been described in the pages of *Episodes*.

The IUGS also has helped organize and support projects in geoeducation and capacity building, environmental management, medical geology, understanding and mitigating natural hazards. The Union is involved in establishing and promulgating standards in stratigraphy and other fields.

As current President of the IUGS, I thank all our predecessors and all those working for the IUGS today for what has been done

throughout the past fifty years to promote the geosciences for the benefit of human society. I also want to express my wishes that in another fifty years the International Union of Geological Sciences and the geosciences as a whole will have continued helping to advance the well-being of human society, and that what J.M. Harrison wrote in 1978 will still be valid: “What lives is the enthusiasm and the pride and the energy with which we tackled the opportunity to work on an international scale for the betterment of geology and for the countries we served. The memory of that rings clear as a bell.”

Alberto C. Riccardi
President IUGS