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Editorial

Hail and Farewell!

I am grateful to have been accorded the honor and privilege of election as Secretary General and Treasurer of the International Geographical Union. Geographers throughout the world possess distinctive, trenchant insights that are critical to enhancing human welfare and prerequisite to sustainable uses of natural environments. Scientists in other disciplines and specialties look to the IGU to articulate and coordinate the knowledge and efforts that geographers bring to the grand intellectual and practical challenges humankind faces. The IGU position will offer many opportunities to apply my experience in scientific administration on behalf of the global community of geographers.

In my view the IGU should address three priorities over the next four years. First, building on the solid foundations laid down by its predecessors, the new

IGU leadership should continue efforts to enlarge the influence of geographers in international science. Second, the structure and operations of the IGU should be streamlined. Third, the IGU should continue and redouble its efforts to ensure that participation in IGU is truly global.

The predecessors of the new IGU leadership made great progress in integrating geographers into international environmental research programs. They were especially successful in identifying geographers who could collaborate productively with research conducted under the auspices of the International Council for Science (ICSU), formerly the International Council for Scientific Unions. The previous IGU Executive leaves the new leadership a legacy of sound and respected contributions to global environmental research. I am committed to using that record of accomplishments as a means of broadening the participation

of geographers in ICSU programs and as a means of placing geographers at the disposal of United Nations and other organizations conducting relevant research and policy analysis. Multinational and global scale research are now moving beyond natural systems and environmental problems toward greater emphasis on human-environment and even wholly socioeconomic aspects of globalization. As that process continues, geographers' theory and methods will become ever more incisive. IGU should make certain that those distinctive contributions are given due consideration within the institutional structure of international science.

The IGU's structures and operations strike me as antiquated and cumbersome. Again, prior executive committees and officers have worked hard to develop mechanisms that enhance rather than impede sound science, but much remains to be done. To the maximum degree possible, geographers who participate in IGU affairs and who serve on IGU working groups should devote their time and energy to advancing science. I believe we need a wholesale examination of how the IGU organizes itself and how it allocates its participants' time and effort, culminating in a thorough overhaul of its procedures. Status structures and membership distinctions that discourage participation in the IGU must be eliminated. Bureaucratic requirements that discourage or hamper productivity must be abolished. Accomplishing those ends will require major alternations in the IGU's governance documents.

More than any other scientists, geographers are obliged to ensure that their craft is global in scope and practice. A complete geography of the world is, by definition, globally exhaustive. The IGU, as the organization that represents geographers to the global community, must also become complete and exhaustive. The new executive committee has set specific

membership targets for 2002 and 2004 that will move the IGU substantially toward membership for all countries of the world and for all geographers in the world. The impediments to full global membership are well known—varying combinations of limited funds and the indifference of national adhering bodies. Where the money needed for membership is not available locally, it should be found elsewhere. Where national committees are ineffective, they must be bypassed. The IGU has some mechanisms for accomplishing those ends. More will be proposed in short order.

I titled this brief essay "Hail and Farewell." The hail is a respectful and hopeful greeting to all in the IGU community I will serve as Secretary General and Treasurer. The farewell is a fond *au revoir* to the members of the 1996-2000 executive committee who did not continue, and especially to Eckart Ehlers and Ursula Dörken. Eckart and Ursula have set an Olympian standard for IGU Secretariat operations, and I will count myself fortunate if I do as well.

In that effort, I will need your assistance. My executive committee colleagues and I will occasionally ask some of you to undertake specific tasks, and I hope you will be able to respond favorably and quickly. What we will value above all, however, are your suggestions regarding ways the IGU can be made more effective and your thoughts on where the IGU's comparative advantage lies among the numerous challenges and opportunities we will encounter during the next four years. Please do not hesitate to direct your reactions and suggestions to me at rabler@aag.org, or at the IGU Secretariat in Washington DC.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve the IGU as Secretary General and Treasurer, and my thanks for your assistance and support during the months and years ahead.

Ronald F. Abler