

Progress report UNIY on Global Understanding

The UN International Year (UN IY) initiative is moving forward. This document summarizes our progress over the past few months and our plans for the foreseeable future.

Management Team

We hope to be able to enlarge the management team to integrate the whole range of the involved disciplines. We are currently asking individuals who have been active with the CCHD if they are ready to continue activity for the UN IY in their fields and are inviting new members. As per Bruno Messerli's advice, based on the successful Mountains UN IY, we are seeking a team of young individuals who will have institutional support throughout the 4-6 years required for the entire exercise.

Language Community Secretariats

Establishing these secretariats will be crucial for our success as a bottom-up organization. They will be responsible for coordinating activities within their respective language communities and for communication between the global secretariat and the local levels. These local actions include the scientific, political, and outreach (media/school books) activities. Additionally, it is vital for each working group of the initiative (political, academic, outreach), particularly in the early phases, that the regional secretariats assist in recruiting local contact people. Each language community secretariat will be responsible for the following:

- Establishing communication channels between members within the region
- Channelling communication between the world secretariat and the regional committees
- If possible, hosting conferences within the region.
- Encouraging the participation of national associations (academic geographers, applied geographers and geography teachers) and local and regional geographic societies to participate in the process of preparation of the UN IY
- Helping the general secretariat (Jena) encourage national IGU-committees to establish national secretariats.

The current structure of language community secretariats so far is: the general secretariat in Jena (with a full time position) for the general coordination of all activities and specific activities in the German-speaking world (in cooperation with the national secretariats), Moscow for Russia and Slavic countries of Europe (and maybe also the new states emerged from the former Soviet Union), Seoul for the activities in Asia, and Rome for Italy. Santiago de Campostela is a strong candidate for the coordination of activities in the Spanish and Portuguese-speaking world in Europe, the Americas, and elsewhere. The possible secretariat in Canada would coordinate activities in the English- and French-speaking world in North America, Europe, and Africa. In addition it would be very helpful to a secretariat for India and another one for the Arabic world.

National Committees

In addition to the language community secretariats, we would like to organize national committees for the initiative. The IGU Swiss National Committee has pledged its support to the idea of a UN International Year; our contact is Jeanine Wintzer. In Holland, Huib Ernste has

offered us the support of the Dutch National Committee. On this basis it should be possible to coordinate the activities of the different IGU-Commissions and Task Forces, the geographical societies and departments.

Institutional Support

Financial support remains our biggest obstacle. On Monday, November 10, I presented the proposal for the UN IY to the Laboratory of Enlightenment, a 'test audience' that reaches across the disciplines at our university and across Germany, with a majority of members from the humanities and social sciences. They responded enthusiastically, and we are now writing a proposal to the State of Thuringia's Ministry of Research and Education for financial support (secretariat, conferences, publications, etc.). At FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association), Joseph Blatter assures me that once we have achieved the goal of UN approval for the IY, FIFA will be happy to support our social engagement and to financially support our activities on a quite substantial level.

Other organizations from which we seek funding include the Commonworld Trust, the Bill Clinton Foundation, Google, where I have contacted Ed Parsons at the European Headquarters, and ArcInfo, where I will contact Jack Diamond personally.

Peer Support

As mentioned above, Bruno Messerli, organizer of the successful UN IY on Mountains, has been generous with advice based on his experience. Ed de Mulder, general coordinator of the equally successful UN IY for Planet Earth has kindly agreed to assist us similarly. We will meet in Harlem or Jena to discuss the organizational structure of the initiative and the strategies for political actions. After this meeting, I hope to see more clearly what kind of abilities the members of the different working groups (politics, media, education) and the different scientific committees (dossiers) need to be successful. We will then seek to establish different action groups by spring, prior to the AAG Las Vegas meeting

Conferences

Ron Abler arranged a panel session on the Initiative for a UN Year on Global Understanding at the AAG 2009 Annual Meeting (March 22-27, 2009), Furthermore, the IGU-Commission "The cultural approach in geography" will arrange several conferences in the next two years to discuss the overall aims of the IGU-Initiative.

Jena 25th of November 2008