

IYGU Report to ICSU

Jena, Monday October 22, 2012

With the ICSU's official support obtained in mid-May 2012 the IYGU initiative has an improved basis for entering into talks with the UNESCO/UN and for gaining support from outside academia. Health problems forced me to slow down for a couple of months such that progress on this matter had been stalled temporarily. However, with the support of ICSU, ISSC and CIPSH the three most important global science umbrella organizations are now supporting the IYGU initiative.

According to the information provided by the UNESCO Science Department of Prof. Kalonij's Office, Assistant Director General of the UNESCO, there are two possible ways of obtaining the UNESCO's support. The first option would be to approach the UN directly and gain the UNESCO's endorsement later. Such a direct application to the UN should be submitted by one of its Member States and should also be supported by about 20 other countries. This pathway was pursued until the end of June 2012. We were hoping to proceed with the application to the UN General Assembly in December 2012 so that 2014 would be declared the UN International Year on Global Understanding. This plan was overthrown due to my illness. The second option for gaining UNESCO's support would involve obtaining the formal support of one UNESCO Member State that would then submit the proposal for consideration by the UNESCO Executive Board by the end of January 2013. Following the approval in the May/June meeting of that Board, our application would be submitted to the UNESCO General Conference in September/October 2013. Should the General Conference decide in favor of our application, it would be then proceed to the UN General Assembly, meeting in November/December 2013. This is the current plan with the extended time frame now aiming for an IYGU in 2016.

The following sections provide a brief overview of the contacts that have been established in the quest for an applicant country. Contact with the **Korean** permanent mission at the UN in New York was first made in February 2012, with Mr. Won Yang being the contact person. According to Prof. Lee, we could find a

strong supporter in Prof. Dong-Pil Min, the Science and Technology Ambassador of Korea. Prof. Lee also informed me that Dr. Han Seung-Soo, former Prime Minister of Korea and currently the head of the Global Green Growth Institute as well as member of the UN Secretary General's High-level Panel on Global Sustainability, would certainly support the YGU initiative in its way through the UN system. I hope to receive a reply from the Korean representatives soon.

Brazil is prepared to support another country's application to the UN, but will not take the lead in the application process itself. Contact has been established through the Minister of External Relations, Mr. Antonio de Aguiar Patriota. Members of the YGU Steering Committee (Gordon McBean, Ed de Mulder, Adama Samassékou) and Scientific Panel (Luiz Oosterbeek) presented the initiative at the Rio+20 conference in July 2012. In a few weeks I will have the opportunity to strengthen this contact when presenting the YGU initiative to Brazil's national industry association (CNI) at its "82^a Reunião do Coema Nacional" on November 20 in Brasilia. Other formal but non-committal contacts exist with **Morocco** (Mr. Mustapha Baba deputy environment minister , Mr. Noureddine Bencheikh and the Mohammed VI Foundation), **Austria** (Prof. Kloestele, Minister for Science and Education), **Burkina Faso** (Minister Prof. Dr. Jean Koulidati, Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development), **Botswana** (Minister Kitso Mokaila, Ministry of Environment), **Peru** and **Luxembourg** (national UNESCO delegation). **Slovenia** (Dr. Ksenija Sckrilec) as a member of the Green Group countries (Costa Rica, Cape Verde, Iceland, Singapore, and the United Arab Emirates) showed serious interest in taking the lead and was willing to introduce YGU to the other group members. Should Slovenia decide not to take the lead, it might still be the case that one of the other Green Group countries will be prepared to do so. We are looking forward to the response of the Green Group members over the course of the next weeks. More recently, contact could be established with **Rwandan** authorities, namely the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation Mrs. Louise Mushikiwabo. Since Rwanda was recently elected a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council this contact might be of particular relevance. It is planned that I will present the YGU initiative to the Rwandan

Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation in Kigali at some time in the next weeks.

The build-up of the Continental Centers is making steady progress. The University of Mexico City (Prof. Irasema Alcatar) agreed to host the Center for America, the University of Hamilton (Prof. Dr. Robyn Longhurst) for Oceania and the University of Berne (Prof. Doris Wastl-Walter) for Europe. Recently, the president of the Tunisian association of geographers, Prof. Dr. Habib Ben Boubaker, offered his support for establishing the IYGU Continental Centre for Africa in Tunis. On this occasion I suggested to Habib Ben Boubaker to reintegrate the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) (with its head office in Tunis) into the IYGU initiative. Prof. Boubaker's response was very positive and reportedly, the negotiations with ALECSO were very productive with the result that I will soon receive an invitation to present IYGU to local authorities and representatives of ALECSO in Tunis. China

The basic brochure, presenting the key aims and objectives of IYGU, is now translated into all official UN languages, except Arabic. The brochure can be downloaded from the newly designed IYGU website. In the near future, this website will also host an internet platform for interactive communication, particularly for exchanging and discussing teaching materials.

Editor teams for most of the six planned theme brochures/booklets on basic everyday actions (eating/drinking/surviving etc.) have been found and they will begin working at the end of the year. The negotiations with publishers (Sage, Springer) are on the way.

The IYGU initiative is now supported by the Katerva Institute, which awards the Katerva Sustainability Award. More than ten jury members of the Award (on all decision levels) are recruited from the IYGU Steering Committee, Scientific Panel and the wider group of IYGU supporters. According to Reuters the Katerva Award is the Nobel Prize in the sustainability field.

ICSU's president-elect, Prof. Gordon McBean, has recently introduced the IYGU initiative to the 'Future Earth' initiative. We already received some encouraging responses. Further presentations of IYGU at the AAG conference in New York in February and at the IGC in Cologne in August this year helped to establish and process further contacts to potential applicant countries. More presentations of IYGU are planned i.e. at the Taiwan Geosciences Assembly in Taipei in May 2013.

We now have about two months left to find an applicant country to the UNESCO. Things are looking not too bad, but we need a break through very soon.

Should option two described above (taking the pathway via UNESCO) fall through (i.e. no applicant country is found by January 2013), we would resort back to option one (directly approaching the UN). Either way, there remains an urgent need to find a country willing to take on the lead. I would be very grateful if you would provide your expertise and possible contacts which may help in finding an applicant country.

Science & Policy

China

Benno Werlen

Executive Director of IYGU