

# Report to the Executive Committee of the International Geographical Union

## For their meeting from March 13-15, 2013

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### Activities in brief

- **Applicant country:** Decision by the Rwandan Cabinet on becoming the applicant country due by March 14, 2013: Should the decision be positive, we will enter the UNESCO/UN application process.
- **Finances:** Funding for IYGU secretariat in Jena has been secured until 2018; additional funds need to be earmarked for opening and closing ceremonies (UNESCO/UN won't approve of our application unless the availability of funds can be proven); funding also needed for printing and editing of PR material and writing and editing of thematic brochures
- **Continental Centers:** Kigali, Beijing, Tunis, and Varanasi potentially hosting a Continental Center each, i.e. the existing IYGU structures are not only strengthened but also expanded
- **Website and brochures:** all revamped/revised; Arab translation of brochure and website is in progress; website will be available in languages other than English and French very soon

### January 2013 – present

The last update on the activities of the IYGU is from January 4, 2013 (I attach the report again to my email). The following gives just an account of what happened since.

**Political application process:** In the past weeks and after our very fruitful trip to Kigali, Rwanda, in December 2012, we have been particularly busy in early January to prepare the upcoming meeting of the Rwandan Cabinet. The Cabinet needs to approve of Rwanda becoming the applicant country for the IYGU initiative. Despite very encouraging talks in Rwanda as well as follow-up email correspondence, official approval of the Rwandan Cabinet is still pending. Initially the Cabinet meeting was scheduled for January 15, 2013 but was postponed several times. However, in an email from March 7, 2013 we were assured by Soraya M. Hakuziyaremye (Senior Advisor to the Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Rwanda) that "...that our Hon. Minister will do her best to have the IYGU Proposal approved by March 14th. We will definitely provide you with the decision of the Government of Rwanda by that date."

The decision by the Rwandan Cabinet has been delayed due to the additional obligations resulting from Rwanda's election into the UN Security Council. Despite causing delays in the Cabinet decision, the fact that Rwanda is now a member of the UN Security Council must be regarded as positive. We expect that it can only help to advance our application in the UN system.

An encouraging sign is that Jacques Kabalé (Rwanda's Ambassador to France and Permanent Delegate to UNESCO) is in regular contact with members of the UNESCO Executive Board since

January 2013. He has already started preparing the introduction of the IYGU to the agenda of the UNESCO Executive Board meeting in mid-April 2013.

**Continental Centers:** Prof Ben Boubaker offered to host the IYGU Continental Center for North Africa and the Arab countries. I suggested getting the Arab League Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organization (ALESCO) on board for this. Building on the memorandum of understanding between the ALECSO and the IGU signed in Rome in 2006 this would be a great opportunity to strengthen the collaboration of these two institutions. Prof Ben Boubaker is currently organizing a meeting with the director of ALECSO to discuss the implications of hosting a Continental Center. As already outlined in previous reports, the integration of ALECSO is very important as it would help strengthen the inclusion of the Arab countries into the IYGU.

**Future Earth:** Gordon McBean, President-Elect of the ICSU, introduced the IYGU to the Future Earth initiative in July 2012. Contact has been established with Johan Rockström and Dianna Liverman, the co-chairs of the Transition Team of the Future Earth initiative. Gordon McBean mentioned in his email to Johan and Dianna that the IYGU initiative and the Future Earth program could be benefiting from each other in several ways: working together in terms of “global messaging, bringing focus to issues, linking the research and related activities”. About two months ago, Heide Hackman, Secretary General of the ISSC, mentioned to Vladimir Kolossov the possibility of integrating the IYGU into Future Earth. This will be all the more important if we do not find an applicant country to introduce the IYGU to the UNESCO/UN. For this it would be helpful to have the IYGU represented in the Scientific Committee of Future Earth. For that reason I recently applied for one of the positions in the Science Committee of the Future Earth program.

**Financing:** In order to ensure that the IYGU general secretariat in Jena is staffed and fully functioning I have been in negotiations with the Friedrich Schiller University Jena (FSU), Germany (my home institution) and the Regional Ministry for Education, Science and Culture. The FSU and the Ministry together committed €128,000 per annum. The official agreement between the University and the Ministry initially granted this amount yearly from now until 2015. However, after a special request to the University Board, the Chancellor assured the financial support of the IYGU with the same amount of money per year until 2018 (please see the attached letter from the Chancellor of the FSU). The funds are earmarked to pay for the staff costs (secretary position of 50% = 20hrs per week) of the general secretariat in Jena and for another staff member to take over my teaching duties.

**Website:** We have been revising our information material and our online presence. In addition to English our website is now also available in French. We will add the Chinese, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish versions soon. For a translation of the brochure and website into Arabic we have been in contact with the president of the Tunisian Association of Geographers, Prof Dr Habib Ben Boubaker. He suggested Ali Toumi from the Tunisian Association of Geographers as a competent translator. We have contacted him and are awaiting a response.

**Brochures:** We have revised and updated the English version of the brochure and are seeking to integrate these amendments in the other language editions, too. We are currently in the process of finding suitable editors for this task.

### **Other news/Ongoing projects**

**IYGU Scientific Panel:** We are welcoming Édith Mukakayumba, PhD as a new member of our Scientific Panel. Édith Mukakayumba holds a BA in Geography from the National University of

Rwanda and an MA and PhD in Geography from the Université Laval (Quebec City, Canada). She was the first black African woman to teach as a professor at a university in Quebec and is an advocate and activist for the empowerment of disadvantaged groups. Édith is based in Montreal where she works for the “Maison de la géographie de Montréal”, of which she is a co-founder. Thanks to Édith’s considerable networking efforts with Rwandan ambassadors in Canada and elsewhere as well as with government officials in Rwanda the IYGU initiative has made significant progress over the past few months.

**Katerva:** We are still in touch with Katerva about funding opportunities. However, certainty on the political process (i.e. an official decision by Rwanda) is needed before we can step up our fundraising efforts and move on to specific negotiations with potential donors.

**TIERS:** The ICSU-funded project ‘Transdisciplinary Intercultural Ecological Research for Sustainability’ (TIERS) is making steady progress. We selected and reviewed the highest-quality papers from the TIERS conference (June 8-10, 2012 in Jena, Germany) and are aiming to have them published in a book by Springer. The papers are now in different stages of the editing process and we are hoping for the publication date to be in late 2013/early 2014. The financial report is attached. The general report to ICSU has been accepted by the evaluation committee at the end of September 2012.

## **What’s next?**

### **Continental Centers**

- **Kigali, Rwanda:** Should Rwanda become the applicant country, a Continental Center for Africa will be established in Kigali.
- **Beijing, China:** Talks will be held in Beijing in May 2013 about the prospects of establishing a Continental Center for Asia in Beijing.
- **Varanasi, India:** There may be the option of the Banaras Hindu University in Varanasi, India hosting a Continental Center for South-East Asia under the aegis of Prof Rana P. B. Singh.

### **Future Earth**

A close and coordinated cooperation between the IYGU and Future Earth is likely to yield considerable synergies; it will expand the possibility of sharing each other’s networks and broadening the support for both initiatives by the scientific community. Under these conditions a financing of the IYGU secretariat by the regional government of Thuringia could be possible. However, should the global secretariat of the IYGU not be established in Jena, these funds from the FSU and the Regional Government of Thuringia would not be released (see the attached letter from the Chancellor of the FSU).

### **Financial matters**

The requirement that financial arrangements are to be made prior to the proclamation of an International Year (as described in the UN Guidelines on International Years) is met only partly (through the funding earmarked for staffing costs of the secretariat). We will need additional financial support from the scientific community as well as from public and private institutions in the long run. A first tentative overview of the costs incurred so far and the expected future financial

requirements is attached ('Financing of the IYGU'). A more detailed business plan is going to be developed as soon as the political application process is taking off.

The UN guidelines for International Years state that "A year should not be proclaimed before the basic arrangements necessary for its financing have been made and such financing should in principle be based in voluntary contributions."<sup>1</sup> This means that we will have to prove the availability of earmarked funds. In particular, we will need funding to cover the opening and closing ceremonies of the International Year at UNESCO in Paris (about €250,000 to €400,000 each; see attached overview for the International Year of Planet Earth and the email from Dr Nalecz from UNESCO). The sum requested from the IGU – four times 15 000.- Euro per year from 2013-16, 60 000.- in total – may appear high but please bear in mind that – according to Prof Ed de Mulder, Director of the IY of Planet Earth – the organizing union allocated €150,000 in total, and €50,000 per annum over three years to the International Year of Planet Earth (see attached overview). In addition, the IGU (like the other geo-unions) contributed €5,000 each year. Given the unique opportunity to raise the global visibility of geography as a discipline, the high potential to strengthen its position in the global science community, and the fact that the IYGU is – according to our Past-President Ron Abler – one of the most important projects in the IGU's history, the results may justify the investment. All in all, this contribution will cover only part of the total budget (see the attached balance and prospect 'Financing of the IYGU'). In addition, we will seek funding from private donors. I indicated to the Rwandan government that Rwanda will most likely not incur any financial obligations should it agree to become the applicant country. With a confirmation that funding will be provided by the IGU (decided at this meeting of the Executive Committee) it would be possible to enter into negotiations with the other unions at the ICSU meeting in Paris at the end of April 2013.

**Fundraising:** I have been thinking about setting up a panel dedicated to networking and fundraising, and my experience of the past months is that this would be a worthwhile addition to the organizational structure of the IYGU. I have started recruiting members and have confirmation from Sybelle De Jongh and Ingelore Scheunemann to serve on this panel. With their strong connections to the Brazilian industry and government they will be a valuable addition to the IYGU team. I would like to keep this panel rather small (up to five members) in order to ensure confidentiality and efficiency. Panel members should be well-connected to relevant government and business institutions and I am open to any suggestions that you may have concerning further candidates.

**ACFAS meeting in City of Quebec, Canada:** The "81<sup>e</sup> Congrès de l'Association francophone pour le savoir" (ACFAS) is the largest and most important meeting of francophone scientists in Canada and takes place from May 6-10, 2013 at the University of Laval, Quebec City, Canada (<http://www.acfas.ca/evenements/congres/a-propos>). There will be a special session on the IYGU jointly organized by Édith Mukakayumba, PhD, Jules Lamarre, PhD, and I. This session will feature presentations from members of various IYGU Panels, including Margret Robertson, Gordon McBean, Luiz Oosterbeek, Allan Scott, and Mathis Stock as well as (potentially) several members of the Rwandan Government, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Vice-President of the National Court, the African Section of the Commission for Human Rights, and the Rector of the National University of Rwanda.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted from page 24 in: United Nations Economic and Social Council. (1980). Resolution 1980/67: International years and anniversaries. UN. Accessed on March 7, 2013; retrieved from [http://www.un.org/sport2005/resources/un\\_resolutions/1980\\_67.pdf](http://www.un.org/sport2005/resources/un_resolutions/1980_67.pdf)

**Beijing, China:** On behalf of Prof Yanhua Liu, President of the Geographical Society of China (GSC) Prof Guoyou Zhang, Secretary-General of the GSC, invited me to China for March 2013 to talk about the establishment of the IYGU Continental Center for Asia in Beijing. The contacts with the GSC and the Ministry for Science and Education were established by Prof Dr Shangyi Zhou (Member of the Steering Committee). However, the trip to Beijing had to be cancelled due to my having health problems (virus infection after my stay in Kigali). We agreed to postpone the meeting to early May.

**Taipeh, Taiwan:** Invited by the Taiwanese Geographical Society I will present the IYGU and its underlying concept of sustainability at the Taiwan Geosciences Assembly held from May 13-17, 2013 in Kěwàng Rd, Longtan Township, Taoyuan County, Taiwan (<http://tga.cgu.org.tw/Default.aspx>). This invitation was received after a meeting with ICSU-President Prof Lee in Taipeh in May last year at the Academia Sinica in Taipeh.