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# IYGU Report January to April 2014

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Report to the  
Executive Committee  
of the International  
Geographical Union  
(IGU)

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Benno Werlen

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## **Report January 2014 – April 2014 to the IGU Executive Committee at their meeting in Moscow**

**Benno Werlen, IYGU Executive Director**

**New York, April 25, 2014**

On the night of the of April 14 I was surprised to receive an invitation by the Permanent Mission of Rwanda to the UN to participate in a UN meeting on Tuesday April 22 at the headquarters in New York, where I'm still busy lobbying in order to get the IYGU on the agenda of the UN General Assembly. It was quite difficult to get all this set up in such a short time and it was virtually impossible to take other people of the IYGU network on board for this.

Before I report the latest developments I am pleased to send you the official UNESCO resolution concerning the International Year of Global Understanding 2016 that was adopted by UNESCO's APX Commission at its 15th plenary meeting on November 19, 2013. However, this final resolution is much shorter than the version that was originally submitted to the UNESCO Executive Board, and it is also shorter than the version that was subsequently forwarded by the UNESCO Executive Board to the UNESCO General Conference. But of course for the IYGU Action Plan the version accepted by the EXB will be the frame of reference. The documents of all three steps are attached (Annex 1).

After (finally) obtaining the official version of the UNESCO General Conference's resolution we are preparing for the submission of this resolution to the UN in the remaining days of April 2014. This should ensure that the resolution makes it onto the agenda of the next UN General Assembly session starting in September 2014.

During my stay in New York (April 19-25, 2014) I met already with delegates of Rwanda's Permanent Mission to the UN, including the legal advisor and liaison person for the IYGU, Etienne Nkerabigwi, the Permanent Representative of Rwanda to the UN, H.E. Eugene-Richard Gasana, the Deputy Permanent Representative H.E. Jeanne d'Arc Byaje, and the majority of the other staff of the mission. On April 22 I attended the 4th Interactive Dialogue of the General Assembly on "Harmony with Nature" chaired by the President of the UN General Assembly, H.E. Mr. John Ashe, representing the Secretary General of the United Nations (see the attached program of the meeting as Annex 2 and 3). The overall theme of the dialogue was "the promotion of a balanced integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development". Further information on this Interactive Dialogue on Harmony with Nature is available under the address:: <http://www.harmonywithnatureun.org/> and the preliminary program and concept note are available for download here: [http://www.un.org/en/ga/president/68/events/harmony\\_and\\_nature.shtml](http://www.un.org/en/ga/president/68/events/harmony_and_nature.shtml).

The meetings with representatives of the UNESCO office at the UN, the ECOSOC and the secretariat of the UN General Assembly were either very informative and successful or will happen (hopefully) in the remaining days/hours in New York.

Let's hope that I will be able to announce soon that IYGU is officially on the agenda of the next UN General Assembly, starting end of September. With this, all further steps will now be much easier to do. In this respect my trip to New York was used to establish contacts with the Permanent Mission of Rwanda's key strategic partners at the UN and some of the key players in the different regional groups of Africa, Asia, South America, Russia, Eastern Europe, the Arabic Countries as well as the group of the Western European Countries and North America. These contacts should give the

decisive boost for a smooth process towards the declaration of 2016 as the IYGU. We are also checking at the moment if there is a faster way to get the declaration. This has to be clarified in the mentioned meeting with the secretariat of the UN General Assembly.

In early April 2014 a field trip took me to Portugal to co-teach an Erasmus course on Integrated Landscape Management for Master level students organized in part by Luiz Oosterbeek. During these almost two weeks Luiz and I were able to meet with several influential people. On April 3, we had a meeting with Portuguese officials about establishing a RAC at the University of Coimbra ('head' of the Coimbra-Network of the oldest European Universities, including Oxford, Cambridge, Salamanca etc.) for the Western part of Europe. One of them was Pedro Saraiva, President of the Commission for Coordination and Development for the region Mid-Portugal. He was very keen to support the IYGU project and has offered to help establish a RAC in Portugal as this would tie in well with the administration's aim to maintain and deepen contacts with other Portuguese-speaking countries around the world. The chance of establishing a RAC in Portugal are, therefore, quite high. In addition, we held talks with representatives from the national bar association in Portugal on the legal form of the IYGU. Luiz also talked with a personal friend of the Angolan President José Eduardo dos Santos in order to promote the IYGU in his country and the African continent (in coordination with IYGU and Rwanda).

On March 31, 2014 I met the Thuringian Minister for Education, Science and Culture, Christoph Matschie, to talk about the possibility of a partial financing of the IYGU through the regional government budget. Our conversation was very positive since he held out the prospect of such support being likely, and perhaps from various sources. He will arrange a meeting with the German Federal Minister for the Environment, Barbara Hendricks, and with Germany's Vice-Chancellor, Sigmar Gabriel, concerning a possible positioning of the IYGU on the federal agenda, hopefully for early June. This would be a great support indeed – not just for financial reasons but also with respect to the political aspects of the application process and as a substantial contribution to the IYGU project's "symbolic capital".

The contact with the German national committee of Future Earth has been established at the constitutive conference in late January 2014 in Berlin.

I also got a positive response from the Brazilian Confederação Nacional da Indústria (CNI) with which I have been in contact since my last trip to Brazil in November 2012. Executive Manager of Environment and Sustainability, Mr. Shelley de Souza Carneiro, held out the prospect of financial support for the IYGU. For further agreements I will be meeting with the CNI President, Mr. Robson Andrade in Brazil end of May 2014. All these contacts with CNI were arranged again by Inguelore Scheunemann.

In addition, Inguelore Scheunemann and Eliezer Batista will establish contact with the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD). Inguelore and Eliezer are very good friends of Ernst Gunter, one of the founders of the WBCSD, with Eliezer Batista and other people at that time. Ernst Gunter has still an active role in this institution. First of all, he will be introduced to the IYGU; after that talks about financial support will take place.

In the next weeks I want to advance our plans with the Regional Action Centers (RAC) and clarify on their structure, role, and responsibilities. The planning of a Skype conference with the representatives of the RAC is on the way. We will discuss the practical aspects, exchange experiences in dealing with universities, academies, etc. and the common problems that we might encounter in the set-up and running of the centers.

A meeting of the editors of the six thematic YGU brochures (on surviving, communicating, urbanizing etc.) will be held in Jena, Germany, from June 2-4, 2014. The meeting will be on the next steps, especially the format and the content of the brochures. Unfortunately, Margret Robertson and Saskia Sassen will not be able to attend. Confirmed are Allen Scott, Mathis Stock, Peter Jackson, Peter Taylor, and Walter Spiess. John Urry is still pending.

With all these talks underway we should have some reason for optimism that at least some of them will yield a beneficial outcome. At the same time there is good chance to collect the money in reasonable time to fulfill the “requirements” of the tentative budget plan (Annex 4).

I have requested the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) to increase Germany’s annual contribution to the IGU from USD 10,000 to USD 12,500 but have not yet received an official reply. Informal talks, however, suggest that a decision in favor of my request might be likely.

Vladimir asked me to suggest ways you might be able to help with the YGU project. This support could focus on five main issues:

1. Writing to the chairs of the national committees: The letter should have the logos of both the IGU and the YGU and the letter should ask for support at the national level and be signed, I guess by Vladimir, Ron, and I.
2. Writing to the union(s) that have promised their financial support but have not transferred the money so far. As promised last year, the IUGG contributed EUR 5000 – so far as a one-off payment. If the application process is positive the union held out the prospect further financial support. The IUGS has promised USD 3000 per annum for the period 2014-2016. But so far we haven’t asked them to pay.
3. Yukio could re-establish contacts with the Japanese delegation at the UNESCO and asking them to get in touch with their colleagues at the UN Permanent Mission, asking to support the Rwandan application. He could also inform the president of the Academy of science about the progress of the application process and that is most likely that will we get the resolution end September/early October.
4. More specifically, I would highly value your support in approaching Ban Ki-moon. It would be great if someone from the EC, Ron, or Vladimir could get in touch with Woo-ik and ask him to approach Ban Ki-moon for support for these last steps. I would like to discuss with Ron as soon as possible whether we should again approach the Permanent Mission of South Korea to the UN in New York.
5. The EC could discuss an action plan about how to respond in case Jules and Edith will recommence thwarting our plans. I don’t think they are a major threat or nuisance anymore, but we should decide if they could keep the option of an RAC for Quebec at Montreal. Their last request of about CAD 200,000 was such an attack that we should think as soon as possible about a radical reply to that request as soon as the declaration is set. Or in other

words, we should come up with an answer to Ron's question on whether, and if so how, we could get rid of them.

For the next few months up until the UN General Assembly's (UN GA) 69th session our main tasks will be navigating safely through the final stages of the political application process and acquiring further sponsors and donors. The UN GA will – according to the official UN-information platform – convene at the UN Headquarters in New York on September 16, 2014 and the debate will open on September 24, 2014. Spreading the word about this initiative and lobbying for support (may this be academic, political, or financial) is always helpful and very much appreciated.