



A BIG STEP FOR SCIENCE IN ECUADOR

by Cristina Serra

With close ties to TWAS and a commitment to scientific strength, the Academy of Sciences of Ecuador inducted 25 scientists in its first class of elected members.

Ecuador is an emerging country with a thriving economy, abundant resources and a good educational system. But until recently it did not have a science academy to guide its research and drive its development.

Eugenia del Pino Veintimilla, a renowned biologist and Ecuador's first TWAS Fellow (1989), with a few

colleagues committed herself to this goal and worked for several years to succeed. In March 2013, the *Academia de Ciencias del Ecuador* (ACE) came to life and on 19 February 2015 it welcomed 25 new members during an official ceremony held in the capital city of Quito. With the new scholars, ACE now counts 31 affiliates.

"Having such an academy is very important for Ecuador," ACE President Carlos A. Soria said in a recent interview. "It will serve to promote research and the development of science, creating a rich core of experts available to contribute to the development of the nation."

The road to the Academy's inception was marked by meetings among the founding members – TWAS Fellow Santiago Ron (2014); Katya Romoleroux; Tjitte de Vries; Jaime

Costales; Soria; and del Pino – who examined the statutes of other science academies in South America.

After the founding of ACE, the leaders received an encouraging visit from TWAS President Bai Chunli, who also serves as president of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. The new academy "is an important milestone achievement", Bai said after returning from Ecuador. "It has the good potential to be a scientific think-tank for the country on major S&T and development issues."

As a TWAS Fellow, del Pino was aware that Ecuador could learn from TWAS's experience and benefit from the Academy's support in terms of visibility and international connections. She also credited IAP, the global network of science academies, with providing an important boost for ACE.

TWAS Fellow Michael Clegg, co-chair of InterAmerican Network of Academies of Sciences (IANAS), was in Quito for the ceremony. "Science academies are critical institutions for every nation, like Ecuador, which aspires to develop its capacities in science and technology," he said.

ACE's new members, chosen through a merit-based evaluation and with an eye on gender equality, include mechanical engineers, microbiologists, environmental chemists, marine ecologists and immunologists.

"I think that ACE will have a fundamental role in fostering scientific research and becoming a bridge between the Ecuadorian scientific community and the Ecuadorian government and society in general," said Ron, a professor of evolutionary biology at *Pontificia Universidad Católica*. Ron was elected to TWAS last year. ■

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▼ Founding members of the *Academia de Ciencias del Ecuador*, from left: Tjitte de Vries, Katya Romoleroux, Carlos Soria, Eugenia del Pino, Santiago Ron.

