



A HIGH-LEVEL PLEDGE FOR COOPERATION

At the opening ceremony of the TWAS General Meeting, Austrian President Heinz Fischer and other leaders urged science to take a front-line role in advancing sustainable development and peace.

 by Edward W. Lempinen

Science and policy leaders from Europe and the developing world urged a strong commitment to international cooperation on innovation, sustainable development and global peace during the opening ceremony of the 26th TWAS General Meeting.

Lead by Austrian Federal President Heinz Fischer, speakers at the ceremony acknowledged a range of challenges confronting the world, from hunger and climate change to terrorism. Only by working together can the challenges be addressed, they said, and science cooperation must play a central role.

"I regard scientific institutions as important and in fact indispensable for the positive development of a country or of a society," said



▲ Austrian Federal President Heinz Fischer

◀ TWAS President Bai Chunli



Fischer. "Promoting international cooperation in science is one of the core issues in our globalized world ... in particular in Europe."

Scientific networks in the developing world are gaining importance, he added, and he called TWAS "foremost among these networks... [in] playing a key role in international scientific cooperation."

TWAS President Bai Chunli also endorsed expanded cooperation. Through much of its existence, Bai said, TWAS and scientists in the developing world have had vital support from Italy, Sweden, the UK and other partners in the developed world – and now, from Austria.

"We have much to learn from our colleagues in the North," Bai said in his opening address. "But our research centres in the developing and emerging countries are making great progress... As this progress continues, we will find that we have much to learn from each other, and that we can join as equals in projects that benefit all people."

TWAS is an important organisation for bringing nations together, both through science and science diplomacy, said Giorgio Marrapodi, Italy's ambassador to Austria. "Italy strongly believes that TWAS can act globally and locally with an integrated approach to the local scientific communities and an expanding global vision," Marrapodi said.

More than 300 high-level policymakers, diplomats, researchers and others convened for the opening ceremony at TWAS's annual meeting, held 18-21 November 2015 at the Austrian Academy of Sciences, one of Europe's premier institutions for science and research.

The event also was supported by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy; the Austrian Federal Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology; the Mayor and the Cultural Department of the City of Vienna; the Austrian Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the Hannes Androsch Foundation; and the Federation of Austrian Industries.

Grave global tensions formed a backdrop for the meeting, and the opening ceremony began with a moment of silence for the victims of terror attacks in Egypt, Beirut, Paris and other locations.

"This terrorist wave of violence strikes at the aspiration to live in a world where dialogue, mutual understanding and cooperation participate to bolster peace and scientific progress toward sustainable development," said Flavia Schlegel, assistant director general for natural sciences, in a recorded message.

Reinhold Mitterlehner, Austria's vice chancellor and federal minister of Science, Research and Economy, also cited the threat of terrorism – and the need for scientific research on the phenomenon.

"Terrorism is a constant threat to our freedom and our will to live together in peace," Mitterlehner said. "Governments, politicians,



▲ From top: Flavia Schlegel, assistant director general for natural sciences, UNESCO; Giorgio Marrapodi, Italian ambassador to Austria; Reinhold Mitterlehner, Austria's vice chancellor and federal minister of Science, Research and Economy.

scientists and civil society – the efforts of each and every one are needed. We all have the responsibility to help ensure that racism and the fear of unknown stand no chance in our society."

Speakers at the opening ceremony focused on a range of other challenges that may impede prosperity, many identified in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. The 17 goals, contained in the framework of the 2030 Agenda, call for an end to poverty and hunger, sustainable use of resources, gender equality, efforts to limit climate change and other objectives.

"Investing in science and technology is necessary to achieve the SDGs," said Harald Mahrer, State Secretary of Austria's Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy. "Science provides us with potential solutions that, for us politicians, serve as a basis for targeted decision-making."

Other speakers emphasised that international cooperation is the core mechanism to drive progress and peace, today and in the future.

"In the global South, there is an abundance of talented young minds with fresh perspectives on the challenges that they face every day," Schlegel said. "It is the responsibility of the global scientific community to nurture the next generation of scientists and to ensure their research gains attention and policy focus."

"North-South and South-South relations are essential for disseminating knowledge around the globe," she said.

Marrapodi, the Italian ambassador, described TWAS as a hub for such relations, working with the international scientific organisations of the "Trieste System" to advance the cause.

Bai echoed that theme. While the Academy is known for building South-South research networks, he said, South-North partnerships have been crucial to TWAS since its founding more than 30 years ago.

"This is why our meeting in Vienna is so important," Bai added. "It is a signal to the world: South and North have shared interests, and we are working together." ■