

# IRPA 10

## Reports of Co-Chairmen for Highlight Sessions

### **Associate Societies Forum**

*Tuesday, 16 May 2000*

**Co-Chairs: J. Lochard and G. Webb**

For the first time in the history of the IRPA Congresses, the Associate Societies Forum was organised independently from the General Assembly to give to all Societies a true opportunity to exchange views between themselves and with the Executive Council on all aspects related to the functioning and the role of IRPA.

The decision to organise such an event was adopted by the Executive Council during its meeting held in Washington DC (USA) in April 1997. Preparatory meetings took place at the occasion of the Barcelona IRPA Regional Congress organised by the Spanish Society in May 1998 and the Southport IRPA Regional Congress organised by the UK Society in June 1999. Altogether 19 Societies have been directly or indirectly involved in the preparation phase of the Forum.

As most ideas and proposals expressed by the Associate Societies during this process were related to activities regarded as appropriate to accomplish the objective of the Association, the Executive Council decided to draft a discussion paper entitled “Enhancement of the role of IRPA” for structuring these ideas and proposals and to serve as background document for conducting the Forum. The discussion paper prepared by Geoff Webb was sent in November 1999 to all Associate Societies with an invitation to participate to the Hiroshima Forum to discuss further the proposals. The Forum took place last Tuesday and was attended by about 70 participants representing 21 societies which means half of the members of the IRPA family. The co-chairman of the session was Geoff Webb, the newly elected President of IRPA and the chairman was Jacques Lochard the new appointed Executive Officer.

A first aspect identified by the Societies and discussed during the Forum is the possible **Development of a Code of Ethics** to aid Societies in maintaining an ethical level of professional conduct. Standards and regulations based on consensus information developed by international bodies provide the conceptual framework for protection of man and his environment. However it is the individual radiation safety specialist who is directly responsible for interpreting and applying this framework to real situations. This responsibility for the safety of persons exposed to radiation requires the highest levels of ethical conduct by those entrusted with it. Ethical behaviour, founded on honesty, integrity and openness enhances the effectiveness of the professional entrusted with radiation safety. Based on a first review of existing Code of Ethics formulated by some of the IRPA Radiation Protection Societies the Executive Council put forward in the discussion paper a few principles intended to aid Associate Societies in maintaining an ethical level of professional conduct.

A clear consensus emerged during the Forum to consider that sticking to a correct application of professional practices is not sufficient and that there is a need to develop formalised Codes of Ethics or Conduct. Such codes are seen important for the image of the profession especially in the public as well as in the context of litigious situations when the responsibility of professionals is at stake.

In conclusion all participants agreed on the need to develop a set of principles that could serve as Code of Ethics for IRPA societies with the objective for them to adapt it to specific situations and to set up the necessary requirements for their members. Practically it was decided to review all relevant existing codes and to establish a mechanism by which a Code a Ethic could reasonably be adopted by Societies at the IRPA 11 Congress.

The second aspect the Forum looked at is the **Establishment of Societies** throughout the world. Despite the adhesion of 5 new societies during the last 4 years the Executive Council feels that many other countries have the potential to join IRPA and that a more pro-active role should be adopted toward them. Most of the countries which are still not members of the IRPA family are generally facing difficulties to initiate networks among the professionals and are severely limited as far as financial matters are concerned.

During the Executive Council meeting last Saturday and Sunday, a simplification and clarification of the procedures for admission of new societies as been adopted as well as the suggestion to make contact early in the process - even before there is a society – to assist in its creation. This might even involve a visit to the country to provide assistance and advice on the spot.

Several of the largest Societies attending the Forum have expressed their support to the proposed approach and declared they are ready to envisage their direct commitment in the preliminary phase of this process on a case by case basis. They also suggested to establish special links with new formed societies to assist them in the first years of their development. Regional federations of societies is also proposed as a means to overcome the difficulties small and isolated societies are facing.

The third aspect looked at in the Forum is the **Support of International Meetings**. On this issue, the Executive Council of IRPA has progressively adopted a more flexible mechanism to deal with the request of Societies over the recent years. Any IRPA Society in good standing is authorised and encouraged to fly the IRPA flag during its meeting. Any combination of IRPA Societies may organise IRPA Regional Meetings – that can be called conference, symposia, workshop as needed – upon notification and approval of the Executive Council which normally will not involve IRPA financing.

As far as IRPA Regional Congress are concerned, they are meant to be more formal gathering of multiple IRPA Societies approved by the Executive Council and including an official IRPA representation. Funding of Regional Congresses is possible upon request for financial assistance and after approval of the budget.

This more flexible policy was largely endorsed by the Societies during the Forum and it is also expected that the Executive Office will facilitate the early notification of the intentions to organise meetings through the IRPA Web Site in order to avoid conflicts in dates and favour a better co-ordination between societies.

The fourth aspect discussed during the Forum is the role of IRPA in the field of **Publications**.

The main scientific publications of IRPA in the past have been the proceedings of the various Congresses and, during the formation of ICNIRP, some publications on non-ionising radiation. These Congress proceedings have formed valuable compendia of the state of the art covering the whole topic of radiation protection and no changes are proposed.

The other main publication has been the IRPA Bulletin, which has had a somewhat chequered history with lapses in publication from time to time. The Executive Council is aware of this and is already taking steps to overcome the situation. Beyond these difficulties, there is also an obvious need to re examine the role of the IRPA Bulletin.

From the discussion it is clear that a large majority of Societies are in favour of using the Bulletin as a means of information exchange between societies, in disseminating the current activities of IRPA including the publication of Tables of Contents of all Journals published by IRPA Societies, and as a forum for discussion on topics of current interest. This last aspect was emphasised by several Societies as well as the need to progressively shift towards a fully electronic based information system.

The fifth topic addressed during the Forum is the **Encouragement of Education and Training**. Education and professional training has become an increasingly important component of IRPA Congresses and of IRPA sponsored meetings. In 1991, members of the IRPA executive council were assigned to a task force to review the certification and training issue. Two surveys have been conducted in 1991 and 1994 by the Task Force. The large difference in formality, legal requirements, recognition and training methods found in the 1991 and 1994 surveys illustrated how difficult it could be to unify professional recognition on a world-wide scale. In view of the results of these surveys it did not seem practical for IRPA to try to promote an internationally recognised or standardised certification process. However, recognising the recent and fruitful initiative by the European Societies through the EC, it may be appropriate for IRPA to act as a link on the matter of mutual recognition with the non European Societies. The problem of the recognition of transient radiation workers was also pointed out during the Forum as a something IRPA could look at in the future.

The discussion in the Forum also confirmed the need to pursue the efforts concerning the inclusion of supplementary training and refresher courses through IRPA congresses held around the world as well as in meetings organised by societies. The possibility for IRPA itself to develop professional enrichment courses by making use of the materials and expertise available in its member Societies as been mentioned. Some countries have pointed out the particular needs in training for the newly formed societies. It appeared that it would be more effective for IRPA to seek a method whereby it could help to standardise the efforts of its member societies in professional accreditation by providing

The last aspect examined is the role IRPA can play in the establishment and continuous review of **Radiation Protection Standards and Recommendations.**

This activity, which is explicitly encouraged by the IRPA Constitution, has not received sufficient attention in the past, except in the non-radiation area. While accepting that is unlikely to be possible to arrive at a single view of the many thousands of professionals in IRPA, this difficulty should be faced and some procedures evolved to overcome it, otherwise the professionals have essentially no collective voice in the process.

A clear consensus exists among societies present at the Forum to consider that IRPA must play a role in the standard setting process. The mechanisms to ensure this role have to be still elaborated. Two processes have been identified. The one for collecting and transmitting societies views on proposals by standards-setting bodies and the one for quickly informing the societies about the developments within international bodies when IRPA acts as an observer.

The offer by ICRP to IRPA to actively participate in the consultation process in view of the preparation of future recommendations is seen by all IRPA Societies present at the Forum as a first real opportunity to express the views of the professionals and to test transfer mechanisms as the one we saw in action yesterday during the special session with the presence of Professor Roger Clarke.

On the possibility of IRPA to formulate, through ad hoc bodies possible approaches based on the experience and knowledge of the professionals for submission to the standards-setting bodies there is a general view that a step by step process should be adopted starting with the setting up of working groups linked through the internet. The next IRPA Congress is seen in this perspective

as an opportunity for the working groups members that could emerged in the coming years to sit face to face and to exchange further their views. This process might be a possible way for structuring a few sessions during the IRPA 11 Congress in Madrid.

The last part of the Forum was devoted to other questions not covered directly in the Discussion paper and raised by the Societies during the last period of the preparation process of the Forum. The French Society draw the attention of the participants on the increasing number of accidents with radioactive sources all over the world and the sometime dramatic consequences for the victims. A paper prepared by a working group of the Board of the Society addressing the role that IRPA could play in this domain was presented and discussed. The Argentina Society raised its interest to open a discussion within the IRPA Societies on the risk perception issue that could be addressed through a working group on the internet.

Altogether the Forum has been considered by the participants very successful with a positive functioning and output. There is a general wish to continue with such an arrangement and to organise the Second IRPA Associate Societies Forum during the Madrid Congress with the objective to avoid as much as possible competition with the scientific sessions that run in parallel. There was also a suggestion to held Societies Forum during the Regional Congresses.