

A Balance—Difficult to Keep

by Christoph Buxtorf



As treasurer of IUPAC and as a chemist, I am constantly concerned with how things balance out. When it comes to the Union's bookkeeping, I try to ensure that the left and the right side of the balance sheet are equal, hopefully ending with positive earnings and a happy future. And as a chemist, I must think about chemical equilibrium, which is described succinctly in Le Chatelier's principle:

"Every change of one factor of an equilibrium occasions a rearrangement of the system in such a direction that the factor in question experiences a change in a sensed opposite to the original change" (H.L. Le Chatelier, *Annales des Mines* 13(2), 157[1888]).

These days, all chemists must also be concerned with another kind of equilibrium—the fragile balance that exists in our environment.

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Our activities can have a deep and lasting impact on our water, soil, and air and it is our responsibility to minimize this impact. Maintaining the delicate equilibrium of nature is IUPAC's most noble task.

In this regard, the Union has a unique opportunity to cooperate on a global scale with organizations such as the International Council of Science to encourage sustainable development of our "blue planet." By setting strategic goals and planning multiple projects in this field, we can become recognized as a respected leader in the field of green chemistry.

In fact, our divisions and standing committees are already very active in this sense, with many projects on track. I think that IUPAC is well positioned in the fields of environmental protection, human safety, solutions to Africa's food crisis, chemical weapons cooperation, and crop protection, just to name a few.

One of the most powerful ways that IUPAC could promote sustainable chemistry would be through the transfer of technology to less developed countries.

This would represent the "good side" of globalization. IUPAC, with the help of volunteer experts, could help spread knowledge and provoke change.

Although IUPAC is highly regarded for its work on nomenclature, standard setting, and organizing congresses, meetings, and workshops, it largely goes unnoticed for the other "good things" it does to help maintain the fragile equilibrium of our world.

Perhaps it is necessary to do more "selling" of our goods to the outside world. Maybe our closer cooperation with ICSU will result in more targeted activity. It should be our aim to change the way we are communicating, especially to decisionmaking bodies. On this very topic, I shall invite you to review the feature presented in this issue (p. 12) by Peter Mahaffy (Committee on Chemistry Education) in which he analyzes IUPAC's niche in promoting public understanding of science and carefully identifying who shall be IUPAC's best target audience.

My term as an officer will end in 2007. I think that sound strategic goals—reflecting on the sustainable development of our "blue planet"—will help my successor prioritize funding.

Is it not self-evident? Do we ask too much? Is it not important in the interest of our future on this planet? I wonder if you have suggestions for setting IUPAC's priorities. The officers and I will welcome your comments. 🌍

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Resignation of Vice President

On 29 June 2006, Prof. Matsumoto informed IUPAC that, for personal reasons, she is resigning as vice president with immediate effect. The IUPAC Bureau will discuss this matter at its regular meeting on 7–8 October in Madrid, Spain. There will be separate elections for incoming president (2008–2009) and vice president at the Council Meeting in Torino, Italy, in August 2007, as provided for in the Statutes.