

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION CAN DO MORE IN OUR KNOWLEDGE-BASED ECONOMY

Facing poverty and strengthening democratic governance constitute the main objectives of the Fourth Summit of the Americas, to take place next November in Argentina. The first difficulty will be to produce a realistic, yet pragmatic, plan of action that could guide the Heads of States to build a better future for the citizens of the Americas. One contribution is fundamental: "Science, Technology and Innovation will have to be essential components, if we want to reach the goal of reducing poverty in our knowledge-based economy. Scientific awareness is a MUST for all citizens, in particular for the leaders of our societies», proclaims the *Declaration of Panama* (see page xxx of this issue).

The *Declaration of Panama* contains the actions and recommendations adopted by 11 member associations present at the recent Council meeting of the Interciencia Association. These were also approved by other regional associations during the one-day meeting convened last September 5th by the OAS Office of Education, Science and Technology in Buenos Aires, within the framework of discussion for the Fourth Summit.

Extensive use of science and local application of the most efficient technology require the building and maintenance of a national capacity in S&T. Education at all levels, for women and men, is a responsibility for each nation. It is why the Interciencia members have submitted, as their first recommendation and the corner-stone, the accessibility to scientific information for all citizens. Its recognition must become a new fundamental right emblematic of this millennium. This new right follows the letter and the spirit of the Charter of the OAS. Moreover, it could be considered "priority of the moment" in view of the strong will-power expressed in the preparatory documents of the Summit.

The financial cost and disastrous social effects of ignorance are well documented and demonstrated in labor, public health and the environment. Science illiteracy, due to a deficient education, is often associated with poverty and bad hygienic conditions, which are amongst the causes of unemployment. Without easy access to S&T information, it is difficult for local entrepreneurs to innovate and create jobs and, hence, to deliver the benefits of science to workers and their families. Democratic governance cannot be strengthened in our institutions involving citizens' participation without an easy access to S&T information as offered by Internet. Be it our governments or any non-governmental institutions, a science input is essential and inseparable from their decision-making process and is therefore essential for democratic governance.

This new right of accessibility to scientific information imposes the duty on our governments to promote rigorous information, and the critique of S&T itself about its humane use in a social context. This can be achieved only with the presence of local expertise. For these reasons and as a corollary of the new fundamental right of accessibility to scientific information, the Interciencia Association strongly supports the approach to poverty reduction in the Hemisphere which takes advantage of S&T, Innovation and Engineering, and their centrality for the construction and maintenance of a knowledge-based society, inclusive of women and men.

By signing the *Declaration of Panama*, the 11 member associations reiterate the engagement of their scientific communities to aid more effectively the development of the nations and the welfare of their people. The declaration is in continuity with the role played by the Interciencia Association since its creation in 1974, as an agora of ideas for the scientists through symposia, technical exchanges and interventions in political forums, as well as through editorials and papers published in our journal, *Interciencia*. This continuous transfer of new knowledge has been carried out to meet needs of our fellow-citizens. It has been our belief that science appropriation is one sure way to help reduce poverty and increase well-being. Despite the name of our member associations, it is social progress and not progress of science itself that is our dream.

Scientists from different countries and many disciplines who attended the recent meeting in Buenos Aires, all agreed on the letter and spirit of the *Declaration of Panama*. Some insisted on the importance of early science teaching in schools, in order to inculcate the rigor of analyzing and reasoning. All of them shared the view that ignoring the gender gap in scientific professions was blocking women's ability to participate in the knowledge society, depriving society of a significant portion of its intellectual force, a sure way to weaken the national scientific capacity.

We hope that the political leaders of our Hemisphere will retain the chief message of our scientific communities, that spending in S&T is not a "gift" to the scientist but an investment for social development. The members of Interciencia share the same conviction and conclusions expressed by the ministers and the high authorities of S&T of the Hemisphere in the *Plan of Action and the Declaration of Lima 2004: Science, Technology and Innovation are essential components of Democracy* and in the Report of the OAS Office of Education, Science and Technology.

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