

# Message from the President of WMO, A.I. Bedritsky

**On 7 May 2007, delegates from WMO's 188 Member countries will meet in Geneva for Fifteenth World Meteorological Congress.** Congress is a landmark event in the life of the world hydrometeorological community. Uniting our family of meteorologists and hydrologists at the home of WMO is a superb illustration of the cooperation between specialists from different countries in a field which knows no national boundaries and influences all aspects of human life.

With each year, WMO is becoming an increasingly important catalyst in the development of global civilization. Governments, the business community and civil society increasingly recognize the role and significance of WMO in the life of the international community. This is happening, not only because weather and climate are having increasingly negative impacts on humanity, but also because the global economy is becoming more sensitive to these impacts.

The professional work and commitment of WMO's founders and of the many generations of meteorologists, hydrologists and other specialists at National Meteorological and Hydrometeorological Services (NMHSs) around the world are of particular importance. The activities of NMHSs and their contributions to development and to improving the safety and well-being of their countries form the

foundation for successful international cooperation in this field and are earning the recognition of the world community.

As a UN specialized agency, WMO is the cornerstone for large-scale multi-disciplinary cooperation between NMHSs, uniting the efforts of almost every country in the world. At international level, the constant improvement and development of the global system for monitoring the state of the environment, using the latest scientific and technical advances, are the results of such cooperation.

The forthcoming Congress represents a milestone in the Organization's development and provides an excellent opportunity to reflect on the work of the past four years and to identify new challenges and adjust the work plans accordingly.

Congress decisions will enable us to better define the role of WMO in the short term in facilitating and coordinating the international cooperation required to develop and enhance the image of meteorological, hydrological and other related services throughout the world for the benefit of society. The essence of this role is captured in the statement regarding the future of WMO at the beginning of the Sixth Long-term Plan:

"To provide world leadership in expertise and international cooperation in

weather, climate, hydrology and water resources, and related environmental issues, and thereby to contribute to the safety and well-being of people throughout the world and to the economic benefit of all nations".

Recent experience has shown that there is a need to implement strategic planning in order to direct current activities towards a more effective response to the global processes taking place. The WMO Executive Council supported the idea of preparing a WMO strategic plan for 2008-2011 and beyond, which would encompass the Organization's activities in all fields, particularly those mentioned in the WMO Statement on the Role and Operation of NMHSs for Decision-makers. The Plan will determine a strategy for an organized response to global sustainable development issues and will contain specific quantitative performance indicators. The WMO Strategic Plan will be complemented by the detailed WMO Secretariat Operating Plan 2008-2011 and regular budget estimates. A planning structure of this kind would provide clear guidance for WMO Members and NMHSs on how to resolve meteorological and hydrological issues and apply these sciences in order to achieve sustainable development and protect people, property and resources from the effects of natural disasters.

Considering the amount of work carried out by the Executive Council

Task Team to Explore and Assess the Possible Changes to the WMO Convention, and acting in the spirit of Resolutions 40 (Cg-XII) and 25 (Cg-XIII), Fifteenth Congress will be discussing the proposed amendment of the WMO Convention, which has far-reaching implications. Producing the new version of the preamble to the Convention was an arduous task which would not have been possible without the active contributions of Member countries and their permanent representatives. The amended Convention would give WMO and NMHSs a clear mandate to contribute more actively in fields such as sustainable development, environmental protection, climate and natural disaster prevention and mitigation. It would also increase the social significance of NMHSs at national level, while highlighting the authority of WMO as an organization participating in resolving the issues facing humanity.

It is also extremely important that Fifteenth Congress take specific steps as regards the implementation plan for the Geneva Declaration adopted by Thirteenth Congress (May 1999) and relevant decisions of Fourteenth Congress, in the interests of all NMHSs and WMO.

A considerable amount of work has been undertaken in recent years to increase the social significance of NMHSs, but it must be recognized that a great deal remains to be done in this area, both within Member countries and the Organization as a whole. Clearly, Fifteenth Congress must give the impetus required for this work to continue. NMHSs must strive to achieve social significance and visibility at national level and ensure that there is recognition of the value of the services provided, besides fulfilling the main task which is to constantly improve the quality of such services.

Of course, as I write these lines, I am eagerly awaiting the commencement of the Conference on Secure and

Sustainable Living in the Spanish capital of Madrid due to take place in March this year. I am sure that the Conference will have positive outcomes and that the most important of these will be brought about through improved understanding on the part of society, business circles and decision-makers regarding the critical importance of the services provided by NMHSs in the field of weather, climate and hydrology. I wish to express my deep gratitude to HM Queen Sofia of Spain for agreeing to sponsor the Madrid conference. I am sure that the forthcoming Congress will also take account of the outcomes of the Conference in its resolutions.

Broadening and strengthening cooperation with the UN system and other international organizations has also played a prominent role in WMO's activities over the past four years. WMO took an active part in the World Summit (United Nations, New York, 14-16 September 2005). The Summit confirmed that sustainable development, together with its economic, social and environmental aspects, is one of the key elements of the all-embracing structure of the United Nations and a broad range of climate change issues was discussed. One of the main issues of particular importance to participants was that of natural disasters. The World Summit called on all States to take urgent measures to create a global early warning system for all natural disasters with regional subsystems based on existing national and regional structures.

This sends a clear signal to WMO and NMHSs of Member countries to take an active part in this work. This should also be reflected in WMO plans and programmes, particularly the Natural Disaster Prevention and Mitigation Programme.

Since Fourteenth Congress, WMO has taken an active part in major UN events and world summits such as the International Meeting to Review the Implementation of

the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) (Mauritius, January 2005), the World Conference on Disaster Reduction (Kobe, Japan, January 2005), the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) (Tunis, November 2005) and activities aimed at mitigating the consequences of tsunamis in the Indian Ocean.

WMO has been an active participant at meetings of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, sessions of the Administrative Committee on Coordination and the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the UN Convention to Combat Desertification and other environmental conventions and inter-institutional groups.

WMO has continued to expand its cooperation with other international organizations in order to strengthen support for its programmes and the NMHSs. A number of memorandums of understanding have been signed with, for example, the Asian Disaster Reduction Centre, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research Operational Satellite Applications Programme, and the South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme. Cooperation with national and regional meteorological and hydrological communities has been strengthened.

As regards cooperation in hydrology and water resources, one of the main events was the Fourth World Water Forum (Mexico City, March 2006), where WMO also played a key role.

WMO's international activities in the field of operational hydrology will continue to increase through the implementation of the Hydrology and Water Resources Programme, participation in the establishment of an International Flood Initiative (IFI) and the drafting of guidelines on the role and activities of National Hydrological Services.

The international community is now recognizing the need for a more efficient organization of joint work to resolve large-scale problems in international relations. The current reform of the United Nations aims to do just that and WMO has to participate fully in these transformations. Such work should be carried out in the spirit of our continual strengthening of the role of WMO within the UN system and increasing its influence in resolving global environmental issues.

Although a UN specialized agency, WMO has yet to become, for the UN, a source of statistical data on hazardous meteorological and hydrological phenomena and the state of the climate system. While we seek to gain proper recognition of the Organization's role within the UN system, we must also strive to become the UN's authoritative source of such information at a time of great demand from the international community.

Another important challenge is to extend our partnerships with related UN agencies and other organizations active in similar areas. We already have a number of examples of effective partnerships of this type, such as our close cooperation with the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (IOC-UNESCO). WMO's active involvement in such partnerships increases the effectiveness of the international community's work in the field of disaster reduction, poverty reduction, increasing access to water resources, strengthening food security in developing countries and generally providing greater protection for society from the effects of negative natural events.

It is also important for WMO's relations with its partners to be based on mutually beneficial principles. The decision to foster close cooperation with another organization should be taken on the basis of an analysis of the benefits which WMO and NMHSs would derive from such joint work.

WMO should actively develop cooperation with the international financial institutions in their fields of activity for building the capacity of NMHSs. The first steps have already been taken in this direction. Since 2005, with my full support, the World Bank has been studying the current state and development of the National Hydrometeorological Services (NMSs) of 19 countries in eastern Europe and central Asia. The aim is to obtain information about the national and regional potential of NMSs in terms of weather and climate forecasting, identify any shortcomings, determine the most cost-efficient ways of developing NMSs and improve regional cooperation.

Of particular note is the recently completed World Bank express assessment of the economic efficiency of the current activities of seven NMSs and the potential economic benefits for their respective countries were they to invest in an NMS modernization programme. The results of the research on the economic feasibility of investing in modernizing NMSs have been discussed and received the support of the governments of the countries concerned. The activities of the World Bank demonstrate an entirely fresh approach to cooperation between NMSs and sponsoring organizations. They show that the financial activities of NMSs and the consolidation of their resource base can and should be considered an investment activity which will have a real economic impact in the short and medium term. WMO and NMHSs need to actively promote this approach among international, regional and national financial institutions.

Indeed, in my view, Congress should consider activities for encouraging a more dynamic cooperation with international financial organizations in order to find new ways of helping developing countries to strengthen traditional NMHS fields of activity. Strengthening the capacities of developing countries in the field of observation and forecasting for the

development of an early warning system for natural disasters of a hydrometeorological nature could considerably increase the effectiveness of investment in development, ensuring food security, eradicating poverty and adapting to climate change, thus making a significant contribution to the goal of sustainable development in these countries.

In connection with weather- and climate-related natural disasters, I would consider it appropriate to examine the basis and meaning of the concept of "hydrometeorological safety". This, like other types of safety, is rightly given a prominent place in national plans and programmes for sustainable socio-economic development and reflects the contribution of NMHSs in protecting vital activities from the negative effects of the environment and weather and climate systems.

International Polar Year 2007-2008 (IPY), co-sponsored by WMO and the International Council of Science (ICSU), promises to be an important event. A great deal of work has been done to prepare and organize the science programme of IPY. WMO, its Member countries and the NMHSs have worked hard to ensure that we may look forward with confidence to the implementation of the projects proposed in the programme, which currently comprises over 200 projects in the field of research, education and the dissemination of knowledge with the participation of over 60 countries. The results of IPY will lay a solid foundation for the future participation of WMO and NMHSs in developing observing systems in these regions, including those using the space-based component.

The Organization's priority is to strengthen the capacities of NMHSs in developing countries, particularly the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). WMO's activities to support NMHSs in LDCs are now part of a separate programme and should

build on the results obtained through implementation of the Education and Training Programme, the Technical Cooperation Programme and other WMO programmes and partnerships aimed at supporting developing countries.

It is my hope that the reorganization of the Cooperation and Regional Activities Department (DCR) at the Secretariat and Congress's decision on the matter will create greater synergy between the Technical Cooperation Programme and the Regional Programme, thus enabling us to address the needs of developing countries more effectively.

A number of important activities undertaken since Fourteenth Congress have enabled WMO to respond appropriately to the current situation in world meteorology and related fields and plan its future activities with confidence, a prime example being the creation of two new WMO programmes—the Disaster Prevention and Mitigation Programme and the WMO Space Programme.

WMO has a key role to play in preventing and mitigating natural disasters. Thanks to its scientific and technical programmes, the observation networks of NMHSs and world and regional specialized meteorological centres, WMO possesses a global infrastructure for producing information of vital importance to society, business circles and governments in calculating the risk of natural disasters and responding to them. The Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015, which was adopted by the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, states that the vast majority of disasters are caused by a hydrometeorological event. Unfortunately, statistics provide no consolation: there has been a clear increase in the economic damage caused by natural disasters over the past few decades, and nearly 90 per cent of this damage over the last decade was a result of hydrometeorological events. The recently published



*Alexander Bedritsky, President of WMO*

conclusions of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which will form an integral part of IPCC's Fourth Assessment Report, clearly demonstrate that continuing climate change could lead to more severe and often dangerous natural phenomena such as heat waves, heavy precipitation, droughts, and cyclonic activity in the tropics.

WMO has always played a leading role in studying the climate and its changes. WMO Programmes, particularly the World Climate Programme, have for many years helped society and governments to understand that climate change is a problem affecting the entire planet. WMO programme outputs constitute a significant proportion of the IPCC Fourth Assessment Report on climate change. When considering issues relating to climate-change impacts on the economy and society, information regarding weather, climate and water is crucially important. The weather and climate observing networks of NMHSs, coordinated by WMO, are the main sources of data for making global and regional assessments of climate variability and preparing the relevant response measures. We must endeavour to ensure that WMO remains the authoritative source of

information regarding climate and climate change. The influence and role of WMO in implementing the Climate Variability and Predictability Programme (CLIVAR) and its sub-programmes must therefore be strengthened. In order to make timely calculations of the negative consequences of climate change as part of national development plans, it is becoming critical to address the shortcomings of the climate monitoring networks, particularly in developing countries.

WMO continues to cooperate successfully with the various UNFCCC bodies, and both WMO and NMHSs are playing a more prominent role in its work on issues related to climate-change impacts, adaptation and vulnerability. These activities have made the Parties to the Convention more aware of the role of WMO and NMHSs in the process of adapting to climate change and the important role of WMO in managing and coordinating the work of the global observing network. By taking part in UNFCCC events, WMO underlines the value of observations, in particular those of global concentrations of greenhouse gases, ozone and aerosols provided by the WMO Global Atmosphere Watch, and scientific research for

the purposes of forecasting climate change caused by human activity, determining its causes and assessing the effectiveness of measures to mitigate its consequences, while, at the same time, addressing shortcomings in data and research which need to be remedied in order to better control climate-change impacts and make it easier to adapt to future changes.

Congress is expected to launch the crucial phase of preparations for the third World Climate Conference (WCC-3). WMO has already held consultations with 14 UN agencies and international bodies, including the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), IPCC, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Environment Programme, UNESCO, UNFCCC, the World Health Organization and ICSU on potential partnership for WCC-3. WMO and other UN agencies must now continue detailed work on the scientific agenda, issues for the high-level segment and the resource-mobilization plan, as well as coordination at both national and international level, in anticipation of the final decision on WCC-3 by Fifteenth Congress.

The Implementation Plan for the Global Observing System for Climate in support of UNFCCC is being carried out with the direct participation of NMHSs and WMO.

The WMO Space Programme aims to improve the space-based component of the Global Observing System and extend the use of satellite data through specialized education and training of key personnel. The establishment of a virtual laboratory for education and training in satellite meteorology is an example of best practices in this field. In October 2006, this laboratory hosted a two-week High-Profile Training Event in which more than 120 WMO Member countries participated. Components of the international satellite observing system continue to be created under the programme. The sixth session of the WMO Consultative Meetings on

High-Level Policy on Satellite Matters (Argentina, January 2006) approved a draft implementation plan for an International Geostationary satellite Laboratory.

The main strategic objective of NMHSs and WMO is doubtless to improve the accuracy of weather forecasting. Fourteenth Congress took place when the 10-year international scientific research programme to accelerate improvement in the accuracy of one- to 14-day weather forecasts (THORPEX) was beginning. As an integral part of the World Weather Research Programme (WWRP), THORPEX started a series of regional and global projects, including improving forecasting skill, experiments with satellite observations, data assimilation and numerical weather prediction systems. THORPEX is closely linked with the activities of all WMO programmes and technical commissions. It is an example of extensive cooperation with the higher-education sector, research organizations, operational weather forecasting centres and end-users of forecast products. Both developed and developing countries will benefit from the results of the programme's research, both in terms of new equipment and methods for disaster reduction, and optimized economic effectiveness of existing prediction technologies.

WMO's Education and Training Programme is actively promoting the use of new learning technology. Reforms of WMO Regional Training Centres are continuing in order to ensure that the training programme covers a wider range of specializations in hydrometeorology and related fields. Current efforts to enhance the role of NMHSs in their respective countries reveal a need to attract highly qualified economists and marketing specialists, which should also be taken into account when planning the training programmes for WMO Regional Training Centres.

Another initiative is the new Global Earth Observation System of



Systems (GEOSS) in which 60 States participate. GEOSS began its activities after Fourteenth Congress, and WMO actively contributed to efforts to integrate existing systems into a global, coordinated and sustainable observation system of systems to meet requirements of social significance such as weather, water, climate and natural disasters. The time is approaching when WMO can expect to receive returns from these efforts in terms of GEOSS contributions towards meeting the requirements of NMHSs in developing countries for strengthening their observing systems.

Since Fourteenth Congress, we have made considerable progress in understanding the need to integrate the observing systems. The Executive Council has recognized that moving towards integrating WMO's various fields of activity, in particular the observing systems, will ensure that

the Organization is better adapted to today's challenges. Integration of the observing systems is one of WMO's main strategic aims and requires the Organization to be restructured accordingly. I am confident that Fifteenth Congress will take wise decisions about how to move towards this objective most effectively.

I think there are at least two conditions which need to be fulfilled if WMO programmes and projects are to develop effectively and unite Member countries in their attempt to find appropriate responses to global environmental challenges. The first of these is the constructive and timely reform and structuring of WMO's coordinated mechanisms for international cooperation at all levels: the WMO Secretariat, the constituent bodies and the partnership mechanisms for strengthening cooperation among Member countries and international organizations. In several places, my message mentions the many useful initiatives and innovations which have been implemented over the past four-year period or are still under way.

The second condition is the mobilization and integration of the resources required to achieve current strategic aims. For the first time, we are able to assess the available resources in retrospect, thanks to the new approaches and tireless work of the WMO Secretariat towards the resource-based management. Clearly, the main source of funding remains the regular budget, which, unfortunately, is not increasing and

actually tends to decrease, because of inflation.

I therefore call on all permanent representatives to continue their efforts to encourage their respective Member countries to participate actively in the work of WMO and its programmes and to make financial contributions. As a result of this work, NMHSs will derive benefits in terms of capacity-building at national level.

In general, despite a number of complex issues affecting the role and operation of WMO, the lack of financial resources and other problems which many Member countries face when providing meteorological and hydrological services at national level, the Organization has functioned effectively over the last four years and has been very successful in its key areas of activity. It is well prepared for the beginning of the fifteenth financial period and has a clear vision of the future. It also has an effective strategy for realizing that vision and benefits from the renewed commitment of Member countries, the constituent bodies and the Secretariat.

In the run-up to Fifteenth Congress, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all those who have contributed in one way or another to the success of the Organization in its activities over the last four years. I would also like to express particular gratitude to the Vice-Presidents, presidents of regional associations and other members of the Executive Council for their important work in the course of the last four years.

I would like to thank the presidents of technical commissions, the chairmen and members of the working groups, advisory groups, expert groups and individual rapporteurs for the considerable voluntary efforts they have made to ensure the effectiveness of the work of WMO. I am particularly indebted to the Secretary-General, Michel Jarraud, and his staff for their invaluable help and support, which greatly facilitated the work of the Executive Council and other constituent bodies.

I believe that it is of paramount importance in the work of all the bodies of the Organization for the forthcoming period to maintain and develop WMO's principles of cooperation and traditions and to increase its resources and scientific and technical potential in order to address the aims and priorities of the WMO Strategic Plan.

In conclusion, I would like to express my firm conviction that, by making the most of its resources and drawing on the invaluable experience and professional knowledge of meteorologists and hydrologists all over the world, Fifteenth Congress will further consolidate the authority and role of WMO and strengthen NMHSs for the benefit of the development of all WMO Member countries.