

International Union of Nutritional Sciences (IUNS): An Overview

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President

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Historical Perspective

The International Union of Nutritional Sciences (IUNS) enters the 21st century with 52 years of experience representing the global family of nutritional scientists. Although nutrition as a science was established early in the 20th century, for IUNS it all began when a group of distinguished nutrition scientists met in London under the auspices of the British Nutrition Society, July 1946. About twenty-two researchers from thirteen countries met to discuss the future of the profession. Two years later, in June 1948, an International Provisional Committee assembled to discuss statutes, by-laws and the principal mission of an organization that would represent the broad interests of nutrition scientists internationally. The IUNS was established, initially led by a small executive committee chaired by Professor E. J. Bigwood (Belgium) and Dr. Leslie J. Harris (UK).

Through the years, IUNS guided by a distinguished group of nutrition science leaders (Table 1) has grown in stature among scientific organizations and in its representation of member countries (e.g., Adhering Bodies). A country can have only one Adhering Body attached to the Union. The character of that body varies considerably among countries, but regardless of structure, the Adhering Body is expected to represent the majority of the country's organized professional groups in nutrition. There are no individual memberships in IUNS, but all professionals affiliated with their country's Adhering Body are considered members. Their collective voices are heard by the IUNS Secretariat through the Adhering Body. In turn, the IUNS Secretariat communicates official business through the Adhering Body and depends on that body, rather than through individuals, to communicate relevant information to the nutrition groups within the country. Today, there are 67 Adhering Bodies, 2 in Observer Status and additional applications awaiting ratification at the next meeting of the General Assembly in 2001. Countries currently not a member of IUNS can apply through a principle Scientific Academy, National Research Council, or other appropriate scientific group recognized specifically as an Adhering Body by the General Assembly.

Several regional and subspecialty groups in nutrition, representing more than one country are affiliated with IUNS. They are considered Affiliated Bodies after their application for affiliation is approved by the IUNS General Assembly. Affiliated Bodies are organized and function independently, with IUNS serving to facilitate and strengthen their activities as appropriate. Currently, regional affiliated groups are in Latin American (SLAN, Latin America Society of Nutrition), in Europe (FENS, Federation of European Nutrition Societies; EANS, European Academy of Nutritional Sciences; GERM, Groupe

d'Etudes et de Resherches sur la Malnutrition), in Asia (FANS, Federation of Asian Nutrition Societies), and in Africa (AFRONUS, Africa Council for Food and Nutrition Sciences, currently inactive but anticipating reorganization). Subspecialty affiliations exist with international groups representing clinical nutrition (APCNS, Asia Pacific Clinical Nutrition Society; ISCN, International Symposium on Clinical Nutrition) and dietetics (ICDA, International Committee of Dietetic Associations). In addition, IUNS maintains contact with international consultative groups with specific focus on dietary energy (IDECG), iodine (ICCIDD), vitamin A (IVACG), iron (INACG) and zinc (IZiCG) deficiencies.

Table 1. IUNS Presidents and Secretary Generals

Year	President	Secretary General
1946-60	E. J. Bigwood (Belgium)	L. J. Harris (UK)
1960-66	D. P. Cuthbertson (UK)	1960-63 M.van Eekelen (Netherlands) 1963-66 H. Gournelle de Pontanel (France)
1966-69	C. G. King (USA)	R. Ammon (FRG)
1969-72	P. K. Roine (Finland)	J. C. Somogyi (Switzerland)
1972-75	C. den Hartog (Netherlands)	B. Isaksson (Sweden)
1975-78	C. Gopalan (India)	B. Isaksson (Sweden)
1978-81	N. S. Scrimshaw (USA)	D. F. Hollingsworth (UK)
1981-85	R. Buzina (Yugoslavia)	D. F. Hollingsworth (UK)
1985-89	M. K. Gabr (Egypt)	J. G. A. J. Hautvast (Netherlands)
1989-93	J. E. Dutra de Oliveira (Brazil)	J. G. A. J. Hautvast (Netherlands)
1993-97	A. Valyasevi (Thailand)	J. G. A. J. Hautvast (Netherlands)
1997-01	B. A. Underwood (USA)	O. Galal (Egypt/USA)
2001-05	M. Wahlqvist (Australia)	

In 1968, international recognition among the scientific community was enhanced when IUNS was elected to full membership in the International Council of Scientific Unions (recently renamed International Council for Science, ICSU). This organization was created in 1931 to promote international scientific activity in different branches of science and their applications for the benefit of humanity. Today, IUNS is one of 26 International Scientific Societies and 17 interdisciplinary scientific and special committees with membership in ICSU. Participation in ICSU activity exposes IUNS to a wide range of international scientific concerns and, in turn provides a forum for drawing attention to cross-disciplinary scientific issues that impact on human nutrition.

IUNS Mission, Structure and Functioning

Statutes and Rules of Procedure have been modified from time to time during the years of IUNS existence, but no major review has occurred in recent years. Such a review was requested at the 1997 General Assembly in Montreal in order to position IUNS to more effectively and efficiently address current and future global issues in nutrition. The President appointed a special committee of distinguished nutritionists to conduct the review and report their recommendations for reform to the IUNS President and Council. The committee, under the chairmanship of former IUNS President Dr. Mamdouh Gabr,

completed its work and the recommendations are drafted for discussion and vote by the General Assembly at the 2001 International Congress of Nutrition (ICN) in Vienna, Austria. Changes are likely that will affect the number and structure of officers, frequency of face-to-face meetings of Council and ways to communicate to assure the regional input of Council members in guiding IUNS activities. Revamping of membership categories and dues structure will also be considered.

Already the Secretariat is adapting to more efficient operating procedures by increasingly conducting its business among Council, Adhering Bodies, IUNS Committees and other professionally related groups using internet technology. This has facilitate global communications and reduced operating expenses, while greatly facilitating more dynamic and timely interchange. For example, the IUNS web page (www.iuns.org) is specifically meant to communicate with the IUNS-related groups noted above and to strengthen linkages among and between them. Adhering Bodies and Affiliated Bodies are encouraged to provide updated information on leadership and structure of their organization and on activities. IUNS Committees are encouraged to submit abbreviated activity reports for posting on the web page, including linkages to where complete reports of their activities can be obtained. These innovations are expected to replace producing the rather expensive Annual Reports of the past that were often out dated before publication occurred. The web page also strives to announce important international events relevant to nutrition. Linkage is also provided to Adhering Body web sites where detailed information is available. Development of the web page for these purpose assumes that the relevant groups will provide timely information to the Secretariat.

What does IUNS do?

International Congress of Nutrition. IUNS is best known for the periodic ICN that brings together professionals in nutrition to exchange the latest findings from both basic research and applications for the betterment of human livelihood. Sixteen ICNs have been held each hosted by an Adhering Body under the patronage of IUNS (Table 2). Attendance at the congresses has grown from the 1st ICN in 1952 in Basel, Switzerland with 150 in attendance from 18 countries to the 16th ICN in 1997 in Montreal, Canada with approximately 3250 in attendance. The 17th ICN will be in Vienna August 27-31, 2001 hosted by the Austrian Nutrition Society and the 18th ICN will be in Durban, South Africa in September 2005.

A Voice among International Agencies. IUNS does more than hold congresses every four years. As a non-governmental organization (NGO), it represents the global interests of the profession among UN Agencies, enjoying officially recognized NGO status with the major nutrition-related UN Agencies, including UNICEF, WHO, FAO, IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) and the SCN (Sub-Committee on Nutrition). Invitations are regularly received for IUNS representation at regional and global meetings of these organizations and we try to respond by sponsoring an IUNS Council member or a local Adhering Body representative to attend for IUNS. In turn, representatives of the UN Agencies are invited to the IUNS Council meetings and they usually participate actively in the program of the ICNs. Currently IUNS is one of three

NGOs alternating on the SCN Steering Committee, thus representing the voice of the scientific community in nutrition in their important deliberations. Of special interest is that the SCN approved a new Working Group on Capacity Building in Nutrition at their April 2000 annual meeting and appointed the United Nations University (UNU) and IUNS as chair and co-chair of the activity.

In addition, the Secretariat increasingly receives requests to identify competent nutritionist for various assignments ranging from short-term consultants to authors for books and monographs. For example, the large UNESCO undertaking of preparing a multi-volume Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems (EOLSS) contacted IUNS to identify authors for various chapters related to human nutrition. With permission of the publisher, we have recorded contributions of IUNS-identified authors on a CD-ROM for distribution to all registered participants at the 17th ICN.

Table 2. International Nutrition Congresses

Place	Year	Attendance	Countries represented
Basel	1952	150	18
Amsterdam	1954	360	32
Paris	1957	1000	22
Washington	1960	2000	65
Edinburgh	1963	1500	63
Hamburg	1966	2100	81
Prague	1969	1800	62
Mexico City	1972	2000	66
Kyoto	1975	2300	55
Rio de Janeiro	1978	3500	92
San Diego	1981	2500	83
Brighton	1985	2300	79
Seoul	1989	3500	104
Adelaide	1993	260	91
Montreal	1997	3250	121
Vienna	2001		
Durban	2005		

A Voice among International Scientific Unions. ICSU provides a forum where IUNS can exchange with other International Scientific Unions. ICSU, in the past, has generously provided seed money grants supporting activities of IUNS Committees. Recently, the governing board approved a major grant to IUNS and the International Union of Toxicology (IUTOX) to examine the scientific basis for benefit/risk assessment of genetically modified foods for development, health and human nutrition. Four other International Scientific Unions, i.e. Pure and Applied Chemistry (IUPAC), Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (IUBMB), Food Science and Technology (IUFoST), and Soil Science (IUSS), the Committee on Sciences for Food Security (CSFS) and the Advisory Committee on Genetics and Biotechnology will collaborate on the project.

Partnerships. To extend its effectiveness, IUNS frequently joins hands with other agencies or academic groups on broad-based projects. For example, several projects are jointly conducted with the UNU Food and Nutrition Program. The journal of the UNU program, i.e., Food and Nutrition Bulletin, provides a means for disseminating proceedings of joint projects, committee reports and other IUNS activities. Since the 16th ICN in Montreal, the UNU/IUNS Task Force on Food Data Base Conferences held a well-attended third conference in 1999 hosted by FAO in Rome. This group plans a fourth conference to be held in Bratislava, Slovakia prior to the 17th ICN. Also, IUNS/UNU has held two successful workshops exploring long-term dietary approaches toward eliminating vitamin A deficiency, one in Asia and one in Africa, with proceedings published (Food & Nutrition Bull. June 2000) or in process of publication. The IUNS/UNU initiative on capacity development, initiated at a meeting in Manila in 1996 (Food & Nutrition Bull. 18: 103, 1997), is currently focused on Africa where regional workshops were held in southern, eastern and western Africa to develop long-term regional and continent-wide plans. These plans were presented to the SCN at its 2001 annual meeting and will be discussed at a workshop on capacity development at the ICN. An overview of the African Nutrition Capacity Development Initiative is found on the IUNS web page (www.iuns.org). The capacity development initiative is expected to expand to Latin America, Asia, and Eastern Europe over the next few years.

IUNS Committees. Through its own committee structure, global issues of nutrition are addressed by a membership with broad geographical representation. Committees often organize international workshops or meetings on topics currently significant in nutrition that result in publications in peer reviewed journals or monographs. An example of significant long-standing committee activities with published proceedings, include those of the Urban Nutrition Committee. This committee has held many workshops, the latest one in Durban, South Africa in 1999, and proceedings are published as a supplement to the South Africa Journal of Clinical Nutrition (vol. 13 [suppl.]: S1-S48, 2000). Other significant committee activities include those of the Food Standards and Terminology committee who have actively organized joint symposia with food technologists at IUFOST meetings, as well as at ICNs. An example of recently formed committees is the Committee on Genetics, Nutrition and Chronic Disease, which held its first scientific and administrative conference on the topic in Greece in 1999 and posted a very interesting report on the IUNS web page. Another newly established task force, Nutrition Transition, has planned a pre-17th ICN congress meeting in Bellagio, Italy to discuss the implications for health of nutrition transition issues. They will communicate recent scientific findings in a symposium at the 2001 ICN. Table 3 lists current committees and chairpersons. Details of the committee's charge, membership and in some cases activity reports are found on the IUNS web page (www.iuns.org).

Table 3. Current IUNS Committees

<u>Committee name</u>	<u>Chairperson</u>
21 st Century Committee (task completed)	M. Gabr (Egypt)
Nutrition Transition	B. Popkin (USA)
Nutrition and Electronic Communication Taskforce	B. Hsu-Hage (Australia)
Taskforce for International Food Data Conference	B. Burlingame (FAO/Australia)
Terminology and Food Standards	R. English (Australia)
Foetal/Infant Origin of Adult Disease	C.S. Yajnik (India)
Genetics, Nutrition and Chronic Disease	A.P. Simopoulos (USA)
Nutrition and Food Habits (joint IUNS/IUFoST)	U. Oltersdorf (Germany)
Nutrition and Urbanization	N.W. Solomons (Guatemala/USA)
Nutrition and Aging	M.L. Wahlqvist (Australia)
Nutrition and Mental Development	S. McGregor (UK)
Food-based Approach for Nutrition Improvement	M. Bloem (Indonesia/Netherlands)
Nutrition and Production of Fish and Shellfish	S.J. Kaushik (France)
Nutrition of Pigs	C. Wenk (Switzerland)
Nutrition of Poultry	D.J. Farrell (Australia)
Nutrition of Ruminants	D. Sauvart (France)
Nutrition and Environmental Pollution	R. Gross (Peru/Germany)
Comparative Physiology of Pregnancy and Lactation	A.M. Prentice (UK)

IUNS in the 21st Century.

There are several international groups representing subspecialties in Nutrition and Nutrition Science, but IUNS remains the only overarching spokesperson for nutrition in its broad context. IUNS is uniquely positioned to echo voices from the entire spectrum of concerns related to nutrition, health and development. Streamlining the mode of operations of IUNS is expected to permit timely response to on-going and rapidly emerging issues in nutrition, utilizing its committees to provide sound science-based analyses for actions. Among challenges ahead are global issues on biotechnology, HIV/AIDS, chronic disease risk, sustainable intervention programs to reduce malnutrition (both deficiency and excess), implications of nutrition transition, distance learning, and capacity development for research, training professionals and community enhancement of livelihood quality. Other issues undoubtedly will come onto the international scene as the next century progresses. Because IUNS has limited financial resources, it will need to focus those resources, use them to leverage additional funding among other global nutrition groups and be flexible in finding our distinctive niche for making contributions in a dynamic and timely manner.