

WORLD ASSOCIATION OF SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

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Introduction

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished guests, Ladies and gentlemen, Fellow soil and water conservationists from all over the world. I am delighted that I am here in Brisbane today with all participants of the 13th ISCO Conference, who have been or have become members in the World Association of Soil and Water Conservation (WASWC), thanks to the generosity of the Organizing Committee of this important conference who has signed those non-members up with us.

WASWC and Its History

I would like to spend a few minutes this morning talking about our Association and explaining what it does and how it works. But first, let me tell you about its history. The WASWC is an international non-government organization that was established 21 years ago with the objective of promoting the wise use of the earth's land resources. In doing this, it acts as a forum for people from all over the world, who are interested in soil and water conservation; it provides us with a network, through which we can make contact with people with similar interests, problems and projects to our own from any country or region in the world; and it provides information – mainly through the quarterly newsletter – about matters of mutual interest. The WASWC also sponsors and co-sponsors conferences, seminars, workshops every now and then, and synthesized and compiled them into the book form. Over the last 21 years it has been responsible for producing approximately 20 books, which have been made available to members at reasonable prices. Our books have had a very big influence on the way soil and water conservation is now perceived and approached in many countries, especially the small booklet, "Land Husbandry – a Framework for Soil and Water Conservation" – it was one of our first publications and it has been widely distributed and given guidance to many soil and water conservationists in many parts of the world.

The WASWC is run by a small, hard working, elected Council, who give their time to the Association free. The Council members come from different countries – I am from Thailand, the Deputy President, Michael Zöbisch, is from Germany, the Treasurer is Maurice Cook, an American, the Executive Secretary is Jiao Juren from China and David Sanders, the Immediate Ex-President comes from Australia and live in England. As you can see, we are a very international group but we do represent a large number of regions, countries, interests and experiences.

Although the members of the Council live in different parts of the world, we are in contact practically every day by e-mail, sometime several times a day; we conduct nearly all our business and meeting on the e-mail. The Council members are elected for three-year term-of-office. The present Council was appointed 2 ½ years ago and will serve until the end of this year. Elections for a new Council will be held very soon. At present we have approximately 1,000 members from about 100 countries and our membership numbers are growing rapidly. We also have a number of Vice-Presidents who represent different regions. We are fortunate to have number of these Vice-Presidents with us today. It is the responsibility of the regional VPs to represent WASWC at the regional level, to advise the President on what is happening in their regions and to organize all kinds of activities.

The WASWSC works very closely with national soil and water conservation societies, and soil science societies, especially through the Decentralization Program. We have also developed strong links with other related organizations like the International Union of Soil Sciences (IUSS), the International Erosion Control Association (IECA), and the European Society for Soil Conservation (ESSC).

ISCO

People often get ISCO and WASWC mixed up or don't understand the difference between the two organizations. The difference is this: the WASWC is primarily a formal association of professional soil and water conservationists. ISCO, on the other hand, is an informal organization and it does just one thing – it organizes and runs a big international soil conservation conference about every two years. We work closely together and, in fact, WASWC helps ISCO with its conferences whenever needed. So again, ISCO is an organization that does one thing every two years – it runs a conference – while we, WASWC, are there all the time to help and support a worldwide membership.

The SWCS and the Move to China

When the WASWC was established 20 years ago, we were sponsored and helped by the American Soil and Water Conservation Society. That society was very good to us; they provided us with a secretariat and ran our affairs for us from their office in Ankeny, Iowa. They looked after our administration; they kept our records, handled our finances and published our books and newsletters. This arrangement worked well for many years but recently there were some troubles. The main problem was that we had to pay for the services that we received and, being in America, it was expensive – in fact, we were beginning to run at a loss and we were using up our small savings. We looked at several possibilities and then, in August 2002, we received an offer from China. The Department of Soil and Water Conservation in the Ministry of Water Resources in Beijing offered to provide the facilities for our secretariat. They offered very generous terms and, in effect, guaranteed financial support for three years. We have signed an MoU with the Ministry of Water Resources; under this agreement, the Chinese took over responsibilities for the administration of our Association from April 1, 2003. We have now cancelled our charity status in America and have yet to register with the authority in China as a non-profit organization

Membership Payments

Our main problem continues to be the financial one: how to handle the small membership fees that members are obliged to pay each year. The problem here is the cost of transferring money from one country to another. Bank charges are so high that it frequently costs us more to cash a cheque than the cheque is worth! To overcome this problem, we have introduced several new procedures. First, members from all over the world can send money by credit cards, Visa and MasterCard, to both America and Japan pay stations. Second, members in 59 countries can buy UNESCO coupons by local currency and send to our Chinese office by post. Third, the other procedure is already in place. Under this, members pay their annual subscriptions in the local currency to a national organization. This national organization then sends the money collected in bulk to the office in China. In this way a sizable amount of money is sent at one time, making the exchange expenses worthwhile. Under this system the local organization benefits as it is allowed to keep a percentage of the money to spend on WASWC activities in the country. This is all rather complicated but we are trying to explain it to members through articles in the newsletter and our website.

National Representatives and Decentralization Program

A new Decentralization Program (DP) was launched in early 2003 and is progressing very well. Under the DP, National Representatives are appointed by the Council and the activities of members in the country can be organized through some new or existing organization, such a national soil and water conservation society. Twenty countries have already joined, while several other countries are considering joining. The idea of the decentralization program is simply to bring our Association nearer to our members and to encourage members to play a more active part in the Association's activities. We want all members to feel that this is their Association, not something that is run by a group of people in another part of the world. The idea of the DP is to reflect the widely accepted saying "Think Globally, Act Locally." It is either a VP or NR who coordinates such program. The main purpose of the DP is that the coordinator will facilitate in distributing the newsletter both as paper and digital; collect membership fees (in local currency), and undertake certain activities to really benefit local communities. The program has been able to proceed relatively well because of the division of funds: only 40% of the collected funds is to be sent to the central administration of WASWC, while the rest (60%) remains in the country to be spent for all activities. Full details of our DP are given on our website: www.swcc.cn/waswc/.

We feel like we are doing a development project, which is more or less a process for establishing some kind of movement that is sustainable for a long time. At this point we are rather certain we have come in a right direction, since the membership has climbed up to more than 1,000 from approximately 100 countries. We are sure there is much need in having a central organization like ours. But the important point is that, this kind of organization needs personnel who are willing to work for global soil and water conservationists worldwide, normally without any compensation; those who belong to such category should therefore step forward and join hands with our administration in managing the WASWC now and in the future.

The Newsletter

I would like to mention the WASWC newsletter because its production is probably the most important single thing that we presently do. For twenty years the WASWC has produced a newsletter every three months. For a long time this came out as a small printed publication, usually of only four pages. During the time of my predecessor, David Sanders, he and I made a big effort to improve the newsletter by making it longer and to contain more articles that would be of interest and value to our members. When I took up the presidency the Council has put more efforts and

we have succeeded; each issue of WASWC newsletter has between 20 and 25 pages and contain several sections that may serve most members in a satisfactory way. A breakthrough came when we were able to produce the electronic newsletter and send out by e-mail. One previous problem was the difficulty in getting members to contribute with articles. This has now changed; we are now receiving a wide range of articles, book reviews and other items from all over the world. We have recently received several contributions in the form of long articles. Though we cannot publish full-length scientific papers but we can post them on our website. The WASWC website is going to be used more efficiently for many purposes. Our conference in Sofia last year has recommended to use the website for most publishing activities.

The Special Publication

It is our intention that, under this program we will be able to publish Special Publication to give to our members for free once a year. We try to find an issue that may attract interest from majority of our members in the form of long articles, which can be used as additional reading for students. In 2003 we published *The USLE Story* by John Laflen and Bill Moldenhauer and distributed to about 3,000 individuals, both being members and non-members. This year we have just published *Carbon Trading – Agriculture and Poverty* by Mike Robbins. You may find it in your conference bag already. We have received kind sponsorship to cover the printing cost from Dr K.G. Tejwani, our former Vice President since the founding of the association. We still need more support from members in order to expand our activities to cover more areas.

The Norman Hudson Memorial Award

This year we have started to give an award called the Norman Hudson Memorial Award to a deserving person. This is the highest honor bestowed on an individual by the Association, one person a year. It is given for distinguished service in recognition of international accomplishments in soil and water conservation. The award is named for Dr Norman Hudson, whose exemplary professional career was devoted to the cause of global soil and water conservation.

Some Things That We Are Not

I have talked about what the WASWC is and I would now like to mention what it is not. I want to mention this because we often get request that we cannot meet. The WASWC is primarily a professional association of soil and water conservationists. It is not a technical assistance agency and it is not a funding agency. Unfortunately, some of our members do not understand this point and we sometime receive requests for funding or for help in setting up projects. Of course, we cannot help with these requests other than putting the people involved in touch with some agency that may be able to help.

The Vision and Mission Statement

The Council is very keen that the WASWC should not only grow in numbers of members in various categories, but that it should also become more responsive to the needs of our members. In other words, we want to become more useful to you all. For this reason, we have been having discussions with our members for about 2 years and have now acquired the “Vision and Mission Statement” (Figure 1) which we intend to follow it as much as possible.

Table 1. WASWC Vision and Mission Statement

Vision	A world in which all soil and water resources are used in a productive, sustainable and ecologically sound manner.
Mission	To promote worldwide the application of wise soil and water management practices that will improve and safeguard the quality of land and water resources so that they continue to meet the needs of agriculture, society and nature.

We invite you to write to us to exchange ideas and make your membership creative, and send articles to publish in our newsletter, so we can continue to function as a forum for soil and water conservationists and academics and professionals in many related fields worldwide.

Thank you very much and with my best wishes.