

Opening by IUSSP President Tom LeGrand

Welcome to the General Assembly – bienvenue à l'Assemblée générale de l'UIESP.

As everyone knows, the last 4 years have been marked by the COVID pandemic. This has required huge changes in how we operate for the secretariat, the council and our scientific panels and other groups – challenges that have largely been met. We quickly pivoted from onsite panel seminars and events like the annual laureate ceremony to webinars, online council meetings, this online General Assembly and most importantly, to making great adjustments to the format and operation of the upcoming IPC to allow it to run as a world-wide cyber conference. The secretariat moved their work to their homes for much of the past 18 months, allowing the business of union to continue seamlessly.

One big worry on the horizon, that Shireen and Nico will address, concerns core funding. Core support from our Hewlett Foundation grant (that has provided our largest source of such funding over the past years) is ending and there is a great deal of uncertainty over whether they will continue funding us in some form in future years. Core support from the French government (with the exception of INED) has similarly ended. I want to express our real gratitude to these institutions for their support over past years, even if to a large degree this is or may be ending. Our grant funding is increasingly coming from projects tied to specific activities (and especially one big project). This puts us in a more precarious funding position and places burdens on the secretariat to manage those additional activities.

Review and adoption of the agenda

I now want to rapidly review the agenda for this meeting (which everyone should already have received). If you want to add something to the agenda, please rapidly write your request using the chat button at the bottom of the screen. (*No one proposed additional items and the agenda was adopted*).

Personal comments and thanks

I want to end my introduction with a few quick personal comments and thanks.

I have been on the IUSSP council, as regular member, Vice President and President for 16 years now. This has been an enormously rewarding experience – working with close colleagues united by our strong belief in the importance of the IUSSP and our common passion to make the union as vibrant and as effective as possible.

In my view, this has been a very good council and bureau – I cannot think of a better group of colleagues with whom I would have liked to work, in face of the drastic changes forced upon us by the COVID pandemic, and also to help the IUSSP move into the future. In particular, our successes in developing the Urban FP program funded by Gates, and the many activities organized around the Data Revolution funded by Hewlett, CIDA and others (both with substantial training components), have given me enormous satisfaction. To everyone: thank you for giving me the opportunity to serve – this has been the high point of my career.

I want to make a special note of thanks from myself, Shireen Jejeebhoy, Nico van Nimwegen, the members of council and the union as a whole, to the IUSSP Secretariat, led by the very able hands of Mary Ellen Zuppan and Paul Monet. Working with them closely over the years has revealed just how dedicated and how good they are, and they have often worked very long hours, showing a flexibility in working well into the evenings or on weekends at times to accommodate activities held in different time zones especially during this time of COVID. Our successes are in large part grounded on the hard work of the secretariat, much of which is not visible to most IUSSP members.

Many other people also deserve special recognition. Essentially all of the substantive work at the IUSSP regarding research, training and international meetings and exchanges are done by our scientific panels, our Early Career Taskforce and several other people who have generously given their time to those activities – volunteers. Simply said, the effectiveness and achievements of the IUSSP relies upon the very substantial efforts of these people and, as with the secretariat, our accomplishments are truly due to them.

Lastly, I want to thank our Indian partners, in particular the Indian Association for the Study of Population headed by Dr Somayajulu, who generously invited us to hold the 2021 conference in Hyderabad and, when that became impossible, maintained their commitments and hard work to making the conference a success. Thank you.

Tom LeGrand