

Committee on Freedom and Responsibility in the conduct of Science (CFRS)

Advice Regarding International Scientific Meetingsⁱ and Visa Issues

Introduction

The universality of science, in its broadest sense, is about developing a truly global scientific community based on equity and non-discrimination. The Principle of the Universality of Science (ICSU Statute 5), adherence to which is a condition for ICSU Membership, underpins this concept. It focuses on the freedoms and responsibilities of science in all its aspects, including the necessity of free movement and association for scientists. As guardian of this Principle, the Committee on Freedom and Responsibility in the conduct of Science (CFRS) developed this document to draw the attention of conference organisers and participants to problems that may arise in this context as well as to suggest ways to help avoid difficulties and increase the chances of a resolution where problems do occur.

Principles

- International scientific meetings arranged or sponsored by ICSU itself or the ICSU Membership must be free from discrimination in attendance based on ethnic origin, religion, citizenship, language, political or other opinion, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, or age;
- Selection and registration procedures for meeting participants must be non-discriminatory;
- Meeting organisers must ensure by all possible means that no bona fide scientist, whose participation in a meeting has been accepted, is excluded from taking part;
- The right of bona fide scientists to attend meetings outside their countries of residence is based on the assumption that they will return to their normal place of residence by the date indicated in their visas. Meeting organisers should make this clear in the meeting information/invitation.

Recommendations for meeting organisers, sponsors and participants

Organisers

- Prior to the selection of a country for a meeting, the relevant government authorities should be approached for assurances that they will facilitate entry visas for bona fide scientists to attend and fully participate in the meeting;
- Ideally, the initial meeting information/invitation should be issued 12 months before the meeting is to take place. At a minimum, a notice period of 6 months should be respected. This initial notification should provide details of how and when to obtain entry visas, and this information should again be distributed in at least one subsequent circular;
- Prospective participants should be informed that, if they encounter any difficulties related to visa applications, they must report them at once to the organisers and that any delay in reporting may make it impossible to provide assistance;
- When difficulties relating to the issuing of visas emerge, they should be reported without delay to the ICSU Member sponsoring the meeting, with as much detail as possible.

Sponsors

- In addition to securing assurances from the organisers, the sponsoring body for a meeting may seek information from CFRS on the past record of the intended host country regarding delivery of visas for foreign meeting participants;
- In the event of difficulties in obtaining visas, the ICSU Member sponsoring the meeting should intervene with the relevant authorities, as appropriate, citing the Principle of Universality of Science, and inform CFRS at once.

Participants

- Visa applications should be made to the appropriate authorities in accordance with the timeframe provided by the meeting organisers. Visa requests by persons who apply in a country of current

residence, which is not that of their citizenship, or whose country of residence/citizenship is experiencing political difficulties with the country hosting the meeting, may need to apply up to 6 months in advance of the meeting;

- Meeting participants should note that when traveling to a meeting destination involves passing through third countries, transit visas may be needed, applications for which may require up to 6 months' leeway. The applicable regulations need to be consulted prior to making travel plans;
- In cases of difficulties over visa applications, an intending participant should report the matter at once to the organisers of the meeting, as delays in reporting may make it impossible to obtain assistance.

Role of CFRS

- Where organisers of a meeting or individual participants encounter visa difficulties that cannot be resolved with the aid of the sponsor(s), CFRS may take action through relevant channels, if provided with the necessary informationⁱⁱ in a timely manner;
- In cases where organisers of a meeting fail to act in conformity with the Principle of the Universality of Science, CFRS may undertake a range of measures to defend that Principle, including: issuing a private protest statement at the local, national or international level; bringing the matter to public attention; and requesting ICSU and/or its Members to withdraw sponsorship, if any, of the meeting;
- In instances where the country hosting a meeting fails to abide by the Principle of the Universality of Science, CFRS may recommend that ICSU Membership not hold, sponsor or participate in future meetings in the country in question until there is evidence that the Principle of Universality of Science is respected.

ⁱ This advice was originally developed with regard to the major international scientific congresses that are organised at regular intervals by ICSU's International Unions and Interdisciplinary Bodies. It is also broadly applicable to other international meetings although it is recognised that it may not always be feasible to fully respect the proposed procedures.

ⁱⁱ Date of invitation to hold the meeting, its agenda and any statement(s) concerning obtaining visas; complete record of the visa application procedure undertaken and responses from the relevant authorities; bona fides of scientist(s) affected – preferably with a CV – including a statement on any prior visit(s) by the relevant scientist(s) to that country; and any reactions, nationally or regionally, to help rectify the problem.