

One billion people, the majority of whom figure among the world's poorest inhabitants, are thought to live in the potential path of a 100-year flood. Floods are the most destructive type of water-related disaster. Between 1991 and 2000, more than 665 000 people died in 2557 natural disasters, 90% of which were water-related. From 1971 to 1995, floods affected more than 1.5 billion people. More than 81 million were left homeless. Asia is most at risk, some 228 000 people having perished between 1987 and 1997 in floods that caused economic losses of \$136 billion.

The idea of a joint UNESCO/WMO programme on floods was first raised by the Intergovernmental Council of UNESCO's International Hydrological Programme (IHP) in June 2002. The Council recommended setting up an intergovernmental joint committee on floods to govern the programme. The proposal was welcomed by the WMO, which liaised with UNESCO to establish a joint Task Team in April this year.

The Team was assisted in drafting the concept paper by the United Nations University's new Environment and Human Security Institute and by the International Association of Hydrological Sciences. The United Nations, International Strategy for Disaster Reduction will be invited to collaborate on the initiative, which will achieve outreach through members of the scientific community, civil society, private sector and insurance industry.

The IHP Council approved the concept paper in Paris (France) in September. The WMO's Commission for Hydrology is due to do likewise in Geneva (Switzerland) in October. The initiative will then be announced to the technical community in London, Ontario (Canada), in December at an international workshop on water and disasters. The official launch will take place at the United Nations World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe (Japan) in January 2005.

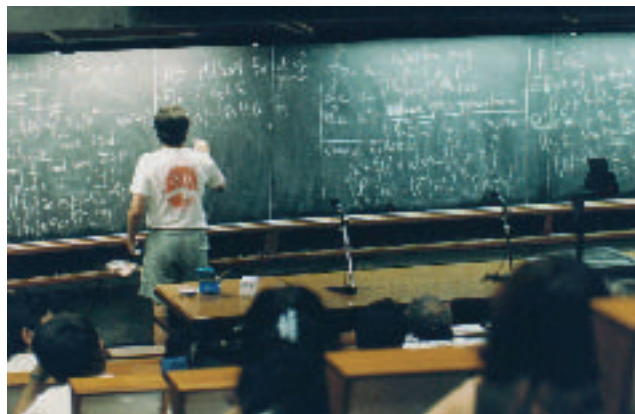
The Public Works Research Institute in Tsukuba (Japan) has offered to host a small secretariat to manage the day-to-day running of the initiative.

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## The ICTP turns 40

**The Abdus Salam International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP) celebrates its 40<sup>th</sup> birthday on 4–5 October with a two-day conference featuring presentations by some of the world's most distinguished scientists, including six Nobel Laureates. The conference will include a roundtable discussion on opportunities for doing science in developing countries.**

Over the past 40 years, some 100 000 scientists from 170 nations have passed through the Centre's doors. They have come for varying lengths of time to do research and



*ICTP school and workshop on dynamic systems in August 2001*

attend activities in the core areas of physics, including high energy physics and condensed matter physics, and mathematics, as well as in such related fields as astrophysics, fluid and plasma dynamics, geophysics, optics, soil physics, synchrotron radiation, and weather and climate. The ICTP sponsors a one-year diploma programme for promising students from the world's least developed countries. In addition, scientists affiliated with the Centre participate in its sponsored off-campus activities both in Italy through the Training in Research in Italian Laboratories Programme and in all regions of the South through the External Activities Programme.

Continual advances in science in the developing world have made the ICTP's task both easier and more difficult; the South is no longer homogeneous, meaning that the Centre can no longer follow a 'one size fits all' strategy.

As the ICTP turns 40, what then is its strategy? Katepalli Sreenivasan, the ICTP's Director, believes that 'the Centre will no doubt continue to encourage and support individual scientists. However, while the Italian government has been generous in its support of the ICTP, the Centre has neither the physical space nor financial resources to welcome every needy and deserving scientist. So it must nurture strong partnerships with like-minded centres of excellence everywhere, particularly in the developing world, and, at the same time, encourage governments in the South to build new regional centres of scientific excellence based on the example of the ICTP. We should also work closely with the ICTP's UN sponsors – UNESCO and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) – as well as others to pay more attention to infrastructure, such as fast Internet connectivity and access to scientific literature'. He concludes that 'the ICTP must move beyond its support of individual scientists and lend its considerable prestige to efforts for institutional changes in developing countries. And it must do all of this while remaining true to its enduring principle that scientific progress depends most of all on scientific integrity and pursuit of excellence. These are its core values'.

*For details: [www.ictp.trieste.it](http://www.ictp.trieste.it)*