

Conference Call

appreciated assistance from our secretariat Sue McClelland and our co-organizers William Tam, Eric Fillion, Andrei Yudin, Robert Batey, and Andre Charette. Generous financial support from more than 20 companies and the University of Toronto (chemistry department, dean, and provost) were absolutely necessary given the complex conditions under which the conference was held. Global concerns over SARS and Toronto's central role in that unfolding drama made everyone from sponsors to speakers, attendees, and organizers uncertain of the viability of the conference. Two outbreaks of SARS at key moments (abstract registration and in the weeks prior to the final registration) led the organizing committee to constantly re-evaluate the feasibility of holding the event. Of course, substantial reductions in the number of participants also put the financial health of the conference at great risk. We were very fortunate and pleased that the speakers agreed to give their lectures under the circumstances, and the scientific content of the conference was never compromised. The conference was held as planned.

The meeting was held in the Isabella Bader Theatre on the campus of the University of Toronto. This newly constructed building is an ideal venue for a medium-sized conference and the proximity of the speakers to the audience provided a good atmosphere for scientific exchange and enthusiastic participation by the conferees. A total of 300 chemists from 20 countries attended the plenary, invited, and short lectures, and presented approximately 100 posters. OMCOS-12 had a high proportion of students attending the meeting, giving short talks and/or posters. Seven plenary lectures (Echavarren, Hartwig, Hayashi, Helmchen, Kocienski, Marek, Mikami) and 15 invited lectures were presented on the latest advances in asymmetric catalysis, new metal-promoted reactions, new catalysts, mechanistic studies, and the utility organometallic reagents in synthesis. The highlight of the conference was the OMCOS Prize Lecture given by Professor Kyoko Nozaki of Tokyo University. We are grateful to the Yen Chuang Foundation and Springer Verlag for the support necessary for the OMCOS Prize.

OMCOS-13 will be held in Geneva, Switzerland, from 17–21 July 2005. Peter Kündig is the chair of the Organizing Committee.

Mark Lautens <mlautens@alchemy.chem.utoronto.ca> is the AstraZeneca Professor of Organic Synthesis in the Department of Chemistry at the University of Toronto, and was the chairman of OMCOS-12.

Analytical Chemistry in Africa

by Nelson Torto

The **Inaugural Conference of the Southern and Eastern Africa Network of Analytical Chemists (SEANAC)** was held in Gaborone, Botswana, from 7–10 July 2003. Since 1999, the analytical chemistry section of the Department of Chemistry at the University of Botswana has been hosting annual international analytical chemistry workshops aimed to enhance the interaction of academia and industry. SEANAC was formed in February 2002 during a Sida (Swedish international development co-operation agency) funded workshop where it was agreed to pool analytical chemistry expertise on issues pertaining to the African continent. SEANAC's main objectives are to promote analytical chemistry through collaboration, research, research training, teaching, and information sharing; to facilitate inventory, access, operation, maintenance, and repairs of analytical equipment; and to collaborate with organizations with similar aims.

The theme of SEANAC's inaugural conference was "Networking for Regional Prosperity." At least 20 different African countries were represented, as well as countries from North America, Europe, and the Middle East. Participation by upcoming scientists and scholars of repute was made possible through the sponsorship of delegates by the Organisation for Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), USA National Science Foundation, Sida, Third World Academy of Sciences, Sigma Xi International and the Commonwealth Science Council.

Before the inaugural conference, graduate students, technicians, chemists, and trainers participated in two-day workshops. Dr. Ron Majors of Agilent Technologies, USA, held a workshop on "Solid Phase Extraction Sample Preparation"; Dr. Gaspar Mhinzi of the University of Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, held a workshop on chemometrics; Prof. James Holcombe of the University of Texas at Houston, USA, held a workshop on "Presenting and Publishing Scientific Data"; and Prof. Omowunmi Sadik of Binghamton University held a workshop on mentorship. The organizers have posted the workshop material on the SEANAC Web site.

The SEANAC inaugural conference was officially opened by the Minister of Communication, Science, and Technology, Hon. Boyce Sebetela, after delegates were given an overview of the functions of IUPAC by Prof. Roger Smith (UK), who attended as an IUPAC

Conference Call

representative. The plenary lectures on the first day were given by Prof. Sadik (USA), Prof. Lo Gorton (Sweden), Prof. Damia Barcelo (Spain), and Dr. Roland Schnurpfeil (Germany). Sadik gave an excellent talk on trends and challenges in biochemical sensors for chemical and environmental monitoring. Of relevance to Africa was the promise shown by biosensors for rapid diagnosis of HIV as an alternative to ELISA. Barcelo discussed the integration of chemical analysis and the effects of studies of carps and yeast on endocrine disruptors in sewage treatment plants receiving waters and sediments. In his plenary lecture, Gorton outlined the fundamental and applied aspects of enzyme-based amperometric biosensors. Schnurpfeil gave an interesting account of the Proteiner: the integrated mass spectrometry based proteomic suite that facilitates the acquisition of information from various samples.

In the first plenary lecture on the second day, Prof. Gyorgy Marko-Varga (Sweden) discussed proteomics in disease. The other plenary lectures on this day were given by Prof. Roger Smith, on the problems of accurate method transferability in HPLC, and Prof. Douglas Rawlings (South Africa), on "The Mobility-Assisted Dissolution of Minerals and its Use in the Mining Industry." The last two plenary lectures were by Prof. S. B. Jonnalagadda (South Africa), who spoke about the "Scope and Potential of Seawater in Treatment of Sewage Waters" and Drs. Walter Benson and Albert Poland of IOCD, who talked about African analytical chemistry trainers.

The plenary lectures given on the third day were by Profs. Jorge Gardea-Torresdey (USA), Luc Nagels (Belgium), Robert McCrindle (South Africa) and Prof. Geoffrey Kamau (Kenya). Gardea-Torresdey gave an interesting lecture on "Phytoremediation Technologies for the Removal of Toxic Heavy Metal Ions from Contaminated Waters and Soil." Nagels address was on "Potentiometric Detection for HPLC is a Reality-Which Classes of Ionic Organic Substances are the Targets?" McCrindle discussed the "Speciation of Cr(III) and Cr(VI) in Cement by AAS." Kamau gave a lecture on "Myoglobin as a Potential Catalyst for the Decomposition of Persistent Organohalide Pollutants: Selective Control and Rate Enhancement." Dr. Ron Majors (USA) concluded the plenary session with his lecture on "New Directions in HPLC Column Technology for Rapid, Efficient, and Selective Separations."

Sigma Xi Interational sponsored the prize for the best oral and poster presentation. Because of the high quality of the oral presentations, the team of judges (Profs Holcombe, Gardea-Torresdey, Lindner, and Sadik) decided to contribute their own money in order to give two prizes for the best oral presentation instead of one. The prizes for best oral presentation were awarded to Harriet Okatch, a Ph.D. student at the University of Botswana, and Solommon Ssenyange, a PhD student at the University of Alberta, Canada. The award for best poster presentation was given to Ms. Aoife Morrin, a PhD student at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa.

On the last day of the conference plenary lectures were given by Profs Erno Lindner (USA), James A Holcombe (USA), Dr. Ghirma Moges (Netherlands), and Profs Malin Akerblom and Henrik Kylin. Lindner talked about "Microfabricated Electrochemical Sensors and Their Application in Bedside Analysis and Homecare Diagnostics." Holcombe lectured on "Trace Metal Analysis and Development of a Novel Means of Metals Remediation in the Environment Using Immobilized Biopolymers." Moges discussed glutamate oxidase advances. Akerblom and Kylin discussed "Low-Tech Methods for Pesticide Residue Analysis." Dr. John Makhubalo from OPCW provided an overview of the activities and opportunities within OPCW.

Despite the fact that the conference venue had to be changed two weeks before the conference due to U.S. President Bush's visit to Botswana, the conference proceeded without any problems. The 150 conference delegates had the opportunity to listen to 115 lectures that included 18 keynote lectures as well as 50 poster presentations over a 3-day period. The set-up facilitated formal and informal interaction, as all lecture sessions were in one room. All credit goes to the delegates, organizing committee (Dr. J. Catherine Ngila, secretary; Mathew Nindi, treasurer; and the program officers, Drs. Gerald Sawula and Veronica Obuseng), the international advisory committee, and the sponsors for making the inaugural conference a success. The next SEANAC meeting is scheduled for 2005 in Botswana.

Nelson Torto <torton@mopipi.ub.bw> was the chairman of the Organizing Committee, SEANAC secretary general, and conference editor for the *Pure and Applied Chemistry* issue for the SEANAC Inaugural conference.