

REPORT

6th Pan African Environmental Mutagen Society Conference

The 6th Pan African Environmental Mutagen Society Conference (PAEMS 2008) was held in Cape Town, South Africa at the Cape Town International Convention Centre from 3-5 November 2008. The PAEMS 2008 conference follows on successful scientific meetings that were held in different African countries since 1993. Meetings took place every 3-4 years, i.e. in Egypt (1993 and 2003), South Africa (1996), Zimbabwe (1999) and Morocco (2005). The Organising Committee of the PAEMS 2008 conference consisted of 14 members, mainly scientists from South Africa, with Dr. Hester Vismer as the Chairperson.

More than one hundred delegates from 21 countries attended PAEMS 2008 (Fig. 1). Ten countries from Africa were represented and included Egypt, Tunisia, Cameroon, Nigeria, Morocco, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Botswana, South Africa and Mauritius. The other countries that were represented were Croatia, Slovakia, Poland, Russia, Switzerland, India, France, Germany, Italy, United Kingdom and USA.



Figure 1. Some of the delegates attending the 6th PAEMS conference at the Cape Town Convention Centre (CTICC) in Cape Town, South Africa, 3-5 November 2008.

Participants could participate in two satellite courses, one on Scientific Writing presented by Prof. John Leslie from Kansas State University, Kansas, USA, held before the conference on 2 November 2008, and the other on Current Trends in Genetic Toxicity Assessment following the conference on 6 November 2008. Dr. Jeanine Marnewick from South Africa co-ordinated the latter workshop and the presenters for this course were: Dr. David DeMarini (USA), Prof. Volker Mersch-Sundermann (Germany) and Prof. Wagida Anwar (Egypt). Each course was attended by thirty delegates, many of whom were sponsored.

Eminent scientists from all over the world were invited as plenary and invited speakers, including Prof. Wagida Anwar (Department of Community, Environmental and Occupational Medicine, Ain Shams University, Egypt); Prof. Theeshan Bahorun (Department of Biosciences, University of Mauritius, Republic

of Mauritius); Dr. David DeMarini (US Environmental Protection Agency and President of the International Association of Environmental Mutagen Societies (IAEMS)); Prof. Wentzel Gelderblom (Director of the PROMEC Unit, Medical Research Council, South Africa); Prof. Mary Gulumian (National Institute for Occupational Health, South Africa); Prof. Michael Kew (Department of Medicine, University of Cape Town, South Africa); Prof. Volker Mersch-Sundermann (Director of the Department of Environmental Health Sciences, University Medical Centre Freiburg, Freiburg, Germany); Prof. Iqbal Parker (Director of the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, University of Cape Town, South Africa) and Prof. Chris Wild (Director-elect of the International Agency for Research on Cancer). These and other speakers set the scene for the topics that were discussed during nine sessions of the conference, i.e. Air-, Water-, Food-borne and Occupational Mutagens and Carcinogens, Antimutagenesis, Chemoprevention, Cancer, DNA Repair, Genomics, Genotoxic Risk Factors, Micro-organisms as Mutagens and Carcinogens, Molecular Mechanisms of Mutagenesis and Carcinogenesis, Radiation as a Mutagen and Carcinogen, Risk Assessment and Intervention Strategies. Sessions were generally well attended. The full programme and book of abstracts can be viewed at: <http://www.mrc.ac.za/promec/paems/>

Attended poster sessions formed an important part of the programme. More than 50 posters were presented on the topics mentioned above. Three poster prizes, gold, silver and bronze, for scientists younger than 35 years, were awarded. Four independent poster judges, three international and one local judge, selected the winning posters. Poster prizes were sponsored by the PROMEC Unit of the Medical Research Council of South Africa. The gold poster award was won by Ms Lorraine Moses for her work on “Real-time PCR analyses of fumonisin biosynthetic *fum* genes in *Fusarium verticillioides* MRC 826 subcultures” (Fig. 2), the silver award by Ms Hester-Marie Burger for her work on “The importance of using validated dietary assessment tools in human exposure studies: *A case for mycotoxin exposure in the former Transkei region, South Africa*” and the bronze award by Ms Ivonne Schuhr “The antioxidant potential of oleic acid and effect on cell survival in carcinogenesis”, all three PhD students in South Africa.



Figure 2. Prof. Wentzel Gelderblom (left) handing the Gold Award for the best poster to Ms Lorraine Moses (right).

The main goals of the PAEMS are to spread new information and technologies concerning Environmental Mutagens and Carcinogens and to stimulate cooperation and to present training programmes between countries in Africa and countries abroad. It is for this reason that the organisers sincerely thanked the sponsors for their financial support, which enabled the Organising Committee to give sponsorships to 38 participants, mainly to young scientists from Africa. Eighteen were for the waiver of conference registration fees, 11 for registration and accommodation and nine full sponsorships (conference registration, accommodation, air tickets and registration for satellite courses). The main sponsors for the conference were

the Medical Research Council (Corporate, Diabetes Discovery Platform and Technology and Innovation Directorate), Southern African Regional Co-operation in Biochemistry, Molecular Biology and Biotechnology (SARBIO) in collaboration with the International Program in the Chemical Sciences (IPICS), the International Association of Environmental Mutagen Societies (IAEMS), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Cancer Association of South Africa (CANSAs) and the Water Research Commission (South Africa). Sponsors were acknowledged during the conference, in the book of abstracts and the final programme of the conference.

The General Assembly of the PAEMS took place during the conference and it is clear that the society faces many challenges. The main concerns are the financial constraints and limitations of resources, difficulties in collecting membership fees from delegates in African countries, the inconsistency of representations from different African countries, amongst other issues. The revised PAEMS constitution and membership forms were distributed amongst the members present at the General Assembly as well to delegates attending the conference to facilitate the sustainability of the PAEMS activities and to recruit new members.

The current Officers of the PAEMS are: Dr. Hester Vismer (President, South Africa), Prof. Wagida Anwar (President-Elect, Egypt), Prof. Fatima-Zahra Squali (Former President, Morocco), Prof. Alaoui Abdelilah (First Vice-President, Morocco), Prof. Roland Ndip (Second Vice-President, South Africa), Prof. Wentzel Gelderblom (Secretary General, South Africa), Dr. Gordon Shephard (Treasurer, South Africa).

For the first time in the history of the PAEMS, honorary membership was awarded to one of its members. Prof. Wagida Anwar from Egypt received this distinction for her unsurpassed dedication to the Society since 1992 (Fig. 3).



Figure 3. Prof. Wagida Anwar (right) receiving honorary membership of the PAEMS during an award ceremony at the conference from Prof. Walter Marasas (left), a former President of the PAEMS.

Sincere thanks were given to the PAEMS 2008 Organising Committee for the time and commitment that they have put into organising this conference, and the sponsors for their financial support.

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