

SOUTH AFRICAN COUNCIL FOR AUTOMATION AND CONTROL

REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT FOR 2008

After the momentous events of 2007, 2008 was always going to be a more modest year for SACAC. In the event, much has happened, both within SACAC and the wider world in which we operate, some positives as well as more depressing news.

Our AGM last year approved our change of name to the South African Council for Automation and Control, to better align our image with that of IFAC. SACAC was founded in 1961 to serve, primarily, as the National Member Organisation for IFAC in South Africa. It is my sad duty to inform you of the passing away of the last of our founders, JDN (“Naude”) van Wyk, on the 15th of June, 2008. I’d like to think that he would approve of our continuing development as an organisation, although it is a pity that he will not be here to experience the 19th IFAC World Congress that we will be hosting in Cape Town in 2014. I’d like to ask you all to stand for a few moments in silence as we remember him.

The 2008 World Congress was held in Seoul, South Korea, and there were around a dozen participants from South Africa, most of whom presented papers. I regret that I wasn’t able to attend myself, due to a late change in corporate responsibilities, but I understand that the event went well. SACAC had planned to host a Friendship Evening for invited IFAC officers and delegates but we eventually decided not to proceed when it became apparent that the available hospitality package from the conference hotel did not suit our needs – the cost of bringing in our own South African wines and flowers was exorbitant and, without those touches, it would have been just another party. We expect to host a more formal event at the next World Congress, in Milan in 2011, but will not have to compete with other delegations for a date and venue. Several of our members have been elected to IFAC technical committees for the next triennium and, of course, Ian Craig is now officially President Elect and has other duties that come with that office. I am also pleased to report that Xiaohua Xia has been elected Chairman of the TC on Non-linear Control Systems, only the second South African representative to head a TC (Iain Macleod was the first), while Fernando Camisani has been elected to the Policy Committee.

We held but two events on home territory during 2008, since many of our Executive Committee members, and potential organisers, found themselves too busy due to work pressures. A postgraduate day at Wits University in June was well-attended, and it was heartening to see the wide variety of research interests across our tertiary institutions. A symposium on ‘Control in the Green World’ took place in November and covered a variety of topics with an environmental theme. Looking forward, we have a number of ideas for events to be held in 2009 and we have started organising for the IFAC Symposium on Control in Mining, Minerals and Metal Processing (‘MMM’) that we will be hosting in Cape Town in August, 2010. We are also looking at a logo, and subsequently a banner, for the 2014 World Congress, to be unveiled at the 2011 event in Milan. There will be a lot more to organise over the next couple of years in preparation for 2014 and we are using the 2010 MMM as a “practice run” for the main event.

I referred briefly last year to the power supply interruptions that were then being experienced – little did we know that they were just a portent of serious economic trouble to follow, both locally and globally. While there were clearly some political factors behind Eskom’s predicament, in other

respects the root cause was the same – too much money chasing elusive and, as it turned out, illusory returns instead of being invested in productive assets such as generating stations. SACAC depends for its existence, in large measure, on direct and indirect sponsorship from large companies, government and parastatal organisations and our major universities. All of these entities are now facing financial stress and we are already seeing the results in terms of cuts in travel and entertainment budgets, retrenchments and early retirements, corporate reorganisations and greater time pressures on those remaining employed. We need to build SACAC in order to meet our commitment to IFAC in respect of 2014, but we will have to work hard just to ensure our survival for the next couple of years. That said, I have every confidence in the strength and depth of our membership, as represented here today, and I wish my successor as President every success for 2009 and beyond.

Finally, I would like to extend my personal thanks to all of you who have contributed to the smooth running of SACAC during my reign as President, in particular Jean McKenzie and Reina Aviges of JCCI for their efficient administration. Fernando Camisani has handled our finances as well as our website for the past few years, John Viljoen has been my Vice –President and, of course, Ian Craig has been our key man in all IFAC matters. I thank you all for your support and hope to see SACAC continuing to grow and succeed in future as we build towards the 19th IFAC World Congress in 2014.

Richard Roberts

6th March, 2009