

INTERCIENCIA, A SCIENTIFIC DIPLOMACY EXPERIMENT IN THE AMERICAS*

Diplomacy is the art and practice of conducting negotiations between nations. Scientists are not nations, but in each country they constitute a small and influential community of highly trained people dedicated to teaching and research, with important international relationships that promote scientific brotherhood and diplomacy. In what might well be the earliest non-governmental effort to bring together the scientific communities of the Americas, the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) joined efforts with the Brazilian Society for the Advancement of Science (SBPC) and the Venezuelan Association for the Advancement of Science (AsoVAC) to establish the Interciencia Association in 1974. The three institutions chartered the Association in Venezuela in 1975 and, in 2017 it was chartered in Chile.

Latin American countries have been hit by Covid-19 in a disproportionately high measure. At the time of writing, the proportion of cases reported in the region is over twice its share of the world population, and deaths amount to 30%. The Interciencia Association has been active in fostering the exchange of information among its scientific communities. It released a declaration of member associations in eleven countries of the region calling for coordinated actions based on science and technology. In turn, the *Interciencia* journal editorialized, already in the March issue, on the risks of facing one of the worst pests faced by mankind, the danger of false information and the need to guide solutions by science, not politics, while informing in April details of a successful case of pandemic handling, that of Taiwan. The virtual forums organized by the Association covering the Covid-19 pandemic situation in the different Latin American countries contributed to disseminate information about successes and errors in its handling. But, what is the Interciencia Association?

Visionaries from AAAS, AsoVAC and SBPC (Philip Abelson and Leonard Rieser, Salvatore Pluchino and Oscar Sala) defined the mission of the Interciencia Association as “to unite the scientific communities of the Americas and promote the cooperative use of science, technology and innovation for the regional and national development”. Initially, activities centered on three objectives: to encourage and facilitate the establishment of associations for the advancement of science in Latin American and Caribbean countries; to or-

ganize scientific meetings, providing a setting for interactions and exchanges among scientists and; to publish *Interciencia*, a trilingual journal dedicated to stimulate scientific research, its humanitarian use and the study of its social context, especially in the region, and to promote communication between the scientific and technological communities of the Americas.

A large number of symposia on specialized topics have been organized by the Association since its beginnings in the different member countries, mainly in the areas of environment, ecology, biodiversity, ethnobotany, energy and, science and technology policy, as a means to promote scientific exchanges and cooperation in the region. These events gather outstanding personalities in their fields in the different countries and have led to several special issues of the *Interciencia* journal.

The journal has provided a channel for the diffusion of peer reviewed research results and of scientific activities in the region during 45 uninterrupted years, over 20 of which it has been published as an open access journal in digital form. Most of its material is published in Spanish and Portuguese, thus reaching local audiences, and is widely read the world over.

Finally, the Association has granted since 2004 the Interciencia Awards. Under the auspices of the Government of Canada, through the Francophone Association pour le Savoir (ACFAS), and of HydroQuebec, these awards are aimed to recognize outstanding Latin American researchers in the Life Sciences, Ecology and Biodiversity, and Energy. In 2020 the Interciencia Association joined the Ibero American Organization for Education, Science and Culture (OEI) and the Argentinean Association for the Progress of Science (AAPC) in establishing the Dr. Eduardo Charreau Prize for Regional Cooperation in Science and Technology. Also, starting in 2021, it will grant annually the Leonard M. Rieser Young Scientist Award to recognize and support young scientists in Latin America, sponsored by the Rieser Endowment Fund for Interciencia.

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* This is a reprint of the Editorial published in the issue of November 2020, written jointly with Mahabir Gupta a few days before his passing, on December 14, 2020, and which is the last contribution of this great friend, most prominent Panamanian scientist and pillar of international scientific cooperation through his dedication to CYED and the Interciencia Association.