

CLAUDE LORIUS'S RESPONSE TO AWARD OF SCAR MEDAL FOR INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC COORDINATION 2008

This medal is for me a privilege reflecting the fact that right from its beginning SCAR knew how to be interested not only in science but also in problems like climate change that concern our society and that are so large they can only be tackled cooperatively. This 'social' tone to our research was evident 50 years ago, when the cooperative scientific research of the IGY led to the signature of the Antarctic Treaty - a Treaty with protocols that address a major societal challenge: the protection of our environment and biodiversity. I was fortunate to be practicing as a scientist early in the post-IGY development of campaigns to study the history of our planet that is locked away in ice cores, and which we could not do without international cooperation. It was thanks to the scientific will for such collaboration that we stumbled into the wonderful saga of the Vostok ice cores. The outstanding success we had with the Vostok cores was for me a symbol of what humans could achieve if they worked together, instead of fighting each other in the "Cold War" that raged outside our scientific cocoon. In my mind the IPY is somewhat similar, a chance for us to show what can be done when all nations pull together in a coordinated way. Today we can begin to elaborate in great detail how the climate system works, at least as far as the polar regions are concerned. It requires not only collaboration in Antarctica, but also in Greenland, and between the two. A grand challenge. That detail is vital as a historical frame of reference against which we can judge how change may occur in the future, and from which we can derive scientific advice for the people who must make the decisions – the policy makers. SCAR is still at the forefront, 50 years on, in providing this advice, on climate, on the environment, and on biodiversity, to the Treaty Parties.

You will see that I mentioned the other pole – the Arctic. That is because I also participated in the activities of SCAR's Arctic counterpart, IASC. This linkage between the research communities of both poles in my career is symptomatic of the extent to which we must now collaborate across the planet in order to address the big questions of the day. In that context I enjoy the fact that this medal is awarded to me at this symposium, which gathers together the researchers of both poles; their joint expertise and sagacity are necessary in a geopolitical context which will not spare both poles in the more or less long term.

This award made me reflect on my researcher's career on polar ice. I see a long list of scientific articles, some of them no doubt useful, though I know that scientists, like all Men, have a certain tendency to be forgiving in the estimate of their own contribution. How can we judge ourselves? For me, the delivery of this prestigious medal is a truer judgement – the sentence of my peers. It is greatly appreciated as a gift – one that celebrates the closing of a chapter for someone who was there on the ice 50 years ago.

Now it is time to say "farewell" by thanking all of my friends who participated in my adventure, but also all those who made of SCAR a community of friends and who gave it a bright future - to whom I wish long life.

Finally - Think cooperation. Think SCAR!