

CONGRESS AND COUNCIL MEETING

Denis Crane, FAOBMB representative, reports on the FAOBMB Congress and Council Meeting held in Bangkok, Thailand. Photos courtesy of Phillip Nagley.

The 13th FAOBMB Congress, themed 'Discovery of Life Processes: From Biomolecules to Systems Biology', was held at the Bangkok International Trade and Exhibition Center (BITEC) from 25–29 November 2012. The congress was opened by the Privy Councillor, His Excellency Mr Ampol Senanarong, representing the Thai constitutional government. The Congress Chairperson was Professor Piamsook Pongsawasdi who, with her enthusiastic Organising Committee, ensured that this was a very successful and thoroughly enjoyable meeting, both scientifically and socially. Not only were the Thai organisers very generous hosts but the meeting also served to provide a spotlight on the increasingly high quality research being undertaken in Thailand. There were approximately 535 registrants for the Congress, of which 156 were non-Thai. The Congress had a sizeable ASBMB contingent.



Dancers in traditional costume (all undergraduate students from Northern Thailand) performing at the Congress Banquet.

Professor Andrew Wang (FAOBMB President) presents Professor Michael Parker with the 2012 FAOBMB Award for Research Excellence.



Education workshop on constructing molecular models. From left: Graham Parslow, Janet Macaulay, Susan Howitt and Paul Attwood.

The FAOBMB Council Meeting preceded the official Congress program on Sunday 25 November, with Denis Crane as the Australian delegate (ASBMB representative). The President's report emphasised the high quality of applications for the FAOBMB Award for Research Excellence and the Young Scientist Award (YSA), reflecting the growing reputation of the FAOBMB and its scientific meetings. Many applicants for these awards were ASBMB members. For 2013, there will also be the inaugural triennial FAOBMB Education Award.

The Council meeting recognised changes to a number of key FAOBMB executive positions, namely, President Elect, Professor Kiyoshi Fukui (Japan) to take office from 2013, and Secretary General for 2012–14, Professor Phillip Nagley (Australia) who replaced another Australian, Professor John de Jersey. A report from OzBio2010 in Melbourne, a joint IUBMB-FAOBMB-ComBio conference, highlighted the financial success of this meeting, with surplus funds being returned to FAOBMB, as also occurred with the subsequent FAOBMB conference held in Singapore in 2011. Future FAOBMB meetings include: 2013 FAOBMB Conference, Dhaka, Bangladesh (16–19 December); 2014 IUBMB-FAOBMB Conference, Taipei, Taiwan (21–26 October); 2015 FAOBMB Congress, Hyderabad, India (dates to be advised).

The scientific program of the FAOBMB Congress was of high quality, with symposium sessions ranging from 'Genes and Genomes' to 'Stem Cell and Developmental Biology' and 'Bionanotechnology'. The highlight of the congress was the opening plenary lecture by 2009 Chemistry Nobel Prize winner, Professor Ada Yonath (Israel). Professor Yonath provided a fascinating account of her innovative research career investigating the structure of the eukaryote ribosome. Australians figured prominently in the keynote lecture program. Professor Michael Parker (St Vincent's Institute of Medical Research) was the winner of the 2012 FAOBMB Award for Research Excellence. He provided an excellent account of his research innovations spanning the structural determinations of membrane-associated proteins, in a talk titled 'Membrane proteins: a toxic choice'. Professor Merlin Crossley (University of NSW) delivered a typical thought-provoking and animated plenary lecture (the FAOBMB Lecture) on 'Transcription factors in human genetic disease'. Dr Jade Forwood (Charles Sturt University), winner of the male category YSA, spoke on his rapidly developing research activity in a talk on 'Structural and functional characterisation of acyl-CoA thioesterases'.

Other keynote plenary lectures included those of Chi-Huey Wong (Taiwan) on 'Recent advances in glycoscience: from discovery to innovation'; Nigel Scrutton (UK) on 'Quantum biology of enzymatic H-transfer'; Kanury Rao (India) on 'Deciphering the host-pathogen interplay in human macrophages infected with *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*'; and Michael Marletta (USA) on 'Building selective gas sensors: nature's way'.

Other ASBMB members who contributed to the Congress included invited symposium speakers Paul Attwood (University of Western Australia), Briony Forbes (University of Adelaide), Lisa Martin (Monash University) and Phillip Nagley (Monash University). The Education Symposium featured invited speakers Graham Parslow (University of Melbourne), Susan Howitt (Australian National University) and Janet Macaulay (Monash University). Phillip Nagley chaired a number of the plenary speaker sessions, which he carried out with typical aplomb. Symposium co-chairs included Paul Attwood, Denis Crane (Griffith University) and Janet Macaulay.

The final session of the Congress was a lively panel discussion on 'Biochemistry and molecular biology in 2020: for fighting against disasters and disease'.

The Loy Krathong ceremony during the Congress Banquet was a social highlight. Loy Krathong is an annual festival where decorative little lotus-shaped boats carrying flowers, incense sticks and candles are floated on water and wishes are made. For the overseas visitors to Bangkok, the Congress activities concluded with a delightful tour of the Grand Palace and the Temple of Emerald Buddha.

Ancillary to the Congress was a Young Scientists Program (YSP), attended by 27 delegates selected competitively from countries across the FAOBMB region, plus the two 2012 YSA winners. This event, co-organised by the Science Society of Thailand and the National Science Museum, was held before the Congress, from 23–25 November, at the Sirindhorn Science Home in Bangkok. ASBMB supported two young scientists to this program through competitive travel fellowships – Tatiana Pereira Soares da Costa (University of Adelaide) and Ivan Hong Wee Ng (Monash University). See the accompanying report from these ASBMB YSP-Travel

Fellows. The program comprised a good balance of scientific exchange and socialising, with excellent presentations from all the early career scientists. Phillip Nagley participated in the Career Development session at the YSP, with a talk on his life's work and advice for early career scientists. Tatiana won the YSP Awards for both Best Mini-talk and Best Poster Presentation. Both Tatiana and Ivan presented their work in oral presentations (amongst seven chosen from the YSP delegates) in the Young Scientist Session on the final day of the Congress.

2012 Young Scientist Award winners Lai Kuan Goh (Malaysia) and Jade Forwood (Australia).



Professor Phillip Nagley (FAOBMB Secretary General) presents Tatiana Pereira Soares da Costa with the YSP Awards for Best Mini-talk and Poster Presentation.

THE LAND OF A THOUSAND SMILES

Ivan Ng and Tatiana Soares da Costa, ASBMB FAOBMB YSP Travel Fellowship awardees, report on the FAOBMB Young Scientist Program and Congress held in Bangkok, Thailand.

It was a great honour to receive the ASBMB Young Scientist Program (YSP) Travel Fellowships. We attended the FAOBMB YSP, followed by the 13th FAOBMB Congress. The YSP facilitated the establishment of a regional network and the exchange of scientific information between international young scientists.



Kick-starting the Thailand FAOBMB experience was the three-day Young Scientist Program attended by 29 delegates, including two Young Scientist Award recipients, from around the Asia Pacific region. The organisers did a great job hosting the YSP at the Thailand Science Park, where research facilities (such as BIOTEC, which we toured) and biotechnological companies were located. This gave us a glimpse of the high quality research undertaken in Thailand. The generosity of the Thai organisers was demonstrated with the sumptuous local cuisine and chalet style accommodation provided during the stay in Sirindhorn Science Home. In order to promote collaborations and the exchange of ideas, efforts were made by the organisers to allocate two delegates from different nationalities in each shared room to encourage the building of friendships. Some of the delegates were first-time travellers and the YSP gave them the chance to make connections before the Congress. There was a friendly environment for networking and the exchange of culture and scientific ideas amongst young scientists.

The YSP gave every awardee a chance to present their work, ranging from protein structures to agriculture, through either an oral presentation or mini-talk, plus a poster presentation over two days. As both of us were selected to give an oral presentation during the Congress, we were challenged to present a summarised version of our work within five minutes during the mini-talk sessions. We were also honoured to hear Professor Andrew Wang (President of FAOBMB, Taiwan) and Professor Ada Yonath (Nobel Laureate, Israel) present great talks about their long and distinguished scientific careers. As young scientists, our career development is equally important as the scientific research we are doing and we were glad to be given career advice by Professor Phillip Nagley (Australia) and Professor Jisnuson Svasti (Thailand). It made us realise the importance of having a good mentor.



Denis Crane presents Ivan with the YSP certificate.

Impromptu Gangnam Style dance with Ivan at the centre of attention.



Not so serious cooking demonstration.

Despite the intense schedule, the organisers provided free time where we could go for a swim, cycle around the Science Park or play a game of basketball. The social highlight of the YSP was at the dinner party where the organisers gave us an entertaining cooking demonstration of the Thai dish, tom yum goong. During the ice breaker session, an impromptu 'Gangnam Style' dance was performed by several delegates, providing lots of laughter. The party was rounded out by a demonstration of traditional Thai dance. Everyone ended up dancing to the music with twisting hand gestures.

The YSP and Congress were rewarding and inspiring events. New ideas were generated from lectures and presentations, in addition to useful advice and feedback given during poster and oral discussions. The life stories of established scientific leaders inspired us to pursue our goals with determination. Of utmost importance were the people we were fortunate to meet during the YSP and the Congress, who provided a memorable time in Bangkok and the possibility of collaborations in the future.

Denis Crane presents Tatiana with the YSP certificate.

