

## Feature Article

# Thirty-Three Years of The Federation of Asian and Oceanian Biochemists and Molecular Biologists (FAOBMB) (1972–2005)

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My official duty as a member (1997–2003) of the IUBMB Executive Committee (EC) was to act as a liaison with ICSU (International Council for Science) and to establish bridges with other International Scientific Unions for joint activities and interdisciplinary cooperation (*I*). This portfolio was established in 1982 and abolished in 2003. I was also the liaison member for the EC to the Federation of Asian and Oceanian Biochemists and Molecular Biologists (FAOBMB). On the occasion of commemorating the jubilee of the IUBMB, I would like to write with pleasure a brief history of the FAOBMB.

The FAOBMB is one of the Associated Organizations of the IUBMB and was the first regional association in biochemistry to focus on its promotion and development in the Asian and Oceanian regions. The brief history says that it was in mid July, 1972 when three biochemists, Professors Edwin C. Webb, N. R. Moudgal, and Takashi Murachi as delegates of the Australian Biochemical Society, the Indian Society of Biological Chemists, and the Japanese Biochemical Society, respectively, conferred in Adelaide, Australia with Professor W. H. Elliot in attendance. They deliberated on the matter of founding a Federation of Asian and Oceanian Biochemists (FAOB) and decided that the FAOB was jointly founded by the three members on 1 August 1972. The membership grew rapidly and there are now 20 adhering societies, from Australia, Bangladesh, China, Hawaii, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Taipei China, Thailand, and Viet Nam.

On 8 December 1992, the Federation became officially incorporated as a non-profit, tax-exempt association (FAOB, Inc.) in Melbourne, Australia and undertook a change in name to the Federation of Asian and Oceanian Biochemists and Molecular Biologists (FAOBMB, Inc.). The Federation's logo, adopted in 1989 and modified in 1993 to include the change in name, reflects the dynamic nature of FAOBMB and

the continual flow of information in biochemistry and molecular biology among the member societies. The motto of FAOBMB is 'a Federation that exists for and exists through the cooperation of its Constituent Members'. The governance of the Federation is conducted by a FAOBMB Council represented by one delegate from each Constituent Member and four Executive Officers. The Officers are President, Secretary-General, Treasurer and President-Elect or Immediate Past President. Two delegates, elected by the Council, serve as the Chairpersons of the Education Committee and of the Travel Fellowships Committee.

Since its founding 33 years ago, the FAOBMB has developed steadily, playing an important catalytic role in stimulating life sciences in countries of the region and working in close association with the IUBMB in support of their common goals (see Table 1). Presently, the Federation's 20 Constituent Members represent in excess of 20,000 active scientists with some 20 Special Members and three distinguished Honorary Members. The member societies are heterogeneous in respect of their history and academic capability, yet share equal partnership and responsibility in governance and the decision-making process. For example, the Japanese Biochemical Society has 11,000 biochemists and 80 years of history in 2005, while the smallest groups such as Nepal and Myanmar have only 20–40 members and have been in existence for less than 20 years. Only 10 of the FAOBMB Constituent Members are Adhering Bodies to the IUBMB and five are Associate Adhering Bodies. The organization and the activities of the other five societies/groups are immature at present, but the FAOBMB Council is encouraging them to apply for the IUBMB Membership in the near future.

The FAOBMB began sponsoring its own scientific meetings in 1977. FAOBMB Congresses, organized triennially, and FAOBMB Symposia, held in intervening years, are major scientific activities, which are co-hosted by a local society or group and sponsored by the IUBMB (Table 2). A Congress, 1,000–2,000 participants in size, is a gathering for discussing and presenting major topics in biochemistry and molecular biology and has become a main event in the biochemical calendar of the region. A Symposium, with 100–300

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**Table 1** Chronology of FAOB(MB) Presidents, Secretaries-General and Treasurers

<i>Presidents:</i>		
Edwin C. Webb	Australia	1972–1974
Anthony W. Linnane	Australia	1975–1977
Kazutomo Imahori	Japan	1978–1980
Osamu Hayaishi	Japan	1981–1983
Bimal K. Bacchawat	India	1984–1986
Takashi Murachi	Japan	1987–1989
Jisnuson Svasti	Thailand	1990–1992
Nadhipuram V. Bhagavan	Hawaii	1993–1995
Yasuhiro Anraku	Japan	1996–1998
William H. Sawyer	Australia	1999–2001
Lin Qi-Shui	China	2002–2004
Kyun Soo Hahm	Korea	2005–2007
<i>Secretaries-General/Treasurers:</i>		
N. R. Mougald	India	1972–1975
Takashi Murachi	Japan	1976
<i>Secretaries-General:</i>		
Mervyn G. Smith	New Zealand	1977–1979
Fyfe L. Bygrave	Australia	1980–1987
Kay Hoon Lee	Singapore	1988–1993
Lin Qi-Shui	China	1994–1999
Khoo Hoon-Eng	Singapore	2000–2005
<i>Treasurers:</i>		
Serene Vimokesant	Thailand	1977–1980
Jisnuson Svasti	Thailand	1981–1986
Nadhipuram V. Bhagavan	Hawaii	1987–1992
Yasuhiro Anraku	Japan	1993–1995
Si Myung Byun	Korea	1996–2001
Kiyoshi Kita	Japan	2002–2007

attendees, is used to focus on local scientific matters or specific topics in the region, depending on the host organization. The FAOBMB has several Endowment Funds, interest from which is used to sponsor Plenary Lectureships at every FAOBMB Congress: These are the Osamu Hayaishi Lecture, the Takashi Murachi Memorial Lecture, the Jisnuson Svasti Lecture and the Kunio Yagi Lecture. In 2003, the Federation accepted a new Endowment Fund from Yasuhiro Anraku and decided to found a FAOBMB Young Scientist Award. The first awardees will be honored at the 11th FAOBMB Congress/20th IUBMB Congress in Kyoto in 2006.

I served the FAOBMB for 8 years as Treasurer (1993–1995), President (1996–1998) and Immediate Past President (1999–2000). During that time biochemistry had already merged with molecular biology and begun to move toward genome sciences and ‘-ome biologies’. Young scientists and students in the region were excited by these new trends and

**Table 2** Congresses and Symposia

Year	Meeting	Location
1977	1st FAOB Congress	Nagoya, Japan
1978	1st FAOB Symposium	Singapore
1979	2nd FAOB Symposium	Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
1980	2nd FAOB Congress	Bangalore, India
1981	3rd FAOB Symposium	Bali, Indonesia
1982	(No Meeting)	
1983	3rd FAOB Congress	Bangkok, Thailand
1984	4th FAOB Symposium	Manila, Philippines
1985	5th FAOB Symposium	Hawaii, USA
1986	4th FAOB Congress	Singapore
1987	6th FAOB Symposium	Karachi, Pakistan
1988	7th FAOB Symposium	Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
1989	5th FAOB Congress	Seoul, Korea
1990	8th FAOB Symposium	Dhaka, Bangladesh
1991	9th FAOB Symposium	Hong Kong
1992	6th FAOB Congress	Shanghai, China
1993	10th FAOB Symposium	Taipei, China
1994	11th FAOBMB Symposium	Bangkok, Thailand
1995	7th FAOBMB Congress	Sidney, Australia
1996	12th FAOBMB Symposium	Tokushima, Japan
1997	13th FAOBMB Symposium	Manila, Philippines
1998	8th FAOBMB Congress	Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
1999	14th FAOBMB Symposium	Dunedin, New Zealand
2000	15th FAOBMB Symposium	Beijing, China
2001	9th FAOBMB Congress	Lahore, Pakistan (cancelled)
2002	16th FAOBMB Symposium	Taipei, China
2003	10th FAOBMB Congress	Bangalore, India
2004	17th FAOBMB Symposium	Bangkok, Thailand
2005	18th FAOBMB Symposium	Lahore, Pakistan
2006	11th FAOBMB Congress	Kyoto, Japan

wished to learn more about those frontiers. The FAOBMB Council made every effort to strengthen its activities. The finances have increased year by year: The budgets in my term of offices grew upwards by more than three-fold in consequence of recruiting Special Members and the Travel Fellowship Funds were doubled. These budgetary changes empowered the Federation and the Council to organize Education Workshops at its Congresses and Symposia. On my advice to the IUBMB Executive Committee, which I joined

in August 1997, a satellite FAOBMB Education Workshop, sponsored by the FAOBMB, IUBMB and UNESCO, was held at the 13th FAOBMB Symposium in Manila, Philippines, where the Federation celebrated its 25th Anniversary. In July 1997 the FAOBMB founded the *Journal of Biochemistry, Molecular Biology and Biophysics* (JBMBB) as its official publication. The launching of the *Journal* was an exciting and memorable event, however, to our regret, it was discontinued on December 2003 mainly because of a poor circulation.

Internationally, at its Extraordinary General Assembly in Vienna in April 1998, ICSU declared its intention to take a new initiative that promises to meet the scientific challenges of the 21st century. ICSU stressed the urgent need to reduce the educational and research gaps between the developing and developed countries by improving the scientific capacity in the South, and endorsed the belief that science must become a shared asset benefiting all people and societies in the world. Most Scientific Unions, and particularly three ICSU BioUnions – IUBMB, the International Union of Biological Sciences (IUBS) and the International Union of Pure and Applied Biophysics (IUPAB) – welcomed this movement because they are convinced that the dominant scientific force in the new millennium will be the life sciences, which have been widening interdisciplinary on a broad front at a faster pace than scientists could have imagined. The international activities of the IUBMB are greatly strengthened by the existence of, and cooperation with, the four regional organizations of biochemistry and molecular biology, which is an arrangement found in few other international unions.

The FAOBMB has helped to provide scientific and educational activities in the region on behalf of the IUBMB, which encourages the local organizations. To bridge education activities more tightly between the IUBMB and its Associated Organizations, in 1998 the IUBMB EC decided to formalize the sponsorships for these activities. Thus, the 1st IUBMB-FAOBMB Joint Workshop on *Biochemical Education* was held at the 8th FAOBMB Congress in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (1998), the 2nd Workshop on *Genetically Modified*

*Food* at the 14th FAOBMB Symposium in Dunedin, New Zealand (1999), the 3rd Workshop on *Graduate Education in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology* at the 15th Symposium in Beijing, China (2000), the 4th Workshop on *Postgraduate Education and Training* at the 16th Symposium in Taipei, China (2002), and 5th Workshop on *Biochemistry Education in the Post-Genomics Era* at the 10th Congress in Bangalore, India (2003). The 1st IUBMB Lectureship was given at the 10th FAOBMB Congress in 2003 in Bangalore, India. In 2004, the 17th FAOBMB symposium/the 2nd IUBMB Special Meeting/the 7th A-IMBN Conference on *Genomics and Health in the 21st Century* was held in Bangkok, Thailand with great success. These examples indicate that the cooperation between IUBMB and the Associated Organizations is important for scientific asset sharing on a world-wide scale.

It is said that by the year 2050, the Asian population may reach about 6 billion. Obviously, scientific communities of the Asia will and must grow and contribute to not only the amendment of regional life styles and health cares but also the sustainability of the earth and human community in the future. Young scientists of the FAOBMB are needed to challenge to this urgent problems together with those belonging to the other Associated Organizations. The IUBMB should be a firm umbrella in bridging the Organizations and play a guiding role in their activities. I feel it very happy and think it a great honor that I could have worked with many friends and taken a memorable journey with them to our common goal.

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