

International Society for Soil Mechanics and Geotechnical Engineering

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Message to ISSMGE Members from Gabriel Auvinet, Vice-President for North America

As Vice-President for North America, I am deeply honored to address this message to all members of ISSMGE.

I would like to share with you some reflections on the present state of Geotechnical Engineering in North America and on the new trends I can perceive as the 75th anniversary of ISSMGE is celebrated.

The North American region includes only three member countries: Canada, USA and Mexico, a small number when compared to other regions such as South America, Asia and Europe. The individual membership in the ISSMGE represents however close to 20% of the grand total membership (approximately 19,000) of all member societies around the globe.

The three member societies of the region are extremely active and have a strong presence and influence in the engineering community and in the society in general in their respective country as well as internationally. It would be too lengthy to expose detailed information regarding the activities of each of the three member societies in this message. Data will be found on their excellent individual web sites:

Canadian Geotechnical Society (CGS, Canada): www.cgs.ca
Geo-Institute (G-I, ASCE, USA): www.geoinstitute.org
Sociedad Mexicana de Ingeniería Geotécnica (SMIG, Mexico): www.smig.org.mx



Message to ISSMGE Members (continued)

Gabriel Auvinet

The Canadian Geotechnical Society (Société Canadienne de Géotechnique) organizes each year a highly professional national meeting (GEO HALIFAX 2009, GEO2010 Calgary, Toronto 2011 Pan-American /CGS Conference) but also a number of special national or international conferences and short courses. National meetings provide a good occasion to confer prestigious awards upon distinguished members. The Society's main written (hard copy) communication medium is a newsletter called "CGS News" which appears in the quarterly journal "Geotechnical News" published by BiTech from Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. The CGS News features short articles on what is happening within the CGS and other news items of specific interest to the members of CGS. Although not connected to the famed *Canadian Geotechnical Journal*, the Society has remained in close contact with the Journal and is a great supporter of it. The present president of CGS is Bryan Watts.

The Geo-Institute of the American Society of Civil Engineers is the US National Member Society for ISSMGE. G-I national meetings are among the largest technical events of this type organized in the world, with attendance of the order of 2000 participants (GeoFlorida, 2010; GeoFrontiers, 2011). Quality is associated with quantity in these meetings as well as in the numerous special conferences and courses organized or endorsed by the Geo-Institute. The Geotechnical Engineering journals published in the US, including the *ASCE Journal of Geotechnical and Geoenvironmental Engineering* and the *International Journal of Geomechanics*, are among the most prestigious in our profession. The Geo-Institute actively encourages development of continuing education short courses and webinars to disseminate technical information among its members.



ISSMGE membership in North America

Message to ISSMGE Members (continued)

Gabriel Auvinet



Philip King (right) is the new president of the Geo-Institute, ASCE; Larry Jedele will serve on the Board through 2012 as the past president.

The Mexican Society of Geotechnical Engineering (SMIG, formerly Mexican Society of Soil Mechanics) is the smallest but not the least active of the three North-American Societies. National meetings are held biennially (Acapulco, 2010) and a large number of lectures, including the prestigious *Nabor Carrillo lecture*, special conferences and short courses are organized to deal with topics as different as “Laboratory testing” and “Freud for engineers”. A new journal “*Geotecnia*” is now published by SMIG. A well-illustrated commemorative volume untitled “*El Siglo de la Mecánica de Suelos (Soil Mechanics’ Century)*” was published on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the society. A large collection of special technical publications and conference proceedings is also available from SMIG. Recently, stress has been put on improving communication between members through the web and social networks. The present SMIG president is Juan de Dios Alemán.

The three member societies of North America are very active in ISSMGE Technical Committees and in particular in those hosted by the region: TC 102 “Ground Property Characterization from In-situ Tests” (USA), TC 206 “Interactive Geotechnical design” (Canada), TC 208 “Stability of Natural Slopes” (Canada), TC 209 “Offshore Geotechnics” (USA) and TC 214 “Foundation Engineering for Difficult Soft Soil Conditions” (Mexico)

International relations between the member countries of the North American Region but also between these countries and the rest of the world and in particular with South America are being actively developed. An agreement of cooperation was signed between G-I (USA) and SMIG (Mexico) on October 7th, 2009 in Alexandria, Egypt.

Message to ISSMGE Members (continued)

Gabriel Auvinet



*Signature of a collaboration agreement between Geo-Institute, ASCE and SMIG
(Alexandria, Egypt, 2009)*

The Pan-American Conference on Soil Mechanics and Geotechnical Engineering, organized every four years since 1959, is still the main occasion to foster exchanges between North and South America and to promote the development of soil mechanics and geotechnical engineering in some countries where these topics have not received adequate diffusion. It originally surged from the fact that many of the best specialists in Latin-America were former students of US Universities such as Harvard, Illinois, MIT, Berkeley, etc. An additional interest was also expressed by many consulting or equipment companies of North America wishing to develop their contacts and activities in the rest of the continent. These interests are still very much alive now taking into account the large number of specialists of Latin origin working in North America (and to some point the other way around). The weight of the different nations in the world concert is evolving rapidly with the surge of new powerful emerging countries but the interest of the Pan-American Conference remains intact.

Recently (October 2-6, 2011), the 14th Pan-American Conference on Soil Mechanics and Geotechnical Engineering was held in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, together with the 64th CGS National Conference and the 5th Pan-American Conference on Teaching and Learning of Geotechnical Engineering. The 2011 Pan-Am/CGS Geotechnical Conference also featured a comprehensive Trade Exhibition where suppliers to the geotechnical and hydrogeological industry were able to showcase their latest products and services. The conference technical program of this very successful event enhanced opportunities for interaction between academics, practitioners, designers, contractors and owners from North, Central and South America. The prestigious Casagrande Lecture was brilliantly delivered by Dr. Kerry Rowe (Queen's University). To promote a wide participation in this event of member societies of the North and South America regions, a special previous meeting of the Pan-American Committee was organized in Gramado, Brazil (during COBRAMSEG2010, August 17-22) with participation of delegates from 15 member countries. This committee met again during the Pan-American Conference on October 4th 2011 in Toronto. An updated agreement between the member countries of the two regions was approved and the venue of the next Pan-American Conference (2015) was unanimously assigned to Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Message to ISSMGE Members (continued)

Gabriel Auvinet



A touristic/technical visit to the Niagara Falls was organized during the Pan-Am /CGS Conference in Toronto

The 75th anniversary of ISSMGE is an important landmark. ISSMGE is now a respectable 75 years old lady, with the magic power of renewing herself constantly thanks to the inflow of new young members and to the reluctant fading away of old warriors. Homage to the pioneers of the past is an important source of inspiration for the young members. On January 20th 2011, SMIG organized in Mexico City a Special Symposium to honor the memory of the late Prof. Leonardo Zeevaert, with participation of Jean-Louis Briaud, and William Van Impe, respectively President and former President of ISSMGE.

An anniversary is always a good time for reflection. It is an appropriate occasion to look back to the past but also to assess the present in order to prepare the future. The past, present and future of Soil Mechanics and Geotechnical Engineering was the main topic of a special luncheon session celebrated in Toronto on October 3rd 2011. The comments on the past of ISSMGE by Prof. Norbert Morgenstern provided a deep insight into the different stages of the evolution of our International Society. Two young members presented their vision of what can be expected from the future. As far as the present is concerned, I was glad to comment on some of the many reasons why we should feel satisfied with the present state of our profession in North America.

Message to ISSMGE Members (continued)

Gabriel Auvinet

A strong dynamism is observed in the activities of our members. Challenging topics are being dealt with including: Geotechnical data management, Geostatistics, Variability and uncertainty, Physical and numerical modeling, Reliability and risk analysis, Ground improvement, Sustainability, Energy piles, Geosynthetics, Geohazards, Geoenvironmental engineering, Land subsidence, Offshore engineering, New concepts in deep foundations and Underground structures. A large number of topics could be added to the above list. Some of them are still vying to be accepted as significant contributions to geotechnical practice. This is the case of some sophisticated approach such as micromechanics studies on soils or soft computing applications. The importance of basic research on this kind of topics should however be recognized since future progress may depend on them. Far from being stalled, our profession is actively pursuing new goals to better satisfy society's demands.

The large attendance of members participating in national, international and special conferences is also impressive. A special motive of satisfaction is the increasing number of special events organized for and by young members.



First symposium of young geotechnical engineers, Mexico City, February 19, 2010

New advances in computer science have a strong impact on the nature and intensity of our activities. Access to technical information is becoming unlimited and instantaneous; a new collective brain and memory is being continuously created. Communication between members of the same society and of different societies is improving at an impressive rate, and this is just a start since new systems such as our new "Geoworld" have just been implemented recently. Access to the best lecturers in our profession will become easily available in the future through *webinars*. A better diffusion is also given to the excellent Geotechnical Engineering journals published in the region.

Soil Mechanics and Geotechnical Engineering in North America is a buoyant and many-faceted specialty. Its brilliant and creative activities in the present are a guarantee of a promising future.