Alik Ismail-Zadeh Receives 2009 International Award

Alik Ismail-Zadeh received the AGU International Award at the Joint Assembly, held 26 May 2009 in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. The award honors “an individual scientist or a small team for making an outstanding contribution to furthering the Earth and space sciences and using our science for the benefit of society in less favored nations.”

Citation

It is a pleasure to introduce Alik Ismail-Zadeh, recipient of the 2009 AGU International Award. Alik Ismail-Zadeh, a theoretical geophysicist born in Azerbaijan and educated in Russia, built international cooperative linkages at the detailed research level. He then widened those linkages to deal with the societal implications of his research. He heavily invested his time and energy to foster international collaboration among geophysicists at international, regional, and national levels. Since the early 1990s he has established international research cooperation with universities and research centers worldwide. The list includes prestigious European, American, Japanese, and Israeli universities as well as research institutes of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences, Georgian Ministry for Science and Education, and Pakistani Academy of Sciences. For more than a decade he has worked and taught at the Abdus Salam International Centre for Theoretical Physics to promote geophysical science and education in the third world.

My involvement with Alik started about 10 years ago after I agreed to become vice chair of the Commission on Geophysical Risk and Sustainability of the International Union of Geodesy and Geophysics (IUGG). In that role, we jointly organized a meeting at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Alik was successful in attracting participants from Eastern European countries and finding funding for them. The meeting issued the Budapest Manifesto on Risk Science and Sustainability (www.iugg.org/publications/reports/budapest.pdf), which guided the subsequent work of the commission.

In due course Alik became chair of the commission, and after the 26 December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami he prepared a special IUGG resolution (http://www.iugg.org/resolutions/) that was presented to the United Nations World Conference on Disaster Reduction, in Kobe, Japan, and formed the basis for similar resolutions from the International Council for Science (ICSU). The subsequent implementation of the Indian Ocean Monitoring System is, in part, attributable to the credibility that these resolutions imparted to the process. He is an indefatigable organizer of international workshops in many locations that attract outstanding contributors, promote international cooperation, produce high-quality publications, and generate tangible outcomes.

Alik has long been involved with AGU, and displaying the spirit of unselfish cooperation that AGU seeks to foster, he has worked actively to expand AGU activities in Eastern Europe, especially in Russia and other countries of the former Soviet Union; in 2002 he founded the Russian Contact Center of the AGU to promote cooperation between AGU members in the former Soviet Union. He served several terms on the AGU Committee for International Participation. Most recently, he was appointed chair of the newly established AGU Focus Group on Natural Hazards.

Alik is an extremely organized and prodigious worker. His organizational abilities led to his being elected secretary-general of the IUGG. As one of the most senior IUGG officers, he promotes cooperation between IUGG and ICSU regional offices. He is collaborating with the International Union of Theoretical and Applied Mechanics (IUTAM)/IUGG Spring School, “Fluid Mechanics and Geophysics of Environmental Hazards,” which will take place in Singapore later this year, and he is part of the IUGG project “Geoscience for Africa” on the topic of geohazards in Africa.

His success in these endeavors arises not only because of his energy and drive, but also because of his engaging personality and a fluency with languages that enables him freely to converse in English, Russian, German, and, of course Azeri, his mother tongue, which is sufficiently akin to Turkish that he can freely converse with the Turks as well.

Today we honor Alik Ismail-Zadeh in recognition of his outstanding work for the international geocommunity.

—TOM BEER, International Union of Geodesy and Geophysics and Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO), Aspendale, Victoria, Australia

Response

Thank you, Tom, for your kind and generous citation and for your friendship. It is a great and unexpected honor for me to have been selected for the 2009 AGU International Award. I know that today I am a recipient of this award because an international group of distinguished scientists decided that I deserve to receive this honor. I thank Tom Beer (Australia), who nominated me, and Harsh Gupta (India), JoAnn Joselyn (United States), Volodya Kossobokov (Russia), Lawrence Mysak (Canada), Giuliano Panza (Italy), and Uri Shamir (Israel) for their generous support. And surely I am very grateful to AGU for this honor.

I was a bit surprised when I read an e-mail from the AGU president about the award and found that the International Award is given for “advancing science and benefiting society, while laboring under adverse circumstances with limited resources.” I have not viewed myself as a scientist who works under adverse circumstances with limited resources, but this phrase has brought me to remember life in Russia after Perestroika, the difficulties in the Russian economy, and the critical situation in Russian science.

Because of a lack of state funding, Russian academic institutions felt starved of international journals in libraries or access to them via the Internet. Russian scientists, especially young researchers, could not participate in major international meetings. I am thankful to AGU, particularly to Fred Spilhaus, and to the ExxonMobil Corporation for their support of my project to establish the Russian Contact Center of the AGU in Moscow. The Center has been promoting activities of geophysicists living in Russia and the former Soviet republics and assisting them to access AGU publications and to attend AGU meetings.

Since the mid 1990s, I have been working in Europe, particularly at the Universität Karlsruhe (Germany) and at the Institut de Physique du Globe de Paris (France), and I still keep my position and graduate students at the Russian Academy of Sciences. A decade ago, I joined the International Union of Geodesy and Geophysics, and today I try to do my best to promote activities of geophysicists working in many parts of the world.

I am happy to seize the opportunity to thank all my colleagues around the world with whom I have shared great moments of scientific findings and who helped me to strengthen research cooperation between nations. I must mention one person who profoundly influenced me in my scientific thinking, in my style of research work, and in developing international cooperation.
This person is Vladimir Kellis-Borok, a distinguished professor at University of California, Los Angeles, and the Russian Academy of Sciences. I will always be very grateful to him for starting me off in the right direction.

My wife, Sonya, keeps asking me why I go to the Institute seven days a week returning sometimes close to midnight. The answer is simple. I am a scientist, and my research and my work for the geophysical community are a pleasure and a boundless joy. I thank Sonya, my sincere supporter, who accepts my frequent and sometimes prolonged absences, and who makes it possible for me to focus my energies on science and on international scientific cooperation.

I express my heartfelt gratitude to AGU. The International Award is the most splendid award in recognition of contribution to the international geophysical community.

—AIK ISMAIL-ZADEH, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia