New Leaders for IIASA

Laxenburg, 16 May 2008

Today Professor Sten Nilsson becomes the Acting Director of the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA). A native of Sweden, Professor Nilsson has been IIASA’s Deputy Director since July 2002 and leader of IIASA’s Forestry Program since 1990.

IIASA is an international research organization that brings together scientists from different countries and academic disciplines to study global problems. Set up in 1972 to use scientific cooperation to build bridges across the Cold War divide; today, the Institute has 18 member countries, which account for over half the world’s population (55%) and production (58%) and include the world’s four largest economies.

As IIASA’s Acting Director until 31 December 2008, Professor Nilsson leads the work of nearly 200 natural and social scientists, mathematicians, and engineers from over 35 countries who research at IIASA. He is joined by Professor Nebojsa Nakicenovic as IIASA’s Acting Deputy Director. Professor Nakicenovic is also Director of IIASA’s Global Energy Assessment and Professor of Energy Economics at the Vienna University of Technology. Previously he was leader of IIASA’s Energy and Transitions to New Technologies Programs and co-leader of IIASA’s Greenhouse Gas Initiative.

As leader of IIASA’s Forestry Program, Professor Nilsson has helped numerous countries from Russia to Europe to Canada to India to China to better manage their forest sectors. For example, he produced a mock Government Bill to improve how Sweden manages its forest sector. He has led one of the most in-depth analyses of forest productivity and growth in Russia which is used by the Russian Federal Forest Service.

Nilsson is not afraid of challenging the status quo. His research has shown flaws in policies such as the Kyoto Protocol—how can carbon emissions be traded if the emissions cannot be accurately measured? And in paper recycling—it is neither profitable nor environmentally sound to recycle over 60% of paper.

Professor Nakicenovic is a world-renown author of some of the most influential reports on climate change and energy in the past decades. For example, he led the development of the most comprehensive and sophisticated scenarios of greenhouse gas emissions for the
21st century for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The scenarios have been invaluable to the climate change research community as they provide a common ground to compare results and investigate the future. Indeed both Nilsson and Nakicenovic have contributed to the reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and so are recipients of the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize.

Today Nakicenovic also directs the Global Energy Assessment which will provide countries with the knowledge to meet their energy challenges ranging from securing supply to safeguarding the environment. He is also an expert on the patterns and drivers of technological change which, more than ever, has the potential to transform society.

On 1 January 2009, Professor Detlof von Winterfeldt will succeed Professor Nilsson as IIASA’s Ninth Director. Detlof von Winterfeldt is Professor of Industrial and Systems Engineering and Professor of Public Policy and Management both at the University of Southern California (USC). He is also a founding director of the university's National Center for Risk and Economic Analysis of Terrorism Events.

Commenting on the appointments, Professor Simon Levin, Chair of IIASA’s Council said: “IIASA has been fortunate that it had the leadership of Leen Hordijk over the past six years and equally fortunate that Sten Nilsson is serving as Acting Director. Detlof von Winterfeldt fits the model of these two dedicated and visionary leaders, and assures a bright future for IIASA.”

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About IIASA:
IIASA is an independent, interdisciplinary research institution, which specializes in natural and social scientific research methods and models valued by policy makers and the scientific community worldwide. IIASA is an international institution, with member organizations in 18 countries. More at www.iiasa.ac.at