

IUPAP Women In Physics Working Group

February 9-11, 2001

CERN, Geneva, Switzerland

The IUPAP Working Group on Women in Physics is planning a three-day International Conference on Women in Physics to be held at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, France on March 7 to 9, 2002. It is hoped that 250 participants from over 60 countries will attend. For more information see www.if.ufrgs.br/~barbosa/conference.html. The results of the conference will be presented at the IUPAP General Assembly in October 2002.

Internationally, women are seriously under-represented in physics and in other fields, such as engineering, for which physics knowledge is an essential prerequisite. The nature and magnitude of the problem varies from country to country, however, there is a remarkable consistency in one sobering pattern: the percentage of women in physics in all countries decreases markedly with each step up the academic ladder and with each level of promotion in industrial and government laboratories.

In preparation for the conference, the Working Group is undertaking an international benchmarking effort to learn about the status and trends relating to women in physics in each of the 46 IUPAP member countries and elsewhere when feasible. Two surveys were developed for this purpose. The first survey assesses the population, demographics, and institutional aspects women in physics in each country. The second survey seeks to characterize the educational and professional experiences of women in physics and to tap their insights regarding expectations, practices, interactions, and feedback loops that tend to welcome or exclude women as physicists. These surveys will be analyzed to look for keys to women's success as well as barriers they have experienced.

The International Conference will bring together physicists from around the world to review that data, discuss barriers, share success stories, propose ways to improve participation globally, develop resolutions for action by the IUPAP General Assembly, and help teams develop appropriate strategies to improve the status of women in physics in their home countries. Areas to be given special emphasis include 1) attracting girls to study physics in schools and universities, 2) launching a successful career in physics, 3) improving the institutional structure and climate for women in physics, 4) getting women into the scientific leadership structure, 5) learning from regional differences, and 6) balancing family and career. Teams of three to five physicists from each country will be invited to participate. One important goal is to have each team return home with a clear idea of specific action to take to initiate and implement changes that should lead to increasing participation of women in physics in that country. Another goal is to establish a robust international support network that will help bootstrap the systemic change needed and reduce the sense of isolation felt by

individual women physicists to to put in place a framework providing accountability for follow-up.