

# Science Diplomacy Worldwide

Over the past few years, an important focus of AAAS international activities has been in the emerging area of science diplomacy. Such efforts demonstrate that progress in both scientific endeavor and international relations occurs when members of the global scientific community engage across borders. Even when diplomatic and political ties are strained between nations, the association's strategy of scientific engagement helps scientists reach out to one another in the interests of their common pursuits, often with the goal of improving the lives of people around the world.

## SCIENCE & DIPLOMACY PUBLICATION LAUNCHED

The freely available online publication *Science & Diplomacy* was developed by the AAAS Center for Science Diplomacy to promote interaction between the communities of scientific research and foreign policy. In its first year, it tackled topics ranging from the U.S. Administration's role in preparing for a global pandemic, to the need for international science collaboration on issues involving food, water and energy.

The 2012 issues of the publication showcased many high-level expert authors, who described international projects that have advanced science while accruing benefits to the countries involved. As an example, one article looked at how U.S. science associations and top universities are helping to shift the U.S.-Myanmar relationship from one of tension to socially beneficial cooperation. Two other articles examined science outreach conducted through AAAS and other organizations to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). A third looked at using engineering diplomacy to encourage productive relationships between the United States and nations in the Middle East and the Caucasus.

Referring to the need for globally oriented science-based innovation, Jordanian Princess

Sumaya bint El Hassan, president of the Royal Scientific Society, wrote in the September 2012 issue of *Science & Diplomacy* that "only scientific ingenuity, with the support of diplomatic creativity and drive, can respond to the defining challenges of our 21st century."

AAAS staffers Norman Neureiter and Vaughan Turekian met with representatives of seven government ministries in Myanmar.





Above left and middle: AAAS science diplomats discussed potential areas of research collaboration and learned about Myanmar's current scientific capacity.

Above right: Former AAAS President Peter Agre (center, with cane) was joined by Mary Agre, AAAS senior advisor Norman Neureiter (second from left) and distinguished members of Iran's scientific community during a 2012 science diplomacy visit.

#### AAAS DELEGATION VISITS NORTH KOREA

An international delegation co-organized by AAAS made a rare, weeklong visit to the DPRK, or North Korea, to exchange information about environmental challenges related to agriculture and deforestation.

"Cooperating with DPRK scientists in their reforestation projects while we learn from each other is a worthy objective," said botanist and former AAAS President Peter Raven, who made the trip with an international group of 13 researchers in forestry, river reclamation, soils and agriculture. "Not only will it help in starting to come together for our common benefit, but it can be worthwhile both scientifically and, we hope, in relieving human suffering during the years to come."

The visit was jointly organized by AAAS and the Beijing-based Environmental Education Media Project. It was hosted by a DPRK non-governmental organization that sets up international exchanges and cooperation.

The visit "exposes scientists from the DPRK to the kinds of research activity going on in other parts of the world, where they generally don't have any contacts," said Norman P. Neureiter, senior advisor to the AAAS Center for Science Diplomacy, who was making his third recent visit to the country. "And our people learn something about their country."

#### GOODWILL TRIP TO MYANMAR

As Myanmar, also known as Burma, transitioned toward democracy, AAAS continued its science diplomacy efforts with the Southeast Asian country. Following up on the visit of a AAAS-led delegation in 2010, Chief International Officer Vaughan Turekian, director of the AAAS Center for Science Diplomacy, and Neureiter, the Center's senior advisor, led another visit including U.S. university researchers and other U.S. scientific society representatives to the rapidly transforming country in 2012, meeting with representatives of seven government ministries, including the nation's health minister. Specific collaborations were identified in the areas of forest research and laboratory capacity-building in the biological sciences.

#### REACHING OUT TO CUBAN RESEARCHERS

AAAS continued to explore the enormous potential of U.S.-Cuba collaboration in scientific areas ranging from malaria research, to environmental issues, to weather. Work on establishing such collaboration followed on AAAS visits to the island nation that began in 2009 and—at least partly because of the many shared concerns of the United States and its nearby neighbor—grew substantially, involving 18 independent scientists in a AAAS-



organized visit that took place at the end of 2011.

“Given the proximity of Cuba, when you’re talking about atmospheric or marine science, if it travels to Cuba, it travels to the Southeast coast of the United States. If it spawns off the coast of Cuba, it is caught or affected by currents that go into the United States,” said AAAS Center for Science Diplomacy Director Turekian.

In March 2012, Peter Agre, former AAAS president and a Nobel laureate in chemistry, traveled to Cuba to speak at Biotechnology Havana 2012, an international event that focused on medical applications of biotech.

“The recent visits showed that the Cuban mindset is really ready to reach out,” said Agre. “The Cubans are understandably proud of their science, and they see us very positively. I would anticipate if we could normalize relations and do science as a starting point, then really good things could happen.”

#### ENGAGING IRAN

A small AAAS delegation made a weeklong visit to Iran, speaking at elite universities and meeting government and science policy officials, scholars and students

Despite tensions surrounding Iran’s nuclear programs and Western economic sanctions on

the country, the visit demonstrated the opportunity for scientists from the United States and Iran to establish a dialogue. Calling the exchange a “milestone,” Abolhasan Vafai, a professor at Sharif University of Technology, said the meetings “created a very conducive and fruitful atmosphere for establishing scientific dialogue between the two nations.” The delegation was also invited to meet briefly with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Iran’s sophisticated science sector focuses on medical and stem cell research, petroleum engineering, space exploration and nanotechnology. Many Iranian scientists have been educated in the United States or Europe. The U.S. National Academy of Sciences fosters cooperation with the Iranian Academy, with seminars and workshops held in Iran, the United States and other countries.

After the delegation returned, Center for Science Diplomacy senior advisor Neureiter spoke about the trip and its value as a diplomatic effort on The Kojo Nnamdi Show on WAMU-FM in Washington, D.C.