

Opening IRGC Conference, Beijing, 20 September 2005

Address by José Mariano Gago, Minister for Science, Technology and Higher education, Portugal, and President of IRGC

Dear Minister Li Yizhong

Dear Minister Mosibudi Mangena

Dear Vice-Minister Liu Yanhua

Dear Secretary of State Charles Kleiber

Dear Secretary-General of OECD Donald Johnston

Dear Science and Technology Advisor to the Secretary of State George Atkinson

Ambassadors, Distinguished participants, and Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am deeply honoured to open this conference and to welcome all its participants, from academia and industry, government, public administration and regulatory authorities as well as from non-governmental bodies and from international organisations.

Risk governance is now a recognised global issue.

The IRGC aims to support governments, industry, non-government and other organisations and to foster public confidence in risk governance by reflecting different views and practices and by providing independent information and scientific expertise.

We aim to improve the understanding and assessment of major risks and to help designing innovative governance strategies.

According to our mission strategy, we concentrate our efforts on issues (human induced or natural) which have an international dimension and the potential for harm to human health and safety, the economy, the environment or the fabric of society at large.

A White Paper on Risk Governance Framework has been recently completed and published by IRGC. Studies on risk governance in the areas of critical infrastructure networks, nanotechnology and epidemics are now being prepared or investigated.

IRGC is an independent organisation and its S&T Council, chaired by Prof. Granger Morgan, follows a strictly independent policy of peer-reviewing all its reports.

We aim at contributing to better risk governance attitudes and practices and to a denser networking of science, society and decision-making.

IRGC is open to collaboration. We seek your expertise, your support and your ideas.

Let me warmly thank the government of China for hosting this 2nd IRGC General Conference. Vice-Minister Liu, who represents the government of the People's Republic of China on the IRGC Board and the Ministry for Science and Technology of China deserve all our gratitude.

Let me also thank the Swiss State Secretariat for Education and Research and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation for their financial support of the Conference.

Switzerland is not only the host country of IRGC but also its main supporter. Let me thank specially Charles Kleiber, State Secretary for Education and Research of the Swiss Government for his continuous help and for his ambitious vision.

Many other organisations and individuals also deserve our gratitude for their generosity. The Swiss Reinsurance Company (SwissRe), Electricité de France, the US Department of State must be mentioned, as well as the OECD, whose Secretary-General Donald Johnston is also a member of IRGC Board.

I would like to thank all the speakers and chairs, and to convey to the Secretariat of IRGC, to its General-Secretary Christopher Bunting, and to the staff of MOST all our gratitude for the organisation of this conference.

My very last words are simply to recall how the deep relations between risk governance and civilisation have its roots deeply embedded in human culture.

Civilisation and science helped to transform fatality into risk and allowed for the very possibility of risk governance as a rational social activity.

And only knowledge shared by society at large has created the conditions for the recognition of risks not only as threats but also as opportunities.

I hope that you do not find it inappropriate if I quote Confucius.

Confucius said:

“Tsu-lu asked what were a full-grown man.”

“The Master said: (...)

“Who in sight of gain remembers right, in face of danger will risk his life, and cleaves to his word for a lifetime, however old the bond, him we must call a full-grown man”.

Thank you.

José Mariano Gago
President of IRGC