



Above: David Lewis representing IUSTI at the Brazilian STDHIV Congress in Salvador

It is with great pleasure that I write my first letter as IUSTI President. I would like to start by expressing sincere thanks to Raj Patel, on behalf of entire IUSTI organisation, for his extensive work for, and leadership of, IUSTI in recent years. Raj has worked tirelessly for IUSTI and is unique in having hands-on experience of the Secretary General and Treasurer roles. I am conscious that I have taken on the torch from Raj at a time when IUSTI is going through a renaissance, characterized by a raised profile in terms of growing membership numbers, active regions and well-attended scientific meetings. I am conscious that I am following in the footsteps of several Past Presidents who have all made their own unique mark on our Society. During my tenure as President-Elect, I reflected on where IUSTI is performing well and where IUSTI could improve. In doing so, I was mindful of our objective which is to foster international collaboration in the control of sexually transmitted infections (STI) including HIV/AIDS.

In terms of international collaboration, we look to the sterling example of IUSTI-Europe which has gone from strength to strength under the leadership of Keith Radcliffe (UK), who completed his successful eight year term as European Regional Director in July this year. IUSTI-Europe has managed to achieve a strong team in many of its member countries and it is anticipated that there will be several new national IUSTI organisations emerging in the next few years based on the model developed in Eastern Europe. Going forward, a key challenge will be for these national organisations to continue to work as one, both the regional and global level, in keeping with our Society's overall

objective. IUSTI-Europe has set the standard for running successful and well-attended regional meetings on an annual basis. Key to this success has been the fact that Europe has a long-standing history in dermato-venereology and STI control, with a number of strong STI clinical societies and academic institutions, good infrastructure and, despite the current global economic crisis, the advantages that come with a relatively strong economy.

This situation is in stark contrast to my own region (Africa) where there is still much to be done in terms of building up national and regional capacity in order to meet IUSTI's objective. Like Keith Radcliffe, I too have come to the end of my eight year term as African Regional Director; leaving my former position, I believe that IUSTI-Africa is stronger than when I took over the position in 2005. We now have a full team of IUSTI-Africa voting members on the IUSTI Executive Committee which ensures that we have an unbiased and global view for strategic decision making. However, the IUSTI-Africa region will continue to need support and encouragement as its roots need to be stronger if it is to make any impact. Africa continues to be burdened by a high prevalence of STIs and is the epicentre for the HIV/AIDS epidemic. There have been some amazing successes, such as the roll-out of anti-retroviral therapy which has been enabled with the immense generosity of the American people through the PEPFAR programme; however, there are several examples of weak STI control programmes within the region. STIs are no longer viewed as important in many circles, especially when policy-makers compare the older STIs to tuberculosis, malaria and HIV/AIDS. STI surveillance remains weak or non-existent on the continent; accordingly, most countries are unable to monitor specific STI trends as the syndromic management approach currently precludes diagnostic testing. Importantly, Africa lacks regional leadership for improving STI control and this is one area where IUSTI could make a real impact through its global voice, as well as through inter-IUSTI regional collaborations and closer working relationships with the World Health Organization.

In terms of strategic direction, I proposed in Vienna that we put together a strategic plan to take IUSTI forward over the next few years. I will be working closely with the IUSTI Executive Team in the coming year to put this together. I have already alluded to the importance of IUSTI taking on a stronger advocacy role to meet its core objective of improving STI control and key to this will be greater collaborative working with the World Health Organization. In terms of fostering other international collaborations, it is important to celebrate the fact that our recent successful joint meetings with the International Society for the Sexually Transmitted Diseases Research (ISSTD) have enabled the two societies to work closer together with beneficial outcomes for both. It will be important for IUSTI to continue working closely with ISSTD to ensure that we do not compete for scarce resources and that we provide meetings of the highest scientific quality for our members.

The recent ISSTD-IUSTI World Congress in Vienna, hosted by Angelika Stary, was a perfect example of how to do this. We received tremendous hospitality from our host, interacted with an extremely efficient conference organizing team, we enjoyed the magnificence of the Hofburg's congress venue, we were treated to a delightful social programme and, most importantly of all, we were exposed to academic programme of the highest quality which was put together by a hard-working scientific committee and chaired by Tom Quinn (USA). The IUSTI-ISSTD symbiotic relationship is a recipe for future success. IUSTI can learn from ISSTD about how to put a strong scientific programme together that will raise our organizational profile and attract more delegates whilst ISSTD can learn from IUSTI as regards the importance of engaging with the regions, where scientific advances require translation into improved public health policy.

There have been some key changes in the IUSTI Executive Team and I would like to mention just a few of these. Firstly, I would like to congratulate Charlotte Gaydos (USA) on her election to the post of IUSTI President-Elect. Charlotte brings with her a wealth of international experience and an extensive network involving professional colleagues in all IUSTI regions and, importantly, strong links with many diagnostic companies whose technological developments support on-going efforts to improve STI control through the provision of cheaper and more user-friendly diagnostic tests. Airi Pöder (Estonia) takes over as IUSTI-Europe Regional Director, Sax Sarkodie (Ghana) takes over as IUSTI-Africa Regional Director and Somesh Gupta (India) takes over as IUSTI-Asia Pacific Regional Director, whilst Patty Garcia (Peru) and Charlotte Gaydos (USA) will stay in their roles as Regional Directors for the IUSTI-Latin America and the Caribbean and IUSTI-North America regions. On behalf of the whole IUSTI team, I wish these colleagues much success with their new roles.