



## Michael Rogers completes his mandate, and reflects on the past four years as ICOLD President

**T**he 27th Congress and 90th Annual Meeting of the International Commission on Large Dams (ICOLD) can be remembered as a great success, with more than 1500 delegates, exhibitors and guests coming together in Marseille, France, for the first meeting since June 2019. Congratulations are due to the French National Committee of ICOLD (CFBR) for this success, and for so much hard work organizing the conference over the last four years in the most difficult of circumstances.

This ICOLD Congress closed an important chapter in my life, probably the most important chapter of my professional career: the completion of four years as ICOLD President. I am extremely grateful for the honour to have served as the 25th President of ICOLD since my election on 3 July 2018. I am very thankful to Aqua-Media for its support throughout my term on the ICOLD Board, as Vice President and then as President, and I am very pleased to provide a few reflections that I will carry with me from this very special adventure.

My term as ICOLD President has been the most rewarding professional experience of my life. As an organization, ICOLD has dutifully served the profession of engineering for dams since its founding in 1928. The name 'ICOLD' carries instant recognition and respect around the world for the 104 member countries, and more than 15 000 individual members. ICOLD carries great responsibility to gather experts from around the world, and expertise, to share knowledge and lessons learned

with the primary mission to make dams safe and to protect human life. My personal mission as ICOLD President has been to support these strong ideals of our founding, strengthen the organization with our national organizations and technical committees, and invest in the future as a mentor to our young professionals just starting their careers.

### Vienna, Austria, 2018

I remember the euphoria of my presidential election and acceptance speech in Vienna in 2018. The excitement of reaching my life-long aspiration to serve as ICOLD President and the humble realization of the weight of this position. I was following a long line of highly respected and successful ICOLD Presidents: Prof Anton Schleiss (Switzerland), Mr Adama Nombre (Burkina Faso), Dr Jia Jinsheng (China), Dr Luis Berga (Spain) and many others who are recognized leaders in our profession. And, there was also the inspirational leader from my early years at Harza Engineering Company, Dr Jan Veltrop (USA), Harza Chief Engineer and ICOLD President (1988-1991).

The preceding three years as ICOLD Vice President had given me confidence and ambition to serve as President, in working with a Board of talented Vice Presidents from around the world and the dedicated, hard-working Secretary General Michel de Vivo, who would become my closest friend in ICOLD. On that day in Vienna, I remember clearly taking a deep

breath and stepping up to the podium to outline my plan as the newly elected ICOLD President. I remember the room and the faces, some I already knew and many more I would come to know over the next four years, the family of ICOLD!

Over the next four years, I would solicit support from the ICOLD Board, asking individual Vice Presidents for their help with each priority, so that we could work together to make ICOLD stronger.

We have all worked together, along with the Secretary General and Central Office staff, to strengthen ICOLD while at the same time surviving our biggest challenge since World War II, a global pandemic.

### Dam safety

My highest priority has always been dam safety. This has been a passion since my early days as a young engineer at Harza, learning under world-class engineers and scientists about the responsibility we hold for high quality design, to ensure the safety of the structures and protection of human life. I feel that one of my best accomplishments has been the ICOLD World Declaration on Dam Safety that was approved by the Board on 18 October 2019, at the HYDRO 2019 Conference in Porto, Portugal.

I feel that the Declaration is a strong statement by ICOLD that dam safety is our core value, and that, as engineers and scientists, we must always be diligent in our work, every day, to protect lives and the critical infrastructure that we build.

## National Committees

ICOLD is an international organization that is strengthened by the active participation of each National Committee and each member from each country. I have been fortunate as President to represent our organization around the world, meeting colleagues and governmental representatives involved in water and power infrastructure. I have visited 12 countries meeting many of our friends and family, including many meetings, and memorable dinners. On these occasions, I have carried the message about the important role of ICOLD to unite the industry under a common and respected banner for technological quality and excellence for engineers from all nations.

## Technical Committees

The hard work and heavy lifting of ICOLD is done by our Technical Committees. During my tenure as President, I will always remember a key success: the start of the new ICOLD Technical Committee for Levees. The inclusion of levees in our organization is especially important to me, primarily as a result of the terrible images in my memory of Hurricane Katrina, a huge destructive Category 5 hurricane that hit New Orleans, USA, in late August 2005, causing more than 1800 fatalities and more than US\$125 billion's worth of damage. I saw the vulnerability of levees to these catastrophic events, and I also know ICOLD's work on dam safety can make levee structures safer. I supported the initiation of a new levees committee in 2017 under the leadership of Rémy Tourment (France), including the adoption of Question 103, Small Dams & Levees, for the ICOLD 2018 Congress in Vienna. I have seen this committee grow in stature and confidence, including the development of three Technical Bulletins during the pandemic years. There is a definitive place for levees in the ICOLD focus on safety and security of critical water and power infrastructure. Many lives have been and will be saved by ICOLD delegates committed to the safety and reliability of levees.

## Capacity building

The need for sharing and training has been a cornerstone of ICOLD since its formation in 1928. The modern world sees soaring demand

for reliable water and renewable energy in regions previously without the means to design and build such infrastructure, including Africa. In 2008, ICOLD issued its World Declaration for Dams and Hydropower for African Sustainable Development. ICOLD's Ad hoc TC-Z on Capacity Building was established in 2009, during the Annual Meeting held in Brasilia. The purpose of this committee was initially to handle the training programmes and coordinate workshops and technical tours, primarily offered by Turkey, Morocco, and China. It has since grown to look for supporting organizations for capacity building within and beyond ICOLD. This is a difficult mission when funding for training and technology transfer is often very limited.

As President, I have been fortunate to work with Hon President Adama Nombre, Chair of TC-Z, and Vice President Michael Abebe to look for opportunities to improve the situation of capacity building support within ICOLD and with our associated partners, including the World Bank. My hope is that the important work begun by ICOLD President Nombre and VP Abebe will be picked-up by other motivated ICOLD members to continue the commitment to African sustainable development made in our World Declaration in 2008.

## Young professionals

As ICOLD President, I was asked to make many, many speeches on many various topics on many different occasions. My favourite speeches were those to our ICOLD young professionals of engineers and scientists who are the future of ICOLD. I enjoy telling my own story from being a young student engineer, 18 years old, at Harza Engineering Company to attaining my goal to be ICOLD President. My 40-plus year professional career path in civil engineering for dams has been an amazing journey, and many of the highlights from that journey result from my participation in the United States Society on Dams (USSD) and ICOLD.

## Concluding remarks

I will always look upon my time as ICOLD President as a grand adventure and the experience of a lifetime. During our ICOLD 2022 Final Dinner on 3 June, I took a

brief moment of reflection on the patio looking over the beautiful city of Marseille and the gathered ICOLD family around me. I remembered the many faces of ICOLD I have met over the years, especially the dedicated colleagues who persevered to keep the mission of ICOLD moving during the isolation. Of the pandemic I remembered the friends that we have lost along this journey, and the joy of our annual gathering of the ICOLD family.

Now having completed my term as President, I remain full of optimism that ICOLD has emerged from the pandemic stronger than ever, because we have been tested in the cruel forge of despair and uncertainty. ICOLD has kept focus on our important vision and mission to build safer and more reliable dams by freely sharing knowledge and experience on a global scale. As engineers and scientists, we have a high calling to serve the basic needs of humankind for clean and reliable water and power, along with protections from floods, earthquakes, and other natural disasters. The important lesson of my time within ICOLD, especially the last four years as President, has been that this professional calling is about our important work and about the journey of our careers with the friends and family that we gather around us along the way.

I am grateful to my employer, Stantec, for its unwavering support to my participation in ICOLD, from the very beginning recognizing the importance of this organization to our profession. I am especially thankful to my wife, Kristin, as the First Lady of ICOLD, over four years, for her patience with my service and her unending support. I am warmed looking back at the memories from the many ICOLD experiences around the world that my wife and I have shared. We remember many beautiful places and smiling faces with our good friends, good dinners, and good wine.

I wish new ICOLD President, Michel Lino, all the best for success and excitement on his journey in this important role. Thank you to the ICOLD family for giving me this adventure of my life. God bless.

*Michael F. Rogers  
Honorary President,  
International Commission on  
Large Dams*