The International Union of Toxicology was founded in close cooperation with the Society of Toxicology (SOT) and the European counterpart society, the European Society for the Study of Drug Toxicity (ESSDT). Both societies were formed after the thalidomide event, in order to prevent similar toxicological disasters in the future, and to stimulate research in toxicology and in the development of new teratogenic and other testing systems. The founding of SOT was decided upon on March 4, 1961 in Washington, DC, and ESSDT was founded on September 26, 1962 in Zürich, Switzerland. The latter name was changed to the European Society of Toxicology (EST) in 1974 and to EUROTOX in 1989.

In the beginning of the 1970’s, SOT invited the European Society to cooperate with them in arranging joint symposia and forming an inter-society liaison committee, the latter from the suggestion of Victor A. Drill, president of SOT in 1972–1973. The first joint meeting of SOT and EST took place in Montpellier, France in June of 1975. The following committee members from EST participated in this meeting: Günther Neuhaus, president; Erwin Eichenberger, secretary; and Jens Schou, Gerhard Zbinden, Laurie Prescott, and others, together with selected council members from SOT: Seymour Friess, Sheldon Murphy, and Perry Gehring. An invitation from the International Union of Pharmacology to form a Section of Toxicology was considered; however, it was unanimously decided to maintain the idea of an independent international union of toxicology. The First International Congress of Toxicology was planned for Toronto, Ontario, Canada in 1977, following the annual SOT meeting. A second international congress was planned for three years later in Brussels, and during that meeting, on July 6, 1980, the International Union of Toxicology (IUTOX) was founded. The nine founding member societies of IUTOX were the British Toxicology Society; EUROTOX; the Finnish Society of Toxicology; the French Society of Toxicology; the Japanese Society of Toxicological Sciences; the Society of Toxicology, Canada; the Society of Toxicology, India; the Society of Toxicology in the United States; and the Swedish Society of Toxicology. These founding member societies were presented, and the following officers were elected for the first executive committee: Seymour Friess, president; Dietrich Henschler and Bo Holmstedt, vice-presidents; Robert Burford, secretary; Christian Hodel, treasurer, and Gabriel Plaa, Etienne Fournier, Matsuo Ikeda, Peter Gupta, and Norman Aldridge, directors.

The general scope of the Union was settled as follows:

The purpose of the Union shall be to foster International scientific collaboration among national and other groups of toxicologists, and to promote worldwide acquisition, dissemination, and utilization of knowledge in the science of toxicology, in particular by sponsoring international congresses on toxicology, for the benefit of mankind.

Since IUTOX was founded, the number of member societies has been raised from 9 to more than 30 in 2000, which means that about 17,500 national society members, worldwide, are represented by the Union. Together with the revenues from the International Congresses of Toxicology, this has led to an increase in assets, which appear in Figure 1.

The most important activities of the IUTOX have been the international congresses held every third year: Toronto, Canada 1977; Brussels, Belgium 1980; San Diego, California 1983; Tokyo, Japan 1986; Brighton, U.K. 1989; Rome, Italy 1992; Seattle, Washington 1995, and Paris, France 1998. Throughout the years, the number of participants has increased from 950 to 2500.

In 1985, IUTOX started to distribute an annual “broadsheet,” which was replaced in 1993 by the IUTOX Newsletter. The newsletters contain the president’s report on the general progress of the Union and reports by the secretary general and the treasurer. In 1997, the subcommittees of the Union were reorganized and now consist of the membership committee as well as “commissions” on strategic development, education, new and developing societies of toxicology, international relations, and communications, the last including the preparation and distribution of the newsletter and the setting up and maintenance of the IUTOX website.
This brief history of IUTOX should certainly include mention of the outstanding toxicologist William B. Deichmann of Miami, Florida. As early as 1968, he fostered the idea of establishing an International Union of Toxicology, which he himself abbreviated to IUTOX. At the annual meeting of SOT in 1968, he invited Frank Blood, Seymour Friess, and Paul Larson to lunch with him for the purpose of “sounding them out on the advisability of recommending to the council of our society that we consider the organization of an International Union of Toxicology.” His initiative was postponed for several reasons, the main one being a general feeling that SOT was already international. However, this attitude changed gradually, and in the mid-seventies, SOT and ESSDT joined forces to establish the independent International Union of Toxicology, mentioned earlier.

A more detailed history of the foundation and functions of the International Union of Toxicology (written by Christian M. Hodel and Jens S. Schou) was presented to the participants of the VIIIth International Congress of Toxicology in Paris in 1998, and we shall not repeat the contents here. Only two more important activities should be mentioned: the risk-assessment summer schools (RASS) and the Deichmann Award lectures.

In 1985, RASS I was held in Menstrup, Denmark. The summer school was sponsored by EST, SOT, and IUTOX, and was organized by the Swedish toxicologist, Torbjörn Malmfors. Since then, the summer schools have been held in 1987, 1990, 1992, 1994, 1996, and 1998 (RASS VII) in different parts of the world. The summer school lasts for one week and Torbjörn Malmfors, together with a group of acknowledged experts, introduce the participants to all aspects of risk assessment. Participants may apply for fellowships.

The Deichmann family donated the grant for the Deichmann Award lecture, which has been given by a distinguished scientist at each ICT (International Congress of Toxicology) since Bo Holmstedt of Sweden gave the first lecture in 1983 in San Diego, California, in remembrance and acknowledgment of the first person to officially suggest the formation of an International Union of Toxicology.

Today, twenty years after its founding, the International Union of Toxicology is a respected organization, which has been an affiliated member of the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU) since 1996. The Union has an efficient infrastructure and healthy finances. The next international congresses will take place in Brisbane, Australia in 2001, and three years later, in Tampere, Finland in 2004.

OTHER READING