

Opening Address SMC Jubilee Congress

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you on behalf of the Science Council of Foundation Mathematical Centre (SMC). I would like to extend a special welcome to our key note speakers and to those contributing to the parallel sessions. The Science Council is the advisory council for the scientific policy of SMC and it has a special responsibility for the SMC funding of mathematics research projects in the Dutch universities.

The Dutch mathematicians are organized in working communities representing different branches of mathematics. The conference organizers have asked each working community to invite the most outstanding scientist in their field to be a key note speaker at this meeting. We are very proud that all of them have accepted and will be speaking here today and tomorrow. Moreover the working communities have played an active role in the organization of the parallel sessions.

This meeting demonstrates that mathematics is a very exciting area of research in which Dutch scientists play an important role. The links between SMC and mathematics in the Dutch universities are twofold.

- The CWI, formerly MC, has been a breeding place for many talented mathematicians now holding positions in Dutch universities.
- The funding of university research by SMC has influenced mathematical research at the universities in general and has fostered inter-university collaboration.

In the parallel sessions we will see examples of both.

The quality of research in mathematics and the many young talents give confidence in the future of mathematics in the Netherlands. But we are also facing some problems that we have to solve in the coming years. The most

important problem is that we do not succeed in convincing society of the importance of mathematics , both as a field of fundamental research and as a science which can offer solutions to real problems. Symptoms of this are the decreasing enrolments of students in mathematics and the very modest participation of mathematicians in applied research programs. Like in other countries of the western world there is much pressure on the public funding of basic research. In this respect mathematics is particularly vulnerable.

Most people do not realize that many technological advances have been made possible by recent developments in mathematics. The contributions from mathematics often remain hidden. When we try to convince our colleagues from other sciences of the importance of mathematics in their fields they often respond by saying: Yes, I agree with you. I am glad that I took some math courses as a student. They do not realize that mathematics is a field of active research and that they might benefit from more recent advances in mathematics.

The image of mathematics is not just a matter of public relations; it is also determined by the research priorities we choose. Improving this image is a national task. As SMC is the only national organization that can influence mathematical research it can play an important role in tackling the problems described.

I think that as Dutch mathematicians we can solve these problems by building on the strong tradition reflected by this celebration of the golden anniversary of SMC. This meeting intends to emphasize what we as mathematicians have in common. The speakers have been asked to address a broad audience of mathematicians. So this is a good opportunity to hear more about what is going on in branches of mathematics other than your own.

I would like to conclude by thanking the organizers for an excellent job and by wishing all of you a fruitful meeting.