

History of the World Allergy Organization: A Global Scientific Meeting on Allergy Comes to Asia—The XX World Allergy Congress of Bangkok, Thailand, 2007

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History of the World Allergy Organization: In 1951, the leaders in allergy from all over the world came together to form the International Association of Allergology and Clinical Immunology (IAACI). For the next 60 years, the allergy world converged at the IAACI triennial meetings, which became biennial in 2003. The international meetings, originally named the International Congress of Allergology and Clinical Immunology (ICACI), are now the World Allergy Congress (WAC) hosted by the World Allergy Organization (WAO). Everyone who has aspired to have worldwide recognition has played a part in IAACI-WAO. The History of the World Allergy Organization traces the global arc of the allergy field over the past 60 years. The current officers of WAO elected to focus on this rich history, inviting prominent leaders who are interested in being part of this history project to write about their time with IAACI-WAO. This series will be presented in Cancún, México, as part of the XXII World Allergy Congress (December 4-8, 2011). Leading up to the Congress in Cancún, the World Allergy Organization Journal is presenting segments of the History as part of the "Notes of Allergy Watchers Series." Please enjoy.

—*Michael A. Kaliner, MD*
Historian, and Past President (2006–2007)
World Allergy Organization

On behalf of the Allergy, Asthma and Immunology Society of Thailand (AAIST), I am honored to have an opportunity to write this recollection of the XX World Allergy Congress (WAC 2007), which was held in Bangkok, Thailand during December 2–7, 2007. I had the pleasure of serving as the President of the local organizing committee (LOC).

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BIDDING FOR THE CONGRESS

The journey for Thailand to become the host of the WAC 2007 began as early as the middle of 1999. The Executive Committee of AAIST (formerly called AIST, with Asthma added to the name in 2009) realized that there was a possibility of the WAC (at that time called ICACI—International Congress of Allergology and Clinical Immunology) to come over to Asia in 2007, following the Congresses in Sydney 2000, Vancouver 2003, and Munich 2005. The AAIST began its lobbying activities in 1999 at the European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology Annual Meeting in Lisbon. It later became clear that the Congress was indeed coming to Asia in 2007, and hence the bidders were mostly from Asian countries (India, Thailand, Israel, and South Korea).

The bidding process occurred at the House of Delegates meeting during the International Congress of Allergology and Clinical Immunology in Sydney, 2000 (Fig. 1). By having a booth and other promotional activities in Sydney, AAIST made lots of friends and was able to convince them of our capability to host this important scientific meeting in Bangkok, and how it would also benefit our neighboring countries, including Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam. Surely, Thailand's main competition in the bidding was Korea. It required 2 rounds of voting to arrive at the final decision. AAIST members were ecstatic to win the bidding by a margin of only 2 votes. It was decided that the meeting, to be held in Bangkok, was going to be a joint meeting of the Asia Pacific Association of Allergy and Immunology and the West Pacific Allergy Organization, with Takeshi Fukuda and Chien-Soo Hong as presidents of the Asia Pacific Association of Allergy and Immunology and West Pacific Allergy Organization, respectively.

FORMATION, PLANNING, AND THE ROYAL BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS

Although the LOC was formed immediately after the bidding, and an initial ground work was laid, such as the fundamentals of the committee, consideration of the venue, dates, selection of the Professional Congress Organizer, accommodations for participants, social events, and so on, we had to wait to begin full implementation until the World Allergy Congress in Vancouver (WAC 2003) was over, as most of the WAO staff members were preoccupied



FIGURE 1. A group of Thai delegates in the bidding process in Sydney 2000.

with ongoing meeting activities (Fig. 2). However, AAIST made a decision to set the dates of the meeting to encompass the 80th Royal Birthday party (December 2, 2007) of King Bhumiphol of Thailand. This was initially to allow Congress participants to join and experience the celebrations in Thailand. This proved out to be a wise choice during 2006-2007, when Thailand went through a political uprising and a coup in 2006. There was a moment of uncertainty about whether the Congress could have been held in Thailand in 2007. We were quite certain that nothing would happen during the King's birthday, and surely enough, everything went smoothly with a huge celebration in Thailand's history (days of yellows). WAC 2007 participants really enjoyed the celebration in Thailand with great enthusiasm.

VENUE SELECTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SCIENTIFIC PROGRAM

Michael Kaliner, who would become the President of WAO after the Congress in Munich in 2005, "went into fifth

gear" preparing for WAC 2007 in Bangkok right after the Munich meeting. At that time, the LOC had already chosen the Queen Sirikit National Convention Center, one of the most beautiful congress venues in Thailand located right in the heart of Bangkok, as the selected venue. We interviewed 2 professional congress organizers and decided on Congrex.

The main Scientific Program Committee met over phone conferences every month along with Charu Malik of WAO and Susanne Rothschild and Anna Alm of Congrex to discuss the progress of the main program (Fig. 3). The LOC proposed the initial outline of the program, which was well received by the main Scientific Program Committee. These monthly conference calls were extremely efficient and productive and produced significant contributions to a very successful program. The Committee proposed 2 international workshops to sandwich the main program, that is, the International Workshop on Allergen Immunotherapy to begin the Congress and Food Allergy to close it. This tradition has continued until the present days. The abstract submission and review was done over the Internet with approximately 1000 abstracts reviewed in a short period by the Scientific Program



FIGURE 2. Official logo of the XX World Allergy Congress.

Committee members. This was quite an experience for me. In fact, I remember losing several nights of sleep from conference calls arranging the WAC 2007, and the abstract reviewing activity was one of the main responsible factors! The “Marathon meeting” in Windsor in June 2007 was another memorable task for me. I have never gone through anything that efficient before. Nonetheless, my family and I had the opportunity to stroll around Windsor and have a brief visit to Eton—an experience of a lifetime. While organizing the Congress, we made good friends with WAO staff Kay Whalen, Charu Malik, Karen Henley, Katie Vande Zande, Jennie Smazik, and Kate Kirchner, and Congrex Staff of Anna Alm, Jenny Strömgård, and Susanne Rothschild, and with so many others.

SUCCESSFUL PARTICIPATION IN A BEAUTIFUL VENUE

As the Congress date drew nearer, political upheaval heated up. To our relief, we were assured by most authorities that nothing would happen during the King’s birthday since all the Thais were eager to deliver good wishes to our beloved King on that occasion. As such, we were able to reassure the world and our Congress registrants and sponsors. The Congress drew about 4100 participants from 100 countries around

the world, significant and well rewarding numbers especially considering the difficulty we had at that time. Despite these hard times, we were able to convince most of the major sponsors to come to Thailand. One of them was Glaxo-SmithKline, which began the association with WAO in 2007.

The decoration of the venue was perfect. We established the global village of 34 national societies, in the tradition of WAO, with several local societies participating including Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia. The entire floor space of the venue was used up, which fitted perfectly well with our program. The audience was delighted by the new decorations in the venue and new carpets. Actually, several participants found resting places on the newly carpeted floor and steps of the venue!

The opening ceremony was the brainchild of Frank-Henning Johnson of Congrex who wanted Michael Kaliner and me to be carried onto the stage on the backs of elephants, but we ended up being carried on two Palanquins, each carried by 6 men (Fig. 4). The opening shows were marvelously arranged to the joy of all participants. The welcome reception soon followed with plenty of food, drink, and music. I had a memorable opportunity to entertain WAC 2007 participants with my musical band—77.com, including my daughter as a singer. We had the best time of our lives performing, and the dance floor was completely packed. The reception dragged on late into the night. The scientific session of the next day began in the morning with the Royal Ceremony, the official opening of the Congress by Crown Princess Mahachakri Sirindhorn (Fig. 5). The Princess graciously opened our Congress resulting in great joy felt among participants. She also visited various exhibit booths including the King’s booth provided by the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Center (TCEB), one of our main sponsors.

The Scientific Program was a true success and offered a generous amount of events:

- International Symposium on Immunotherapy (one full day)
- International Symposium on Food Allergy (one full day)
- House Dust Mite Workshop (one-half day)
- Emerging Societies Program Meeting
- Aeroallergen Symposium
- Postgraduate Courses: 6
- Plenary Sessions: 12
- Breakfast Seminars: 9
- Symposia: 24
- Meet the Expert: 5
- Clinical Year in Review: 6
- Sponsor Symposia: 10
- Satellite Symposia: 3
- Sister Symposia: 19
- Workshops: 11
- Debates: 6
- Oral Abstract Sessions: 25
- Poster Sessions: 3
- and many others

World Allergy Organization (WAO)
Michael A. Kaliner (Washington D.C., USA)
President

The Allergy and Immunology Society of Thailand (AIST)
Pakit Vichyanond (Bangkok, Thailand)
President

The Congress also included:

**The 7th Asia Pacific Congress of Allergology and Clinical Immunology
West-Pacific Allergology Symposium**

Organizing Committee

Michael A. Kaliner, United States, Chair
G. Walter Canonica, Italy
Richard F. Lockey, United States
Lanny J. Rosenwasser, United States

Carlos E. Baena-Cagnani, Argentina
Anthony Frew, United Kingdom
Connie H. Katelaris, Australia
Pakit Vichyanond, Thailand

Scientific Program Committee

Michael A. Kaliner, United States, Chair
Jean Bousquet, France
Alvaro A. Cruz, Brazil
Takeshi Fukuda, Japan
Motohiro Kurosawa, Japan
Lanny J. Rosenwasser, United States
C. Paolo Antonio Tassinari, Venezuela

Carlos E. Baena-Cagnani, Argentina
G. Walter Canonica, Italy
Anthony Frew, United Kingdom
Connie H. Katelaris, Australia
Johannes Ring, Germany
Menachem Rottem, Israel
Pakit Vichyanond, Thailand

Local Organizing Committee

Pakit Vichyanond, President
Kiat Ruxrungham, Budgeting
Sukanya Pothikamjorn, Logistics

Perapun Jareoncharsri, Secretary General
Suwat Benjaponpitak, Scientific
Visanu Pootong, Marketing

FIGURE 3. Organizing Committees of the XX World Allergy Congress.



FIGURE 4. Pakit Vichyanond and Michael Kaliner delivering the "Opening Gong".



FIGURE 5. Princess Maha Chakra Sirindhorn presiding over the “Royal Ceremony” of WAC 2007 at the Queen Sirikit National Conference Center.

The audio-visual services were impeccable. Most of the speakers were happy with the local Congress hostesses (who were mostly students from Thai Universities, my daughter was among them). One of the innovations initiated at WAC 2007, at the suggestion of Richard Lockey, was the “WAC Championship.” The WAC Championship was a team competition to answer up-to-date questions in allergy/immunology, occurring every noon in the Exhibit Hall. This activity quickly became a favorite event, competing with the noon debates. The final round of the WAC Championship was held at the Congress Gala event on the third night of the Congress at the Rose Garden. Again, the Gala night at the Rose Garden was a memorable event for all participants. Food and drink were sumptuous and plentiful. Shows were traditional and eye-catching. The event ended up with elegant fireworks celebrating the King’s birthday and a chance for participants to float the “Kratong”—“Loy Kratong” in the Garden Lake (Fig. 7).

One of the main events to remember was the presidential dinner. The event was held at the Royal Navy Hall overlooking the Chao Phya River bend (the main river of Bangkok) (Fig. 6).



FIGURE 6. The Gala Dinner of WAC 2007 at the Royal Navy Hall.



FIGURE 7. Delegates attending the Loy Krathong Party at the Rose Garden - WAC 2007 (center - Lalana Vichyanond, Tippayan Vichyanond and Charu Malik).

The Hall was newly constructed in a Thai traditional style. Several key historic sites in Bangkok can be viewed from this meeting hall. The food was carefully selected by the LOC and Congrex. The sequence of events during the dinner was meticulously carried out (under Frank-Henning Johnson). Several important key figures in allergy received awards, such as my mentor, Harold A Nelson, for his long contribution in the field of allergy, Malcolm Greaves for his description of the autoantibody to FcεRI in chronic urticaria, and of course, our beloved Connie Katelaris for her ongoing contributions to WAO.

CLOSING

Overall, the WAC 2007 was a major success for the allergy community worldwide—both East and West. Since it was held in Bangkok, the city considered to be located in the strategic center of Asia, the meeting attracted large numbers

of participants from Asia. Hence, the Congress exposed Asia to cutting-edge knowledge in the world of allergy and immunology. The consequence of the project has been immense in terms of enhancement in clinical service, academic teaching, and research in allergy and immunology in Thailand as well as throughout Asia.

Last but not least, the reasons behind the success were due to significant contributions from several committees and societies. I would like to thank all executive members of the AIST (Professors Suttiphon, Montri, Boonchua, Sathit, Suwat, Pantipa, Orapan, Orathai and colleagues), WAO (Michael Kaliner, Carlos Baena-Cagnani, Richard Lockey, Lanny Rosenwasser, Walter Canonica, Anthony Frew), all of the members of the all the organizing committees and of course the WAO staff and the Congrex staff for making WAC 2007 Bangkok a successful and memorable event for all members of WAO.