

ADDRESS BY THE GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE
INTERNATIONAL ASTRONOMICAL UNION

Richard M. West

It is a pleasure to extend warm greetings from the IAU Executive Committee to the organizers and to all participants in IAU Colloquium 78.

When the possibility about holding a meeting on "Astronomy with Schmidt-type Telescopes" was discussed at the time of the IAU General Assembly in Patras, Greece, August 1982, there was full consensus that this was a most timely subject and by accepting sponsorship, the IAU Executive Committee expressed its appreciation of the high level of the proposed programme.

Today, one year later, the great need for this meeting is underlined by the large number of participants and the many papers which have been announced. It is interesting to note that no less than six Commissions and two Working Groups of the IAU are responsible for the scientific programme, indicating a very broad support and a wide range of topics. Curiously enough, the person who has contributed most to this branch of astronomical science, and whose name figures in the title of the meeting, Bernhard Schmidt, was not a member of the IAU and carried out most of his revolutionary work without being known by the world-wide astronomical community. Perhaps this is because in those days, more than 50 years ago, only full-time, professional astronomers could become IAU members and because consultants were not yet co-opted in the IAU Commissions.

Looking through the programme, one is immediately impressed by the wide variety of topics. It may perhaps even be justified to ask what, for instance, comets and elliptical galaxies have to do with each other. However, this is typical in Schmidt astronomy since the photographic emulsion does not distinguish between the two: it shows everything which can be seen in a given sky area. Any astronomical photograph may reveal completely unforeseen objects, and everybody who scrutinizes such material may be lucky to benefit from what is commonly termed serendipity.

I am sure that the participants in this meeting will, in a similar way, learn much from areas outside their own field during the next few days, and I wish all of you a most fruitful and interactive meeting.