


Basu, Ismail-Zadeh, Leinen, Millar, and Wu Receive 2019 Ambassador Awards

Sunanda Basu, Alik Ismail-Zadeh, Margaret Leinen, Connie Millar, and Lixin Wu were awarded the 2019 Ambassador Award at the AGU Fall Meeting Honors Ceremony, held on 11 December 2019 in San Francisco, Calif. The award is for “outstanding contributions to one or more of the following areas: societal impact, service to the Earth and space community, scientific leadership, and promotion of talent/career pool.”

By [AGU](#)  24 February 2020

Citation: AGU (2020), Basu, Ismail-Zadeh, Leinen, Millar, and Wu receive 2019 Ambassador Awards, *Eos*, 101, <https://doi.org/10.1029/2020EO140476>. Published on 24 February 2020.

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Alik Ismail-Zadeh

Citation for Alik Ismail-Zadeh

Dr. Ismail-Zadeh has the requisite research record, citations, and visiting professorships and fellowships that we expect of high-performing members of our fields. He is that and much more.

His scientific work is truly interdisciplinary, involving applied mathematics, geophysics, natural hazards, science diplomacy, and history across regions from the central Apennines to the Tibetan Himalayas. His engagement and leadership across the national and international geophysical scientific community are immense: He has helped promote geosciences from Earth observations and applications in the atmospheric, climate, and hydrological sciences to volcanology and space weather for the United Nations (UN) Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the World Meteorological Organization, the Group on Earth Observations, and others. More broadly, he has supported disaster risk assessment and management efforts for the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs and the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, including for controlling underground nuclear explosions through the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization. In addition, he has initiated a number of outreach and education efforts, including the International Union of Geodesy and Geophysics (IUGG) Science Grants, Science Education, Science Publication, and Science Policy programs.

Dr. Ismail-Zadeh's impact is long lasting. In one illustration, when he started the work on the

formation of AGU's Natural Hazards focus group in 2009, only a few professed interest. Today, the Natural Hazards section unites thousands of researchers. To wit, both IUGG and AGU have selected issues of natural hazards and disasters as key foci of their centennial scientific themes and celebrations.

Two telling statements from other highly recognized researchers in our fields reflect on Dr. Ismail-Zadeh's singular characteristics: "What has been achieved in these areas has been due in no small measure, to Alik's inputs and unique qualities. His efforts are tireless and is characterized by a willingness to use his own time in order to save yours....above all, I value his mature judgment and guidance." And "the sense of pride about his upbringing and family truly shows the human values he cherishes. Judging from his passion and commitment to our profession, this also reflects his feelings and unqualified commitment towards his scientific family, which has made him an ideal ambassador for Earth and Space sciences."

There are many more such sentiments. Dr. Ismail-Zadeh's contributions have been "seismic" on many levels. His formal recognition as an ambassador is a credit to the vision of AGU and most significantly attests to the power of employing science to help secure the safety and sustainability of our societies and systems.

—Roger S. Pulwarty, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Boulder, Colo.

Response

I am honored to receive an AGU Ambassador Award and am grateful to Roger Pulwarty for nominating me and to Harsh Gupta, Yuan Tseh Lee, Özlem Adiyaman Lopes, and Soroosh Soroshian for supporting the nomination. I am honored twice to receive the award in 2019, the year of the AGU Centennial and my 25-year membership in the Union.

Graduating as a mathematician, I moved to geophysics and dedicated my life to studies of dynamics of the lithosphere and mantle and their manifestation in sedimentary basin evolution and, later, in earthquakes and volcanic activities. It was the time of eureka, when scientific discoveries brought satisfaction, enjoyment, and happiness. The beginning of the 21st century, however, changed my professional life from pure science to science for society. After the 2004 great Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunamis, I asked myself, "What is the value of the science I am doing, if this science cannot protect people against disasters? What is a missing link between science and society?" My scientific adviser and colleague V. Keilis-Borok liked to say that "a scientist is not

merely a person who conducts scientific research; a scientist is a person who cannot live without doing so.” So true...I would only add that a scientist is a person who should help society to improve well-being.

“An instant understanding, the efficiency of thought and action, and a good feeling that comes when the like-minded people work together...” (F. Press, as quoted by V. I. Keilis-Borok in *One Hundred Reasons to be a Scientist* (http://users.ictp.it/~pub_off/books/100_reasons.pdf), p. 124, Abdus Salam International Centre for Theoretical Physics, Trieste, Italy, 2004). For the past 2 decades, I have tried to work together with natural and social scientists and engineers in solving challenging problems of society, including disaster risk reduction, and to speak to representatives of industry and international nongovernmental and intergovernmental organizations as well as to national and regional policy makers to convince them that science is available and ready to be used in their daily activities to benefit humanity. What brings me the biggest satisfaction after scientific discoveries are the results of my voluntary work in various capacities on behalf of AGU, the European Geosciences Union, IUGG, and the International Science Council. Creating new knowledge and delivering it to society, being an *ambactus* of the scientific community, and bridging nations via science are my credo. I am pleased that AGU recognizes the contribution to service to the Earth and Space science community and science policy leadership with the award and happy to join AGU Ambassadors.

—Alik Ismail-Zadeh, Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, Germany; also at Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow