

OPENING REMARKS

Riccardo Giacconi

It is a pleasure to welcome all the participants of this “Workshop on the Status of Women in Astronomy.” The response to this initiative has been overwhelming, and I am informed that a number of registration forms and checks had to be returned in the last few weeks because we could not quite cope with the oversubscription. The organizing committee and I were heartened by this response and are most grateful to our colleagues of the John Hopkins University for making available their larger lecture halls and meeting rooms. As some of you may know, the meeting itself is sponsored by NASA and NSF as well as by AURA and the Space Telescope Science Institute. I think that this sponsorship is evidence of the desire and determination of the funding agencies to help in insuring equal opportunity in scientific careers to women and men of all the races, religions and national origins that compose our varied society.

Each one of us brings to this workshop a special perspective and motivation. I am a scientist, a manager, and a human being. I hold deep convictions on the value of cognitive learning as a process of personal and societal evolution. Lighting up the darkness with reason and understanding seems to me incompatible with irrationality and prejudice. As a manager, I have attempted to the best of my ability to create here at Space Telescope Science Institute a rational and decent environment for the personal and professional growth of all of the staff. As a human being, I am conscious of my own limitations and I feel a deep compassion both for the victim and the perpetrators of discrimination, believing that there but for the grace of God go I.

During my tenure as Director here at the Institute I was frankly surprised to find how much concerted and continuing effort is required to substantially improve the status of women colleagues. To achieve greater participation and better career prospects will require persistence and better information. Positive experiences and successes as well as failures should be shared among different institutions. A common basis of understanding and purpose could multiply the beneficial effects of initiatives taken at a single institution.

When several members of the ST ScI staff suggested this meeting I was happy to support it and I believe we can make some real progress in the problems of implementation of what I believe is generally accepted as a moral imperative. I am convinced that good will exists but that ignorance in the specifics of the ills and of the cure still prevails. A philosopher friend of mine, in seeing how much effort I was spending in fighting for lost causes, remarked once that in life there are only four combinations of conditions:

- tolerable and changeable
- tolerable and unchangeable
- intolerable and changeable
- intolerable and unchangeable.

He pointed out that I, as well as most well intentioned people, spent our time fighting intolerable and unchangeable conditions. Since we can live with what is tolerable

whether improvable or not, how much better to concentrate our efforts on what is intolerable but still changeable. I believe this workshop can change things particularly if we can come up with practical, implementable rules of conduct that well intentioned managers or even institutions can adopt. I hope we will succeed in achieving small but tangible progress.

Riccardo Giacconi: Director, Space Telescope Science Institute, 3700 San Martin Drive, Baltimore, MD 21218