

# South Africa's irrigation champion Felix... New President of ICID

by Carol Posthumus

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23rd ICID Congress  
and 10th CIID Meeting  
IRRIGATION & DRAINAGE  
OCTOBER 8-14, 2017  
MEXICO CITY

Felix addresses the Council following his election as President of ICID in Mexico City

**In a moment of great honour for South Africa and local irrigation and engineering, Felix Reinders was appointed as President of the International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage (ICID) in October 2017, at the World Trade Centre in Mexico City, Mexico.**

This is the first time that a South African and a son of SADC (Southern African Development Community) has been appointed as president of ICID, the highly influential international 67-year-network of drainage and irrigation professionals, with members from over 76 countries around the world.

New Delhi-headquartered ICID – for those not in the know - is a bit like the UN of the irrigation, drainage and water world.

Felix Reinders, who is based at the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) in Pretoria, will enjoy a three year tenure as ICID President. The ARC, the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries,

the Department of Water and Sanitation are founder members with SABI a honorary founder member of the South African National Committee on irrigation and Drainage (SANCID).

Felix will travel to many countries with Canada his first official engagement as ICID President for its 69th ICID, IEC and Regional Conference.

Felix, a professional engineer who completed his studies in 1979, has dedicated his considerable energies and talents to wisely and tirelessly serving the irrigation and

drainage sector over the years. Also Secretary-Treasurer of SABI and an Honorary Member of SABI (there are only 7 Honorary Members). It was during August this year in Stellenbosch at SABI's bi-annual Congress that SABI bestowed Honorary Membership on Felix, who has been a SABI council member since 1982 and was 14th President of SABI from 2000 to 2001, receiving his Gold medal in 2005.

Felix has made a huge and multi-dimensional contribution to the sector of irrigation and drainage engineering.

## A true role model In agricultural engineering

Felix Reinders completed his engineering degree at the University of Pretoria in 1979 and started working at the then Department of Agriculture's Directorate of Irrigation Engineering.

"I have a passion for Agricultural Engineering and specialize in Water resources management and Irrigation engineering at the ARC-Institute for Agricultural Engineering," says Felix.

A highly productive and multi-talented engineer, Felix's notable achievements include:

- Research of an infiltrometer to size centre pivots, which received international recognition.
- Main author of the Water Conservation and Demand Strategy for Agriculture as an outflow of the New Water Act of South Africa.
- Formulation and compiling of the National Sub-surface drainage design manual for the Department of Agriculture of South Africa
- Developed and implemented a mobile irrigation laboratory to determine the efficiency of irrigation systems in the field.

- Author of many scientific papers, chapters in books and articles, especially in the irrigation field.
- Organiser of various International and National Symposia and Congresses.
- Training of students on an international (UNESCO) and national basis (universities)
- Developed a new water use efficiency framework for South Africa
- Developed two manuals of drip irrigation (Designers- and Farmer manual)
- Developed guidelines for Drainage in South Africa.
- Serve on various national and international committees.
- Successfully mentoring young engineers and technicians to enter the engineering market.
- Presenter on various scientific Irrigation engineering topics at Congresses.

What advice does Felix, a leader in agricultural engineering, give to youngsters today looking to careers in irrigation or agricultural engineering?



He says the irrigation sector offers various opportunities - and the industry in South Africa is recognised globally for its innovation and creativity in technology.

Felix says: "As in the world, the South African water sector faces many challenges, such as the growth of the population, the need to grow the economy and the threat of global climate change. These are all opportunities for students considering a career in irrigation.

"Choosing a career is one of the most important decisions one will ever make. A career is not merely a way to earn a living; it is also a way to reach one's full potential. One needs to be committed and to constantly develop the skills one will need to advance."



Mexican thumbs up!



Rainbow days...Felix and Rika's greenhouse at home.



Felix at the ICID Congress in Mexico City

## Lecturing

Several professionals in the irrigation sector muse Felix was mentor to them when they were young engineers and technicians. Further, Felix is active in irrigation engineering research, development, testing, design, training and mentoring, and is a regular lecturer at UNESCO in the Netherlands, training on a national and international basis. He also has authored many academic papers over the years as well as the SABI History. Moreover, Felix also has authored manuals on irrigation engineering, and addresses many professional gatherings locally and internationally.

Anyone who knows Felix will tell you his multi-tasking and sheer knowledge of many topics in irrigation, water and beyond is amazing. Felix is certainly a gentleman who shows the truth of the adage "if you want something done – ask a busy person", Besides serving on various international and local committees and organisations professionally, Felix still finds the time to serve in his local community on church and school committees.

Felix is passionate about the work of ICID, and tells SABI magazine: "It is indeed a huge honour and responsibility to be the President of ICID."

He observes that his appointment is a remarkable first for the southern African irrigation community, as South Africa only became a member of ICID in 1993.

The event where Felix was announced as President was the ICID 23rd International Congress on Irrigation and Drainage (ICID) and the 68th International Executive Council Meeting in Mexico City.

## Mexico

The Congress's theme in Mexico was "Modernizing Irrigation and Drainage for a New Green Revolution" and was attended by more than 832 delegates from 35 countries.

Felix elaborates: "The participants discussed two Questions i.e. Q. 60: "Water productivity: revisiting the concepts in light of water, food and energy nexus" and Q.61: "State of knowledge of irrigation techniques and practicalities within given socio-economic settings".

- and an international seminar on Water use in the food value chain: "A challenge for a new Green revolution?" session were also held. ICID has been highly instrumental in Green revolution acceleration throughout the world during its history.

Felix says that the ICID presidency is a three year long position, and the duties are wide-ranging, including aspects such as Chairing meetings of the Council; Chairing the the Management Board and Office Bearers' Committee, Staff Committee of the Central Office; Nominating the Secretary General to representing ICID in international forums and promoting ICID internationally,, amongst many other duties. Felix shares with us a bit about the history of ICID: "ICID was established in 24 June 1950 as a Scientific, Technical and Voluntary not-for-profit non-

by improving water and land management and the productivity of irrigated and drained lands through appropriate management of water, environment and application of irrigation, drainage and flood management techniques. The activities of the Commission are pursued in accordance with the ICID Constitution and By-Laws," says Felix.

## Sustainable irrigated agriculture

ICID aims to achieve sustainable irrigated agriculture through integrated water resources development and management. The ICID network has grown to 76 countries all over the world and represents 95% of irrigated agriculture in the world.

Felix is taking the reigns of ICID as the Commission launches its Vision 2030 Road Map.

Goals in the Action Plan of ICID's Vision 2030



ICID's Vision 2030 Road Map's main drive, says Felix, is towards "a water secure world free of poverty and hunger". How does Felix envisage that during his Presidency he will help to accelerate this vital Vision?

"For me, the best way of moving progress forwards on the Vision is our work together on the national committees and working groups of ICID towards sustainable agriculture water management

governmental international organisation, headquartered in New Delhi, India.

"The Commission is dedicated to enhancing the worldwide supply of food and fibre for all people

through inter-disciplinary approaches to economically viable, socially acceptable and environmentally sound irrigation, drainage and flood management," comments Felix. Looking back home at South

Africa, what areas does Felix feel are notable in terms of irrigation and agriculture at present?

Firstly, says Felix, it is important to acknowledge that "in South Africa, sustainable access to adequate water supplies for agriculture is largely constrained by natural limitations imposed by rainfall, which is variable, erratic, spatially uneven and temporally distributed, as well as our limited stored surface water availability. These circumstances are compounded by rainfall seasonality and high inter- and intra-seasonal variability. Nearly 91% of the country is arid, semi-arid or dry sub-humid."

Felix emphasises that irrigation has a very important role to play in boosting society and empowerment in South Africa: "Irrigation is a response to the call for the sector to increase its contribution to agricultural production thus ensuring food security, poverty alleviation

and job creation."

Looking internationally at trends, Felix says that irrigation – which is as old as civilisation – will also change with progress – and massively. But as water is a limited resource, efforts will continue to focus on water productivity in all its forms to ensure less poverty and food insecurity in our world.

Felix elaborates: "Challenges for irrigation in the distant future look apparent, with extraordinary changes on a scale comparable to that of the electronics revolution unfolding. We may not be able to predict exactly how irrigated agriculture will change by 2030, but the prospects of increased water availability for agricultural production is not possible.

"Agricultural research, technologies and development should therefore be focused on water productivity, water conservation, water use efficiency and the better use of precipitation

– so-called more crop per drop – to reduce food insecurity, poverty and the vulnerability of the agricultural sector to production risk and uncertainty."

Felix is looking very much forward to the responsibilities and duties of his ICID Presidency. He thrives on committees and organisational teamwork, and the collegial spirit and productivity of working together with fellow professionals from various locales towards sustainable agricultural and water management.

He says: "ICID is, indeed, a family of irrigation and drainage specialists from all over the world, supported by governments. For me the joy of ICID is in that we work together as national committees towards sustainable agriculture water management through inter-disciplinary approaches to economically viable, socially acceptable and environmentally sound irrigation, drainage and flood management."

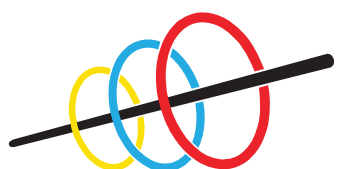
At SABI magazine we cannot help but wonder if this fine gentleman of irrigation engineering has any spare minutes in a busy and responsible schedule, and if, indeed, Felix has any hobbies.

Felix and his wife Rika are in fact passionate gardeners, and grow their own vegetables. They also constructed a greenhouse at home, with automated micro and drip irrigation, where their beautiful orchids are also grown. "When our grandchildren come to visit – our ninth grandchild is to be born in 2018 – Oupa (Granddad) Felix loves to show them the created rainbow amongst the sprinklers in his garden," says Felix proudly.

It seems very apt that Felix is representing the Rainbow Nation at the international level of ICID President.

**All at SABI magazine wish him Congratulations and Godspeed on his mission.**

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## SANCID symposium

SANCID (South African National Committee on Irrigation and Drainage) represents South Africa at ICID.

Felix Reinders, President of ICID, says that SANCID organises the SANCID Symposium on a bi-annual basis, to bring together all role-players in the South African irrigation and drainage fraternity for knowledge sharing and productive interaction in a setting located in a prominent agricultural area. The next SANCID Symposium will be in 2018 and promises to be an event not to be missed.

In the past, South Africa successfully organised the 51st IEC meeting of ICID and the 6th International Micro Irrigation Congress in Cape Town, as well as the 2nd African Regional Conference.

On annual basis, ICID hosts events and meetings in different countries. For the next three years the Countries are:

- 2018: Canada-69th ICID, IEC and Regional Conference
- 2019: Indonesia- 70th ICID, IEC and 3rd World Irrigation and Drainage Forum
- 2020: Australia-71st ICID, IEC and 24th International Congress on Irrigation and Drainage

More info on [www.icid.org](http://www.icid.org)