Dear …….

Thank you for informing us about the bogus paper.

One of our reviewers had already informed us about a paper that seemed to be a joke, as he named it, and he proposed to start making a list of this kind of persons that are taking valuable time of several reviewers and members of the Program and Organizing committees of the conferences. I am not sure how unethical are these bogus submissions, and if there is some way to detect all of them in a large conference.

In our acceptance e-mails we were very explicit about the reasons we had in accepting a small percentage of papers as "non-reviewed papers". We expressed clearly that by the acceptance deadline we had a small percentage of papers for which we received no feedback from the reviewers, in spite of the fact that the submitted papers were sent to at least three reviewers. The pressure we had in sending an acceptance or non-acceptance to the authors of these papers was increasing. We felt it was not fair, not even ethical, to refuse a paper, which refusal was not suggested by its reviewers. Consequently, we considered that one possibility was to accept them as "non-reviewed papers"; until we can have adequate feedback from the reviewers, in which case the paper status would change. The acceptance policy published in the conference web page allowed this kind of acceptation, because in the call for papers and in the web site we have been always clear and explicit that we were accepting not just research papers, but also position papers, case studies, panels, reports, invited papers (which, by definition do not go through the reviewing process) etc. **The author(s) of a fake paper accepted as a non re-reviewed one has complete responsibility on the content of the paper.**

Some of the authors to whom we offered the possibility of non-reviewed acceptance preferred to withdraw their paper which is understandable and very respectful. Others preferred to wait until we have some review of their paper that would change their paper status and others did not care about this kind of acceptance. As you know, and as it has been written in several books and articles in the area of Scientific and Technical Communications, the functions of conferences are very different from those of journals, and this is why there are conferences with no paper review at all, and very known ones ask for submission of abstract of no more that 50 words. We are trying to find a place between the high formality of the journal and the informality of the conferences. And with the increasing number of papers submission we have been having we tried to have more automated support simultaneously with some adequate level of reviewing. A computer program selects three reviewers and sends the paper automatically to randomly selected reviewers, from the paper's area. Our intension in doing so was to provide support for this activity and to make it as independent as possible from the Organizing Committee, so the selection is not biased by human selection. This apparently opened the door for some people to send bogus papers. Since we did not receive review for some of these papers, and we thought that it was not fair to reject a non rejected paper, we accepted them as non-reviewed ones, which was allowed by our stated acceptance policy. As you see, with the intention to be fair, we were treated unfairly by those who silently were sending bogus papers.

Based on the fact, stated in the call for papers and web sites, since the first conference we organized, that we were accepting not just research papers, we had the acceptance policy of accepting a small percentage of non-reviewed papers. We made it explicit in the conference web site that "If the reviewers selected for reviewing a given paper do not make their respective reviews before the papers acceptance deadline, the selection committee may accept the paper as a non-reviewed paper…If a paper does not meet the criteria for inclusion as reviewed paper, the selection committee may invite the author to present it as a non-reviewed paper."

If you check the web you can find many conferences accepting reviewed and non-reviewed papers. The percentage of the non-reviewed papers in our conferences has been lately about 10%-15%. Different kinds of reasoning can be found in the specialized literature on the subject, explaining why non-reviewed papers might, and even should, accepted. Robin and Burke (1987, Peer review in medical journals. *91*(2), 252-255), for example, affirms with regards to journals, that "Editors should reserve space for articles…that receive poor review…they should publish unreviewed material..." (In A. C. Weller, 2001, **Editorial Peer Review, Its Strength and weaknesses,** p.317).

It was established for the Database PubMed Central (following suggestion made by Harold Varmus, then Director of the National Institute of Health: NIH) that "the non-peer -reviewed reports will also enter PubMed Central…reports may never be submitted to a Journal for a traditional peer review, yet will be deposited in PubMed Central…" (Weller, 2001, **Editorial Peer Review, Its Strength and weaknesses,** p.320). Gordon (1978, Optional published refereeing. Physics Today, 31(10), 81) championed the idea of adopting an optional published refereeing where "the publication of almost everything will be guaranteed with the requirement that referees' comments be published along with the articles." (Weller, 2001, **Editorial Peer Review, Its Strength and weaknesses,** p.317). These are few examples with regards to what it is supposed to be the most formal reviewing, which is the journals' one. Being almost unanimously accepted that conferences reviewing are informal or non-formal because the inherent time restrictions and the timeliness objective of these kinds of publications, then it is a legitimate and academically respectful the way we are conducting our reviewing process.

Furthermore, in the Call for Papers of our conferences, included in the respective Web Sites, we have been stating that:

> *"Submitted papers will be sent to reviewers. The best 10% of the papers, according to the reviewers, will be published in JSCI Journal. Invited, non-peer reviewed papers, might also be accepted considering the CV of the author(s). Some of these invited papers, if chosen by the session chair as the best paper of the session, might also be published by JSCI Journal, because the 30% of sessions best papers will also be published in the journal.*

So, we are making the commitment to send submitted papers to reviewers, but we cannot assure that the reviewers will make their reviews on time, because this is not in our hands. We did say that the best 10% will go to the Journal (JSCI) publication, and we are fulfilling this commitment. As you and most scholars know, and as it has been repetitively written in specialized books and articles on the subject, the reviewing process is formal for journals but non-formal, or informal for conference proceedings, because the timeliness of the proceedings publications and because they represent a place to

publish before sending a paper to a Journal. This is why a variety of this informality is found in conferences: from the acceptations based just on very short abstract (50 words,) to acceptations based on 100-words abstracts, to extended abstracts, to a mixture of abstracts, extended abstracts and full papers draft, as it is the case of our conferences. And we have been saying so, explicitly and clearly, in our conferences' call for papers and web sites. We never said that all our papers acceptance are based on 100% of formal reviewing, although we send the submitted papers to at least 3 reviewers.

As you know, there is a general understanding that in scientific/technical communication, "formal communication is not the only mean of communicating ideas within the scientific/technical community. The formal media may be the more permanent means of recording ideas but are only part of the overall enterprise. [The formal media] are complemented by informal, but well established means of exchanging ideas. The formal media are also not all equally formal. In addition…at least three of them - patents, technical reports and conference proceedings - are sometimes considered fugitive forms of scientific/technical literature…The informal exchange of information among colleagues is much more important at certain periods of the research process than the formal media…along the informal-formal continuum, conference papers may rest at or near the middle…papers presented at conferences may not have gone through the same development or review process as that required of the journal article…the conference is the place for highlighting research effort before publication in a journal. In others it is a place where ideas are tested, a place to distribute research results or the place to claim priority… National societies in the same discipline often sponsor international conferences in order to encourage both informal and formal exchange of ideas." (Walker and Hurt, 1990, **Scientific and technical Literature**, American Library Association, pp. XX, 79-80) And this is what we have been trying to do. This is why we have been, are encouraging, since the beginning, the submission of different kind of papers: research, reports, case studies, position papers, etc.; abstracts and full papers; an this why we have been trying to bring together to the same conference, researchers and practitioners, academics and professionals.

This is also why we preferred not to use the phrase "refereed proceedings" to refer to our conferences proceedings. Weller (2002, **Editorial Peer Review**, p. 15), for example, states that "Since editorial peer review is a process, its definition can and does vary according to how the process in envisioned." There is a general obvious definition: "evaluation by one's peers", but the meaning of "one's peers" differs according different editorial policies and according different universities' regulations.

Pettigrew and Nichols state explicitly the ambiguity of the term: "'Refereed journal' is not a precise term, but rather covers a continuum of peer/controlled quality assessment that reaches its most strict definition with double-blind peer review by several scholars working in the research area, and a minimal ability of the editor to override clear decisions by the peer reviewers" (Pettigrew and Nichols, 1994, Publication patterns of LIS faculty form 1982-1992: effects of doctoral programs. *Library and Information Science Research, 16*, 139-156.) So, depending on the meaning of "minimal ability" the same journal's editorial policy may be considered as "peer reviewed" or "not-peer reviewed". Since conference proceedings reviewing is less formal than the journal reviewing process, or informal, then the imprecision of the term is significantly higher.

DeBakey (1990, Journal peer reviewing. Anonymity or disclosure? *Archives of Ophthalmology,* 108(3), 345-349) asked "is a reviewer of a manuscript…always a peer: a person who has equal standing with another, as in rank, class or age?" So, according to this definition of peer (equal standing of academic rank, for example) we are definitely not making "peer reviews", and this kind of "peer reviews" is definitely not the base of our paper acceptance policy.

After examining several definitions of the phrase "peer-reviewed journal", Weller (2002, **Editorial Peer Review**, p. 16) states that "These definitions contain a common element in that they each require some type of review of a manuscript other than the editor. Some definitions are more prescriptive than others, incorporating the number of processes and requirement. **These definitions do not address such issue as the percentage of material in a journal that should be peer reviewed**, or many other details of the process." Weller consequently makes a definition which is "intended to be as inclusive as possible." Accordingly, she states that "A peer-reviewed journal is one that has a portion of submitted manuscripts evaluated by someone other that the editor of the journal." Again, this is a very elastic definition because it depends on the magnitude of the "portion" of submitted manuscripts evaluated by someone other that the editor of the journal. An acceptable "portion" for a given journal, o as given university, might be completely unacceptable for another. And, if we take into account that conferences proceedings reviewing are less formal that those of journals (or informal), that some (or all, depending on the conference) of the paper acceptances are based on abstracts, and not on full papers, and a percentage of the papers might be accepted as non-reviewed ones, then the level of imprecision of the definition increases meaningfully.

Sincerely,

Prof. Nagib Callaos