



Executive Committee of the International Mathematics Union (IMU)
c/o IMU President Distinguished Professor Shigefumi Mori

January 21, 2017

Dear Members of the IMU Executive Committee,

Today I woke up compelled to write to you my personal letter. Right after my plea to change the name on the Rolf Nevanlinna Prize and Medal, addressed to the General Assembly of ICMI, I was thanked by many members present. But the one response is still imprinted in my memory. Gilah C. Leder told me, "Thank you, *I was on the Executive Committee of ICMI, and I did not know.*" Imagine, a most distinguished scholar, a Laureate of the highest Felix Klein Medal did not know about Prof. Nevanlinna's public support for Hitler and his leadership in the recruitment of criminal SS! This makes me think that the 1981 IMU Executive Committee also was not aware of this dark past, or it would not have established a prize in the name that makes me cringe when I look at IMU's web pages. All right, an innocent mistake was made by the distinguished IMU mathematicians, who were uninformed in the history, what are we – what are you – to do now?

There is a popular misconception that one who does nothing, does nothing wrong. In fact, now that you know the truth, doing nothing would transform an innocent mistake of 1981 into an intentional stain on IMU and on all mathematicians. This would stain forever our profession. Remember Grigory Perelman's refusal of the Field's Medal and the Millennium Prize, and his exodus from mathematics? Now you understand why this great mind did not wish to be a "poster buy" for mathematics, where the majority condones immorality of the minority.

We ought to do something to correct the 1981 mistake. Putting myself in your shoes, I realize the complexity of the situation. In my opinion, it is noble to admit a mistake of your predecessors and correct it. How? For example, you can let the Rolf Nevanlinna's Prize expire, effective immediately or by 2018 ICM Congress at the latest. Let it expire, and create a new prize in honor of a person, whose profile will be appreciated by all people in the world: John von Neumann, Claude Shannon, Alan Turing, Norbert Wiener.

If the \$15,000 donated by Finland is a concern, I am willing to contribute this amount every four years, even though in 1978 I started my American life as a refugee, after revoking my citizenship in the totalitarian Soviet Union.

This is certainly an important public affair, and the whole world is watching. I brought the public awareness to the Rolf Nevanlinna prize in my book *The Scholar and the State: In Search of Van der Waerden* (Birkhäuser, Basel, 2015). Make me proud of you when I cover your decision in my forthcoming memoirs *Memory in Flashback: A Mathematician's Adventures on Both Sides of the Atlantic*.

Happy New Year, dear colleagues,

Alexander Soifer
A Concerned Citizen of the World