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The She Is An Astronomer project seeks to break down misconceptions and gender issues in astronomy and science

21 April 2009, Paris: The highly anticipated International Year of Astronomy 2009 Cornerstone project, She Is An Astronomer, was launched today. She Is An Astronomer aims to help achieve several of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, including promoting gender equality and empowering women.

Gender equality is a priority concern for the whole scientific community, regardless of its field, cultural background or geographic location. This is also the case for astronomy, where only approximately one quarter of all professionals are women. In some countries there are no female astronomers, whilst in others more than half the professional astronomers are female. These numbers drop towards more senior levels, suggesting that scientific careers are heavily affected by social and cultural factors and are not determined solely by ability. The International Year of Astronomy 2009 Cornerstone project, She Is An Astronomer (SIAA), has been established to address these issues and tackle the main problems.

The SIAA programme of activities was announced today during the European Week of Astronomy & Space Science at the University of Hertfordshire, UK. Boasting a mixture of international, national and local events ranging from conferences, meetings and workshops to address gender issues, events targeted at teenagers, and the central SIAA website, the variety is designed to appeal to a wide cross-section of the professional and public communities.

The official SIAA website, www.sheisanastronomer.org, provides a one-stop-shop for gender issues in astronomy and science. The site boasts five sections: profiles of living and historic astronomers; resources for female astronomers; events taking place during IYA2009; an SIAA Ambassadors' Area; and a forum where issues, lessons and challenges can be discussed, including the opportunity to question experts. The website provides neutral, informative and accessible information and will be used to advertise new events, keeping interested parties at the forefront of developments. Examples of best practices and relevant statistics will be pooled, making them accessible to the wider community. Content will be regularly added during 2009, resulting in a vast depository that will remain online long into the future, acting as an ongoing legacy.

Several of the international and national meetings arranged for 2009 feature a SIAA presence. These include the IAU General Assembly in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, meetings in the US and Egypt, a book launch in Australia, an exhibition in Germany and many local events. Spain is conducting its first ever survey of women in astronomy and has also produced a calendar featuring historic female astronomers.

IYA2009 encourages us to discuss magnificent and complex topics, from black holes to the mysteries of our Sun, but without losing sight of the core human aspects. SIAA will play its part in ensuring that the Year's impact is definitely felt here on Earth.

Notes

The IAU is the international astronomical organisation that brings together almost 10 000 distinguished astronomers from all nations of the world. Its mission is to promote and safeguard the science of astronomy in all its aspects through international cooperation. The IAU also serves as the internationally recognised authority for assigning designations to celestial bodies and the surface features on them. Founded in 1919, the IAU is the world's largest professional body for astronomers.

Links

She Is An Astronomer website: <http://www.sheisanastronomer.org>

IYA2009 website: <http://www.astronomy2009.org>

European Week of Astronomy & Space Science: <http://www.jenam2009.eu>

For more information

Helen Walker

She Is An Astronomer Project Chair

STFC Rutherford Appleton Laboratory

Space Science and Technology Department, Building R68

Harwell Science and Innovation Campus

Didcot, Oxon, OX11 0QX, UK

Tel.: +44 (0) 1235 446 490

Cell : +44 (0) 7870 977 018

E-mail: helen.walker@stfc.ac.uk

Further contacts

Pedro Russo

IAU IYA2009 Coordinator

ESO ePOD, Garching, Germany

Tel: +49 89 320 06 195

Cellular: +49 176 6110 0211

Fax: +49 89 320 23 62

E-mail: prusso@eso.org

Yolanda Berenguer

UNESCO Focal Point for the International Year of Astronomy 2009

UNESCO HQ, Paris

Tel: +33 1 45684171

E-mail: y.berenguer@unesco.org

Dr. Karel A. van der Hucht

General Secretary, International Astronomical Union

IAU Secretariat, Paris, France

Tel: +33 1 43 25 83 58

E-mail: K.A.van.der.Hucht@sron.nl

Lars Lindberg Christensen

IAU Press Officer

ESO ePOD, Garching, Germany

Tel: +49 89 3200 6761
Cellular: +49 173 3872 621
E-mail: lars@eso.org