

INTERNATIONAL ASTRONOMICAL UNION
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The International Year of Astronomy 2009 Secretariat to Close at the End of the Year

20 December 2010, Paris: The International Year of Astronomy 2009 (IYA2009) Secretariat will finish its activities on 31 December 2010, following three and a half years of service. While closure of the IYA2009 Secretariat marks the end of the largest project that the International Astronomical Union (IAU) has ever embarked upon, the organisation remains committed to promoting education and public outreach throughout the world.

In July 2007, the International Astronomical Union (IAU) established the IYA2009 Secretariat at the European Southern Observatory's (ESO) Headquarters in Garching, Germany. The Secretariat's role was to act as a hub for IYA2009 activities. It coordinated projects from the planning stages through to evaluation, and was a central contact and resource centre for the hundreds of national nodes, international organisations, global projects, the media and the general public. The Secretariat was embedded in ESO's education and Public Outreach Department, which provided invaluable support and expertise for IYA2009.

The IYA2009 was a huge success, involving 148 countries around the world organising hundreds of thousands of individual activities reaching hundreds of millions of people. *"IYA2009 touched the lives of millions of people around the world. For many, this was their first introduction to astronomy,"* says Catherine Cesarsky, Chair of the IYA2009 Working Group, and the IAU's President for most of IYA2009.

Feedback has been extremely positive. The impact of IYA2009 on the scientific literacy of the general public will take time to be assessed, but the first positive results are emerging. In Sweden, a recent public poll demonstrated a noticeable change in the appreciation for astronomy: interest in astronomy increased from 53% in 2008 to 67% in 2009. The IAU believes that the communication of astronomy research throughout 2009 contributed significantly to this.

During 2010, the IYA2009 Secretariat has been supporting the continuation of projects – under the umbrella title, Beyond International Year of Astronomy – and communicating the impact of the Year in publications and at conferences. Recently, the IYA2009 Secretariat has released a 1450-page IYA2009 Final Report and a 24-page Final Report Summary. Links to PDF versions of both of these documents can be found below.

As part of the legacy of IYA2009, the IAU is implementing a decade-long plan for the global development of astronomy, called The Strategic Plan: Astronomy for the Developing World. The IAU has chosen the South African Astronomical Observatory as the location for its Office for Astronomy Development (OAD). Starting in March 2011, the OAD will coordinate a wide range of activities designed to promote astronomy throughout the developing world. Earlier

this month, Kevindran Govender, Chair of the IYA2009 Cornerstone project Developing Astronomy Globally, was appointed Director of the OAD.

Robert Williams, the current IAU President, concludes: *“IYA2009 was always intended to be more than just an event occurring over twelve months – it demonstrated the enormous public interest in astronomy and is a platform for on-going astronomy popularisation and education. The IAU is committed to ensuring the continuation of key projects in Beyond International Year of Astronomy.”*

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Links

- The International Year of Astronomy 2009 Website:
<http://www.astronomy2009.org/>
- The IYA2009 Final Report can be downloaded from here:
<http://www.astronomy2009.org/report/>
- The IYA2009 Executive Summary can be download from here:
<http://www.astronomy2009.org/summary/>
- Additional IYA2009 reports from individual organisations and countries can be found here: <http://www.astronomy2009.org/reports/>
- The Strategic Plan: Astronomy for the Developing World:
http://iau.org/static/education/strategicplan_091001.pdf

For more information:

Pedro Russo
IYA2009 Coordinator
ESO ePOD, Garching, Germany
Tel: +49 89 320 06 195
Cellular: +4917661100211
E-mail: prusso@eso.org

Lars Lindberg Christensen
IYA2009 Secretariat Manager/IAU Press Officer
ESO ePOD, Garching, Germany
Tel: +49 89 3200 6761
Cellular: +49-173-3872-621
E-mail: lars@eso.org

Further contacts

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

Ian Corbett
IAU General Secretary, Paris, France
Tel: +33 143 258 358
Cellular: +44 7919 888 942
E-mail: icorbett@eso.org