

4. THE EC WORKING GROUP ON THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF ASTRONOMY 2009 – status report

The year 2009 will be remembered for many reasons, but the IYA2009 will hopefully be memorable for all astronomers – hobbyists as well as professionals. The IYA2009 fosters a global appreciation of the role and value of science, technology and astronomy as a unifying activity for humanity. The IYA2009 is a global endeavour, promoting astronomy and its contribution to society and culture. There is a strong emphasis on education and public engagement. The response from all the corners of the world has been extremely positive and encouraging, making the Year a great success already. This report outlines the status of its main projects and activities.

Participating Nations and Organizations. As of 27 May 2009, 141 National Nodes have signed up to participate in the IYA2009. Innumerable professional and amateur astronomers, educators, communicators and enthusiasts have invested time, resources and passion into organizing local, regional, national and global activities. The full list can be consulted at www.astronomy2009.org/organisation/nodes/national/. The most recent National Nodes are Azerbaijan, Myanmar, the Maldives, Zambia, the Fiji Islands, Grenada and Palestine.

The IAU is still welcoming suggestions for IYA2009 Single Points of Contact from countries or organisations that are not yet involved. Based on the report on the state of astronomy development by country, compiled by John Hearnshaw (IAU Commission 46, PG World-wide Development of Astronomy iau46.obspm.fr/spip.php?article53&lang=enspip.php?article53&artsuite=0#sommaire_1), the IYA2009 Secretariat is particularly keen to establish contact with the following countries: Brunei, Barbados, Liechtenstein, Mauritius, Monaco and San Marino.

Astronomy, education and science outreach related organisations and institutions are also participating in the IYA2009. So far, 31 such organisations have signed up. The complete list is posted on the IYA2009 website at: www.astronomy2009.org/organisation/nodes/organisational/. The most recently affiliated Organisational Nodes are ESCONET, Yuri's Night, ISU, CERN, ALPO, RadioNet and SiW.

Organizational Associates. The IYA2009 Organizational Associates are organizations, institutions and agencies related to astronomy, space science and natural science that provide financial support for the global coordination of IYA2009 www.astronomy2009.org/organisation/structure/partners/organisationalassociates/. The most recently affiliated Organisational Associates are EAS, NRAO, CEA and KASI. The IAU still welcomes organisations, institutions and agencies that wish to join the IYA2009 Organisational Associates. For more information, please contact the IYA2009 Secretariat: iya2009@eso.org.

Media Partners. The IYA2009 Secretariat has established a network of media partners [<www.astronomy2009.org/organisation/structure/partners/media/>](http://www.astronomy2009.org/organisation/structure/partners/media/) that supports and promotes the IYA2009 programme by providing coverage and publicity for the global and international programmes. The most recently joined Media Partners are: Wiley-VCH, Springer, Cambridge University Press, Athenaweb, Science Newspaper, A&A, Popular Mechanics, Astrocast.tv and Medea Awards.

Resources. The IYA2009 Secretariat has produced a wide array of resources that can be used by laypeople and participants in the IYA2009. These include trailers, brochures and presentations are easily accessible at: [<www.astronomy2009.org/resources/>](http://www.astronomy2009.org/resources/). The public is free to use them in activities and events during 2009.

IYA2009 Cornerstone Projects. In addition to the numerous local and regional projects, the IYA2009 is supported by twelve Cornerstone projects. Based on specific themes, these global programmes collectively represent the means to achieve the IYA2009's primary goals. The steady progress of these projects can be followed on their dedicated websites:

- 100 Hours of Astronomy [<www.100hoursofastronomy.org>](http://www.100hoursofastronomy.org)
- The Galileoscope [<www.galileoscope.org>](http://www.galileoscope.org)
- Cosmic Diary [<www.cosmicdiary.org>](http://www.cosmicdiary.org)
- Portal to the Universe [<www.portaltotheuniverse.org>](http://www.portaltotheuniverse.org)
- She is an Astronomer [<www.sheisanastronomer.org>](http://www.sheisanastronomer.org)
- Dark Skies Awareness [<www.darks skiesawareness.org>](http://www.darks skiesawareness.org)
- Astronomy and World Heritage [<whc.unesco.org/pg.cfm?cid=281&id_group=21&cs=home>](http://whc.unesco.org/pg.cfm?cid=281&id_group=21&cs=home)
- Galileo Teacher Training Program [<www.galileoteachers.org>](http://www.galileoteachers.org)
- Universe Awareness [<www.unawe.org>](http://www.unawe.org)
- From Earth to the Universe [<www.fromearthtotheuniverse.org>](http://www.fromearthtotheuniverse.org)
- Developing Astronomy Globally [<www.developingastronomy.org>](http://www.developingastronomy.org)
- Galilean Nights [<www.galileannights.org>](http://www.galileannights.org)

We would just like to highlight some of the achievements so far: 100 Hours of Astronomy was a major success, with more than 1 million people participating in events such as a global star party, the live 24-hour webcast "Around the World in 80 Telescopes," a Science Centre webcast, and Sun Day. As of May 2009, 60 000 Galileoscopes have been produced, 4000 of which will be donated to organisations and schools in developing countries, in collaboration with the Developing Astronomy Globally Cornerstone project. The Cosmic Diary has more than 60 professional scientists blogging from 28+ countries. To date there are over 1000 individual blog posts, which have attracted more than 55 000 unique visitors. In its first month of operation, the Portal to the Universe had more than 12 000 news and blog posts indexed, which were read by more than 40 000 unique visitors. She is an Astronomer launched its own dedicated website on 21 April 2009. During IYA2009, GLOBE at Night, a programme in the Dark Skies Awareness Cornerstone, set a new record, with 80% more observations of the world's dark skies than the programme's previous best. The

worldwide response to the FETTU project continues to be astounding. As of May 2009, over 55 countries around the world have signed up to host FETTU exhibits in more than 200 separate locations ranging from Brazil to Bulgaria and from Uruguay to the United States.

Following the unprecedented success of the IYA2009's 100 Hours of Astronomy, another weekend of astronomy events has been lined up for 23–24 October 2009. This new IYA2009 Cornerstone project is called Galilean Nights and will see amateur and professional astronomers around the globe taking to the streets, pointing their telescopes at the wonders that Galileo observed 400 years ago. The project's focus is sidewalk observations of the gas giant Jupiter and its moons, and members of the public will also be able to observe the Sun, our own Moon and many more celestial marvels with their own eyes, much as Galileo did 400 years ago.

IYA2009 Special Projects. While the focus of the global activities will rest on the Cornerstones, special projects will also contribute towards the vision and goals of IYA2009. The complete list of IYA2009 Special Projects is available on: <www.astronomy2009.org/global_projects/specialprojects/>. The most recent Special Projects are:

* *BLAST!* is astrophysics Indiana Jones-style! The movie takes the viewer on a journey around the world and across the Universe to launch a new telescope on a high-altitude balloon. See <www.blastthemovie.com> .

* *StarPeace* connects people living on two sides of a national border by conducting joint star parties to show that the sky can act as a bridge to join the people of the world regardless of race, culture or nationality. See <www.starpeace.org> .

* *GalileoMobile* is an itinerant science education project bringing IYA2009 to young underprivileged people across South America to foster their will to learn by exciting their wonder about our Universe, while supplying local teachers with educational resources to sustain our activities. See <www.galileo-mobile.org> .

IYA2009 Special Task Groups. Several groups have been set up to organise very specific events or actions throughout the Year which will complement other global projects. See <www.astronomy2009.org/organisation/structure/taskgroups/>.

Among the highlights is a beautiful collection of IYA2009 related stamps that is available on the IYA2009 Philatelic Release Calendar <www.astronomy2009.org/organisation/structure/taskgroups/philately/calendar/> .

IYA2009 Press Releases, Updates and Features. The IYA2009 Secretariat publishes stories and news daily on the global IYA2009 website: <www.astronomy2009.org>. An extensive, but not comprehensive list of international press clippings can be found at: <www.astronomy2009.org/news/presscoverage/>.

Conclusions. Although 1 January 2009 marked the official beginning of the IYA2009, this immense worldwide science outreach and education programme began more than six years earlier with the IAU's initiative during the IAU XXVI

General Assembly in 2003. The IYA2009 aims to unite nations under the umbrella of astronomy and science, while at the same time acknowledging cultural, national and regional diversity. Never before has such a network of scientists, amateur astronomers, educators, journalists and scientific institutions come together. IYA2009 is, thanks to many of you, truly the largest network in astronomy.

As the IYA2009 comes to an end, we will join in a celebration of astronomy and astronomical experiences. The Closing Ceremony is in preparation and will take place on 9–10 January 2010 in Padua, Italy. We believe that the momentum generated by the end of IYA2009 will leave a lasting legacy for global astronomy and the IAU.

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Garching bei München, 29 May 2009*