



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

2009 : International Year of Astronomy (IYA)

“The Universe, Yours to Discover”

The International Year aims to help people realise the impact of astronomy and basic sciences on our daily lives and understand better how scientific knowledge can contribute to a more equitable and peaceful society.

The vision of the IYA is to help the citizens of the world rediscover their place in the Universe through the day-time and night-time sky and thereby engage a personal sense of wonder and discovery. The sky, our common and universal heritage, is an integral part of the environment that we perceive.

Humankind has always observed the sky, either to interpret it or to understand the physical laws that govern the universe. This interest in astronomy has had profound implications for science, philosophy, religion, culture and our general conception of the universe.

Scientific discoveries by astronomers have not only had an influence on our understanding of the universe but also on technology, physics mathematics, and social development in general. Astronomy uses technology to the maximum and makes it advance as well, always going to the extremes of electronics, optics and mechanics.

While great advances in technology have made this a golden age for astronomy, it is studied by a relatively small number of researchers and although there is general interest in astronomy, it is difficult for the general public to gain access to information and knowledge on the subject.

The International Astronomical Union and UNESCO initiated the IYA as a

global effort to raise awareness of the impact of astronomy and other fundamental sciences on our daily lives and on sustainable development. It is hoped that the effort to popularise this science will attract young people in particular.

2009 – An Anniversary



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The year 2009 marks the 400th anniversary of the first use of the telescope for astronomical observation by Italian scientist Galileo Galilei. That observation was a milestone in the development of

astronomy and the history of humanity as it led to the expansion of the boundaries of the “known universe”, not only in terms of the physical world but also in terms of humanity’s vision of the limits to be surpassed. For the first time in history, people became aware of the fact that the earth was not isolated in space but surrounded by other worlds and other celestial bodies.

UNESCO’s Role

UNESCO has played a key role in several recent celebratory Years related to science, including the International Year of Physics in 2005 and in the still

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on-going International Year of Planet Earth.

As lead Agency for the International Year of Astronomy 2009, UNESCO will seek to increase the visibility of its work in this particular field and to demonstrate the importance of international scientific cooperation to the development of knowledge in the field.

The broad scope of UNESCO's mandate means it can also go beyond the scientific dimensions to explore, for example, the implications of astronomy for culture, cultural diversity and philosophy. Astronomy offers a perfect example of the potential links that exist between science, the social sciences, education, culture and



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communication. UNESCO seeks to make these cross-cutting links materialise through such initiatives as the Space Education Programme and the thematic initiative "Astronomy and World Heritage".

Well over 100 nations and dozens of organizations have signed up to mark the International Year with a full programme of events.

Space Education Programme

Space studies bring a new dimension to science education, introducing new knowledge, values and perspectives on the planet Earth and developing better understanding of the universe. The Space Education Programme seeks to enhance space subjects and disciplines in schools and universities especially in developing countries, through workshops, and by introducing space-related subjects in the curriculum.

Astronomy and World Heritage

Activities for the safeguarding of cultural heritage related to astronomy have already been undertaken under the "Astronomy and World Heritage" project launched by UNESCO's World Heritage Centre in 2003.

A group of international experts met in Venice in March 2004 to draw up a support and implementation strategy for the project. The initiative was backed by UNESCO's Regional Bureau for Science in Europe (ROSTE), the Royal Astronomical Society (United Kingdom) and the Governments of the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

The objective of the Astronomy and World Heritage initiative is to establish a link between science and culture on the basis of research aimed at acknowledging the cultural and scientific values of properties connected with

astronomy.

The identification, safeguarding and promotion of these properties are the three lines of actions for the implementation of this programme. It offers a methodological framework for associated actions, opens pathways for cooperation between countries and academic communities, and enables the sharing of knowledge.

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