

EC WORKING GROUP ON 2009: THE YEAR OF ASTRONOMY

(2009: ANNÉE MONDIALE DE L'ASTRONOMIE)

CHAIRPERSON: Franco Pacini

BOARD: Ron Ekers, Catherine Cesarsky

In 1609, Galileo, in using a telescope, was able to recognize that the Earth is not alone in the cosmos and that we are surrounded by many other worlds. This was a fundamental step in the history of Mankind, with the deepest scientific, philosophical and religious implications, opening the way to a new conception of the Universe.

In this framework, the XXVth General Assembly, held in Sydney last July, voted unanimously that, to coincide with this Anniversary, the year 2009 be declared by the United Nations "The Year of Astronomy". The same step was adopted a few years ago, at the beginning of the new millennium, when the UN established "2000: The Year of Mathematics". Similarly, the 100th Anniversary of the Theory of Relativity is expected to lead to the "Year of Physics" in 2005.

Following the vote of the General Assembly, the IAU Executive Committee asked the President, Prof. R. Ekers, to convey to the Italian Government the suggestion that Italy, as the birth-country of Galileo, should take the lead and present the formal request to UNESCO and to the United Nations, in the appropriate diplomatic procedure. It is expected that many other countries will second this request, once the process has been initiated.

The Executive Committee also decided, in Sydney, to establish an Ad-hoc Working Group chaired by the author of this note. Its task is to make proposals to the Executive Committee and (when appropriate) coordinate a series of world-wide events which, by honoring the discoveries of Galileo, will more generally promote the spread of astronomy and its history, with special emphasis on schools and young people. It is also expected that each country will establish its own national program, appropriate to its traditions, resources and scientific development.

Although 2009 may appear still far away, the organization of such an event (which will coincide with the XXVII IAU General Assembly in Rio de Janeiro), will require much long term planning, including the completion of the composition of the Working Group with a fair representation of geographic and cultural areas.

An initial Report will probably be ready for the 2004 IAU Executive Committee. Any IAU Member or Adhering Organization with a proposal for the Year of Astronomy is invited to submit it (in a concise form) to the following e-mail address: pacini@arcetri.astro.it (subject: "Year of Astronomy")

Franco Pacini
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