

Celebrating the International Year of Astronomy 2009

The sky or the universe has always been a field of great astonishment and excitement for humanity. At night, glaring at the sky, every inquisitive mind has many questions about the sky, the universe, the stars, the planets, the origin of the universe, extra-terrestrial life, etc. Astronomy is the scientific study of the universe, which tries to answer all these questions. With the advent of advanced telescopes and space probes, modern astronomy has accumulated much knowledge answering some of these fundamental questions about the universe and now has become an international collaborative endeavour showing human cooperation beyond borders.

The human excitement about astronomy will be at its peak for the whole of next year, as the UN has declared 2009 as the International Year of Astronomy (IYA). IYA 2009 marks the 400th anniversary of the first astronomical use of the telescope by Galileo in 1609, and will be a global celebration of astronomy and its contributions to society and culture.

It also celebrates the 40th anniversary of the first manned mission to the moon and intends to promote and teach astronomy to a worldwide audience. IYA 2009 will highlight global cooperation for peaceful purposes – the search for our cosmic origin and our common heritage which connect all citizens of the earth – and this is in line with the principles of the UN Charter.

The historic event – IYA 2009 – is aimed at stimulating worldwide interest, especially among young people, in astronomy and science under the central theme ‘The Universe, Yours to Discover’. The IYA 2009 events and activities will promote a greater appreciation of the inspirational aspects of astronomy that embody an invaluable shared resource for all nations. In this connection, a variety of events and activities (for more details see the IYA 2009 website: www.astronomy2009.org) will be organized throughout 2009 across the globe, which will offer an opportunity to humanity to experience the advances and excitement of astronomy through personal involvement and discovery. This will bring astronomy closer to all the citizens of the earth by giving them a chance to interact with professional and amateur astronomers.

According to the IYA 2009 website, the major goals of IYA 2009 are to:

1. Increase scientific awareness.
2. Promote widespread access to new knowledge and observing experiences.
3. Empower astronomical communities in developing countries.
4. Support and improve formal and informal science education.
5. Provide a modern image of science and scientists.
6. Facilitate new networks and strengthen existing ones.
7. Improve the gender-balanced representation of scientists at all levels and

promote greater involvement by under-represented minorities in scientific and engineering careers.

8. Facilitate the preservation and protection of the world’s cultural and natural heritage of dark skies in places such as urban oases, national parks and astronomical sites.

Rediscovering our place in the universe through the day and night-time sky and developing a personal sense of wonder and discovery among the world citizens is the vision of IYA 2009. Astronomy has a great impact on our daily lives, culture, society and the development of other sciences. IYA 2009 will be a great activity raising public awareness about astronomy and science, especially in the developing countries. In this regard, the IYA 2009 website quotes the International Astronomical Union (IAU) President, Catherine Cesarsky, ‘We are delighted that the International Year of Astronomy 2009 gives a chance to the astronomers from the IAU member countries to reach out to the rest of the world and share the new knowledge and excitement of today’s astronomy’.

The idea of celebrating 2009 as the IYA was conceived by the IAU. The IAU at its General Assembly on 23 July 2003 in Sydney (Australia), unanimously approved a resolution favouring the proclamation of 2009 as the IYA. Italy, the home country of Galileo submitted a resolution to UNESCO, which was adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO at its 33rd session on 19 October 2005. UNESCO recommended the UN General Assembly to adopt a resolution declaring 2009 as the IYA. On 20 December 2007, the UN 62nd General Assembly proclaimed 2009 the International Year of Astronomy.



The IYA logo (courtesy: IYA 2009 website).

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