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## **South African Astronomical Observatory Selected as Host for the IAU Office for Astronomy Development**

**25 May Paris:** The Executive Committee of the International Astronomical Union (IAU) has selected the SAAO, a national facility of the South African National Research Foundation (NRF), to host the IAU Office for Astronomy Development (OAD). The Office is the key component of the decadal global strategy plan, *Astronomy for the Developing World*, launched at the 2009 IAU General Assembly in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and is aimed at using astronomy to foster education and capacity building throughout the world.

At its 88th meeting, on Thursday, 13 May 2010 in Baltimore, USA, the International Astronomical Union selected a proposal submitted by the Director of the SAAO, Professor Phil Charles, from 20 excellent proposals that were carefully assessed over several months. This was an extremely difficult process, given the high quality of so many of the proposals, and its successful outcome represents a milestone in a new era of astronomy development activities for the IAU.

*“Finding a home for the OAD is the first step in the execution of the most ambitious global plan ever conceived in astronomy for development. On the behalf of the IAU, I congratulate the SAAO and wish the new OAD every success in this exciting and important new venture,”* says the IAU President Robert Williams.

*“With its links to technology, science and culture, astronomy is a unique tool for capacity building. The IAU has long had a vigorous education programme through its Commission 46. The strategic plan takes it a step further and establishes global capacity building as a core mission for the IAU. The SAAO is the prestigious home of several world-leading research telescopes, such as SALT, and has pioneered a unique programme of education and outreach at all levels. Located at the SAAO, the IAU Office of Astronomy for Development will be in a position to learn from the South African experience and make a fundamental contribution to furthering sustainable development globally,”* says IAU Vice-President George Miley, responsible for astronomy development and education.

The Director of the SAAO, Professor Phil Charles, said, *“We are delighted at the confidence expressed in us by the IAU and very excited to have the opportunity to extend what we have been doing locally to a global scale. Astronomy is all about partnerships, and we look forward to strengthening those we already have, as well as to building new ones, as we use astronomy as a vehicle to introduce science and technology to a new generation. South Africa has been visionary in exploiting the country’s natural strategic advantage in astronomy and using it as an integral part of its science and technology strategy – we aim to show that the skies are not the limit.”*

The IAU’s decadal strategic plan, *Astronomy for the Developing World*, is built upon the unparalleled success of the IAU and UNESCO initiative, the International Year of Astronomy (IYA2009). The strategic plan was developed over two years, and its implementation was

approved during the August 2009 IAU General Assembly, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. By building on the momentum from the IYA2009 and its large network of 148 countries, this ambitious plan represents the long-term commitment of the IAU to expanding development programmes through astronomy over the next decade.

The OAD is the key component of this challenging mission and will play a central role in the coordination and management of all the existing IAU educational activities, as well as in the recruitment and mobilisation of participating volunteers. The OAD will also be a vital liaison between the IAU Executive Bodies and the IAU National Members, as well as the main contact point between the IAU and the national authorities.

The IAU jointly with the SAAO will soon appoint a Director to lead the OAD on behalf of the IAU Executive Committee.

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### Links

- The Announcement of Opportunity:  
[http://iau.org/static/education/announcement\\_opportunity\\_oad.pdf](http://iau.org/static/education/announcement_opportunity_oad.pdf)
- The Strategic Plan: Astronomy for the Developing World:  
[http://iau.org/static/education/strategicplan\\_091001.pdf](http://iau.org/static/education/strategicplan_091001.pdf)
- UN Millennium Development Goals: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals>
- IAU website <http://www.iau.org>
- Some additional images from SAAO: <http://www.saa.ac.za/iau-press-release-may-2010-images/>
- SAAO website: <http://www.saa.ac.za>
- Press release from the South African Astronomical Observatory:  
[http://www.saa.ac.za/no\\_cache/public-info/news/news/article/181/16/](http://www.saa.ac.za/no_cache/public-info/news/news/article/181/16/)
- Press Release from the South African Government:  
<http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2010/10052609551003.htm>

### Notes

Founded in 1919, the IAU is the world's largest professional body for astronomers, bringing together more than 10 000 distinguished astronomers from all nations of the world. Its mission is to promote and safeguard the science of astronomy in all its aspects through international cooperation. The IAU also serves as the internationally recognised authority for assigning designations to celestial bodies and the surface features on them.

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