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IAU releases milestone book and movie celebrating the telescope

23 January 2009, Paris: One of the International Astronomical Union's contributions to the International Year of Astronomy 2009 is the new book and movie *Eyes on the Skies – 400 Years of Telescopic Discovery*, telling the fascinating story of the telescope, from its invention to the modern day. Review copies of the book, published by Wiley, and documentary movie are available for the press.

If asked to name the invention that has done most to change the way we think about our Universe, what would you say? Undoubtedly it is the telescope, an instrument now so familiar that we take it for granted. However, four hundred years ago when Galileo first turned his homemade arrangement of magnifying glasses to the skies and realised that Earth was not unique as had been thought, his discovery rocked the scientific world and changed our understanding of the Universe forever. Imagine what Galileo would think if he could see the telescopes of the modern day and the mind-blowing sights that astronomers witness through the descendants of those first simple lenses.

With the aim of bringing astronomy to the homes of people around the globe, the International Astronomical Union (IAU), in collaboration with Wiley VCH, The European Southern Observatory and the European Space Agency/Hubble, has produced the *Eyes on the Skies – 400 Years of Telescopic Discovery* book and 60-minute DVD documentary. The movie is presented by Dr. J (aka Dr. Joe Liske) from the European Southern Observatory, host of the popular Hubblecast and ESOcast video podcasts. The book and movie is written by Dutch science journalist Govert Schilling and astronomer Lars Lindberg Christensen.

Through words and a wealth of stunning photographs, computer animations and illustrations, they tell the fascinating story of the telescope from its invention in the early 1600s to the high-tech telescopes of the near future with "eyes as large as swimming pools". We discover how humanity's curiosity and knowledge has led to the production of larger and better telescopes allowing astronomers to uncover a host of planets and galaxies while reminding us that our view of the Universe and our place in it is still, to some extent, a mystery.

So, what is next for the telescope? As this enthralling book-movie duo reveals, there are a multitude of new projects in the pipeline, both in space and on the ground. Just looking at the images of the ESO's 42-metre European Extremely Large Telescope, the international Square Kilometre Array and the James Webb Telescope positioned a breathtaking 1.5 million kilometres beyond the Earth will leave the reader wanting to find out more.

In 2009, the International Year of Astronomy, a global effort initiated by the IAU and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), will encourage the citizens of the world to "*rediscover their place in the Universe through the day- and night-time sky, thereby engaging in a personal sense of wonder and discovery*". To find out more about the International Year of Astronomy go to: www.astronomy2009.org.

Notes

Review copies of the book and movie DVD are available for the press, see the contacts below.

The IAU is the international astronomical organisation that brings together almost 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. Founded in 1919, the IAU is the world's largest professional body for astronomers.

Govert Schilling is an acclaimed freelance astronomy writer living in the Netherlands. He writes for Dutch and English newspapers, magazines and websites, and has written dozens of popular astronomy books, some of which have been translated into English. Astronomer Lars Lindberg Christensen is head of communication for the European Southern Observatory and the NASA/ESA Hubble Space Telescope as well as press officer of the International Astronomical Union.

Links

- Eyes on the Skies website: <http://www.eyesontheskies.org>
- IYA2009 website: <http://www.astronomy2009.org>

For more information please contact:

IAU Press Officer

Lars Lindberg Christensen

ESO ePOD, Garching, Germany

Tel: +49 89 3200 6761

Mobile: +49 173 3872 621

E-mail: lars@eso.org

Dr. Karel A. van der Hucht

General Secretary, International Astronomical Union

IAU Secretariat, Paris, France

Tel: +33 1 43 25 83 58

E-mail: K.A.van.der.Hucht@sron.nl

IAU IYA2009 Coordinator

Pedro Russo

ESO ePOD, Garching, Germany

Tel: +49 89 320 06 195

Mobile: +49 176 6110 0211

Fax: +49 89 320 23 62

E-mail: prusso@eso.org