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From Earth to the Universe Wins Prize for Excellence in Astronomy Education and Public Outreach

26 February 2010, Paris: The International Year of Astronomy 2009/Mani Bhaumik Prize for Excellence in Astronomy Education and Public Outreach has been awarded to From Earth to the Universe (FETTU). This award recognises FETTU's important contribution in improving public awareness of astronomical achievements, and in stimulating the use of astronomy for the promotion of scientific education and culture in 2009.

The International Year of Astronomy 2009 (IYA2009) featured tens of thousands of events worldwide. These were organised and implemented by many professionals, amateurs and volunteers who built IYA2009 into the most successful science education and public outreach project ever undertaken. While it is impossible to acknowledge all the activities that have taken place in 2009 and all those who have made them possible, an IYA2009 Prize for Excellence in Astronomy Education and Public Outreach has been established to reward some of the most ambitious. Thirty submissions were accepted from 21 countries and nine transnational organisations. After a very careful evaluation of all submissions, and much difficult deliberation, From Earth to the Universe was selected as the winner.

From Earth to the Universe showcases the incredible variety of astronomical images available today. The exhibit shows how astronomical objects look when viewed across the electromagnetic spectrum, from ultraviolet and visible light to infrared, X-rays and gamma rays. FETTU continues to be shown in non-traditional public venues such as parks and gardens, shopping malls, metro stations and airports in major cities across the world. FETTU images have been selected for their stunning beauty and ability to engage members of the general public who might normally ignore or avoid astronomy. With short but informative captions on each panel, FETTU introduces the basics of the science behind each image, adding to and extending the visual impact. The FETTU project, partly supported by NASA, involves more than 500 exhibits in more than 70 countries of the most beautiful and inspiring large-format astronomical images. The project is a grassroots initiative, which took an innovative approach, making all material freely available as an open source approach to education and public outreach. FETTU has already exhibitions planned for 2010 in more than 30 countries. *"We are really pleased to award the prize to From Earth to the Universe, a project which has really captured the spirit of the contest and of IYA2009 as a whole."* says Dr. Mani Bhaumik, the IYA2009 Patron.

Three additional projects from the very high quality field were selected as runners-up in the contest. The first is Around the World in 80 Telescopes, a 24-hour live webcast presenting observatories and astronomical research around the world, part of the global project, 100 Hours of Astronomy. The webcast featured eighty professional telescopes in seven continents and reached well over 110 000 viewers in 24 hours and many more are still watching online every day from all around the world.

The Galileoscope and Galileo Teacher Training Program shared the second runners-up prize, for their outstanding contributions to all aspects of education during IYA2009. The Galileo Teacher Training Program helped more than 5000 educators in more than 40 countries improve their methods of teaching astronomy and bringing it to the classroom, while the

Galileoscope project created a low-cost telescope kit that enabled children and adults worldwide to relive Galileo's sense of discovery. More than 180 000 of these have been produced and distributed to individuals, astronomy clubs, planetariums, science centres, museums, schools and other groups.

"It was very difficult to select the winners as so many initiatives deserve acclaim for what they've done. All of the projects help contribute to the legacy of IYA2009 and its important mission of astronomy education and public outreach." says Ian Corbett, IAU General Secretary and member of the prize jury. *"Those on our final list showed ambition and scope far above and beyond conventional science communication ventures, and this was an important factor in our decision."*

The winner receives 3500 Euros, the first runner-up receives 1500 Euros, and the two second runners-ups each 750 Euros. The awards and certificates will be handed over in March during the Communicating Astronomy with the Public 2010 Conference, in Cape Town, South Africa. Kimberly Kowal Arcand, FETTU co-chair together with Megan Watzke, will give a keynote talk at the conference. FETTU, is led by the NASA Chandra X-ray Center in Cambridge, Mass., USA.

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Links

- IYA2009 website: <http://www.astronomy2009.org>
- From Earth to the Universe: <http://www.fromearthtotheuniverse.org>
- Around the World in 80 Telescopes: <http://www.eso.org/public/events/special-evt/100ha/index.html>
- Galileoscope: <https://www.galileoscope.org>
- Galileo Teacher Training Program: <http://www.galileoteachers.org>
- Communicating Astronomy with the Public 2010 Conference: <http://www.communicatingastronomy.org/cap2010/>

Notes

The vision of the IYA2009 was to help the citizens of the world rediscover their place in the Universe through the day and night-time skies 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 aim of the IYA2009 was to stimulate worldwide interest, especially among young people, in astronomy and science under the central theme, "The Universe, Yours to Discover". IYA2009 events and activities promoted a greater appreciation of the inspirational aspects of astronomy that embody an invaluable shared resource for all countries.

The Jury of the Prize was composed by Ian Corbett (IAU General Secretary and member of the IAU IYA2009 Executive Committee Working Group), Lars Lindberg Christensen (Head of the educational and public outreach department at the European Southern Observatory), Seiichi Sakamoto (Director for Space Science Outreach at the Japanese Institute of Space and Astronautical Science) and Pedro Russo (on behalf of Mani Bhaumik and in his role as IYA2009 Global Coordinator).

Dr. Mani Bhaumik is an Indian-born physicist, author, lecturer, entrepreneur and philanthropist. He is a laser physicist, who announced the successful demonstration of the world's first efficient excimer laser, a result that later enabled a one-minute procedure known as Lasik, which has helped over fifteen million people worldwide. Dr. Bhaumik's current

interest is to share the astounding advances in quantum physics and cosmology with the public and show their implications for our lives, work, technology and development. Dr. Bhaumik's latest book, *The Cosmic Detective*, a primer on cosmology for the general public was selected as an IYA2009 official product. This year the president of India presented him with the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award, one of the most prestigious civilian awards given by the Government of India to honour exceptionally successful and meritorious Indians residing abroad for an extraordinary contribution to their respective fields.

For more information:

Pedro Russo
IYA2009 Coordinator
ESO ePOD, Garching, Germany
Tel: +49 89 320 06 195
Cellular: +49-176-6110-0211
E-mail: prusso@eso.org

Lars Lindberg Christensen
IYA2009 Secretariat Manager/IAU Press Officer
ESO ePOD, Garching, Germany
Tel: +49-89-3200-6761
Cellular: +49-173-387-2621
E-mail: lars@eso.org

Further contacts

Yolanda Berenguer
UNESCO Focal Point for the International Year of Astronomy 2009
UNESCO HQ, Paris
Tel: +33-145-684-171
E-mail: y.berenguer@unesco.org

Ian Corbett
IAU General Secretary, Paris, France
Tel: +33 143 258 358
Cellular: +44-7919-888-942
E-mail: icorbett@eso.org

Tatiana Chekhova
Assistant to Dr. Bhaumik
Tel: + 1-310-471-0133
E-mail: tatiana@cosmotoons.com