

The International Year of Planet Earth

The International Year of Planet Earth (IYPE) aims to capture people's imagination with the exciting knowledge we possess about our planet, and to see that knowledge used more effectively to make the Earth a safer, healthier, and wealthier place for our children and grandchildren. That could be achieved by building on the knowledge accumulated by the world's approximately 400,000 Earth scientists and is expressed by the IYPE subtitle: 'Earth Science for Society'.

The IYPE runs from January 2007 to December 2009. Its start, last January, was celebrated by balloon launches in three continents: in Chidambaram (India), in the heart of London (UK) and in Sao Paulo (Brazil). Although IYPE has been quite visible ready this year, 2008 will be the main Year as that has been proclaimed by the General Assembly of the UN as *the* International Year of Planet Earth. The UN sees the IYPE as a contribution to its sustainable development targets as it promotes wise use of Earth materials and encourages better planning and management to reduce risks for the world's human societies. Preparations are in full swing now. By today (November 15th, 2007), 55 nations have established National IYPE Committees, each of them developing their own and often exiting science and outreach programmes. By March 2008, we expect a total of 70 nations actively participating in the IYPE.

Two earlier events served as a model for the IYPE. The International Geophysical Year (IGY ; 1957-58) uncovered some characteristics of our planet as seen for the first time from space. As the IGY attracted lots of public attention, many youngsters began their professional careers in the Earth sciences. More recently, in 2002, the Germans celebrated their 'GeoJahr' with many public events and with their nice logo that was provided afterwards to the IYPE. That public Geo-exposure resulted in a much higher inflow of German students in the Earth sciences in successive years. If that could happen in one country and in just one year, we are confident that world-wide exposure and outreach of the Earth sciences in 70 countries during three years

will result in a new generation of Earth scientists over the years to come.

IYPE was initiated in 2000 when a new team started to rule the International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS). Shortly afterwards, UNESCO's (former) Earth Science Division joined in, soon followed by 26 Associate Partners and 12 Founding Partners. Upon UN Proclamation, in late 2005, International Partnership was introduced. Their numbers rose since to 13 by today, all supporting the IYPE, also financially. Through UN proclamation, 192 UN member states declared to support the aims and ambitions of the IYPE at a political level.

The main activities of the IYPE run through the Science and Outreach programmes. Both programmes essentially operate in a 'bottom-up' mode. The science programme consist of 10 broad, societally relevant and multidisciplinary themes: health, climate, groundwater, ocean, soils, deep Earth, megacities, resources, hazards and life. Brochures on each of these themes are available in hard copy or may be downloaded from IYPE's website: www.yearofplanetearth.org.

Outreach activities are taking place in many nations already but significantly more will happen next year and in 2009. In February 2008, the Global Launch Event in Paris will be the meeting place for many political leaders, captains of industry and top scientists. Moreover, some 300 of students from around the world will actively participate and perform the world's first truly International Geo-Song.

The International Year of Planet Earth aims to produce an entire new generation of Geo-experts, so desperately needed



Launch IYPE in Sao Paulo, 25 January 2007

now by industry and by the public sector. Moreover, the IYPE has the ambition to raise the public and media profile of the Earth sciences and its related industry. The great successes of the IGY and the Geo-Jahr make us believe that the International Year of Planet Earth is perhaps the only feasible tool to populate our planet with more Earth scientists in the near future. As no money will come from the UN and just little from governments, we therefore encourage industry to support the International Year and to invest in its goals and targets.

In the next two years, thousands of volunteers and professionals will assure that 'The Greatest Geo-Show on Earth' will not pass unnoticed. Don't miss it and participate!

Eduardo de Mulder
Executive Director IYPE Secretariat

