

IUGS E-Bulletin #12

August 2005

The International Year of Planet Earth

The UN Year of Planet Earth - towards proclamation

This E-Bulletin is intended to bring you all the latest exciting news about the International Year of Planet Earth, a joint initiative of the International Union of Geological Sciences and UNESCO, to which 11 ICSU Unions and other organisations have now joined as founding members. In addition, numerous other organizations and institutions have been identified as supporting and sponsoring entities; the momentum of the initiative is now such that we are approaching a point where "Planet Earth" is in our hands!

The primary reason for launching this initiative was to raise awareness among politicians of the huge potential offered by the application of the vast knowledge store held by the world's 400,000 geoscientists for improved decision making leading to great benefits for humankind. This is clearly expressed in the Year's subtitle: Earth Science for Society. The process of launching this global initiative has taken time. It was first announced in August 2000 at the 31st International Geological Congress in Rio de Janeiro, and a feasibility study began in February 2001. Since then, plans have expanded rapidly, mainly thanks to the hard-working Management Committee chaired by IUGS' Past-President, Eduardo de Mulder.

An important step was taken on April 28th, 2005 when the 171st meeting of UNESCO's Executive Board adopted unopposed a Draft Resolution in support of the Year. The next challenge to be faced by the Year will be its proclamation by the United Nations General Assembly later this year.

YOU can play an important role in setting the stage for a successful proclamation in New York by making sure that you inform your National Delegation members *early* and *comprehensively* about the Year.

Which year - 2007 or 2008?

The wording of the UNESCO Executive Board Resolution (April 28th) specified 2007. However, the Management Team, and many others have since agreed that, for a number of good reasons, 2008 offers a better choice. This is now expressed in a *Draft Resolution to be forwarded to the UN General Assembly, in the following words:*

"The resolution passed by the UNESCO EB specifies 2007 as a date for proclamation for the International year of Planet Earth. However, for various reasons 2008 is preferable. The Year is not asking for any financial support from the UN or its agencies; hence it requires time to raise the required funds from industry. Also, in 2008 two major international geoscientific events are taking place - the 33rd International Geological Congress in Oslo, and the 31st International Geographical Congress in Tunis. Both these provide excellent opportunities for outreach in the central, UN-proclaimed year of the planned triennium."

Always aware of the fact that major programmes in science and outreach rarely achieve all principal objectives in the space of just 12 months, The International

Year made the decision soon after initiation that the "Year" would need to be a triennium, with the proclaimed UN Year in the middle and pivotal year. The International "Year" of Planet Earth will thus be a triennium of science and outreach in the years 2007, 2008 and 2009. UN proclamation of the Year is anticipated before the end of 2005. By then, we expect to have a new, formal organisational structure in place ready to run this wide-ranging global initiative.

The role of the newly established Development Committee

Such a global programme will demand the raising of substantial funds. Current thinking is that realisation of the Year's science and outreach programmes will require a budget of some 20 million US dollars, roughly divided equally between science and outreach, with 5% set aside to cover administrative costs.

The management of the fund raising activities will rest in the hands of a Development Committee, which will identify and approach potential sponsors. Marlan Downey (USA), an entrepreneur of vast experience in global industry, has recently accepted an invitation to chair the Development Committee and to recruit its membership, subject only to the approval of the Management Team.

The Year's Science Themes

Over the past few years, this Initiative has developed quickly and has sharpened its focus. By initially selecting eight broad and societally relevant science themes in October 2003, and increasing the number to nine in 2004, the Year has ensured a strong scientific foundation which is now almost ready for scientific and public involvement.

Groundwater - *towards sustainable use (brochure not yet available)*

Hazards - *minimising risk, maximising awareness*

Earth & Health - *building a safer environment*

Climate - *the 'stone tape'*

Resources - *sustainable power for sustainable development*

Megacities - *going deeper, building safer (brochure not yet available)*

Deep Earth - *from crust to core*

Ocean - *abyss of time*

Soil - *Earth's living skin*

A tenth, and final, theme is now being worked up, focusing on *Earth and Life*.

Colleagues are invited to submit Expressions of Interest on each of these themes, and specifically on the key questions posed in each of the science brochures. Most brochures are now available in printed form, with one or two others on the Year's website; most may be downloaded from the website at: www.yearofplanetearth.org.

Outreach

All organisations, public and private, industrial and commercial companies, international institutions, national, regional and local authorities, educational establishments, and both professional and lay individuals are invited to "board this accelerating train" so as to add their energy and talent to this venture and to ensure that it reaches out at all levels - local, regional, national and international. With its central goal of raising awareness of the crucial role played by the earth sciences in everyday life (see the Outreach Brochure, also downloadable from

www.yearofplanetearth.org), it is incumbent on earth scientists in all walks of life to contribute to this worthy cause. In large measure, the success of the Year will depend upon the extent to which the global earth science community demonstrates its sustained commitment to this initiative.

National Initiatives

As the success of this global initiative will depend quite heavily upon its implementation at national and local levels, you are encouraged to set up National Committees of Planet Earth, preferably linked to IUGS National Committees. Several countries have already done this.

African countries, in particular, have participated both enthusiastically and successfully in the processes leading towards proclamation of the Year in the United Nations. The draft Resolution, approved by UNESCO's Executive Board in April 2005 was presented by the Permanent Delegation of the United Republic of Tanzania. Founding President of the Republic of Namibia, Sam Nujoma, has agreed to become a Patron of the Year. The Management Team is in the process of identifying more Heads of State and other people of comparable stature to become Patrons of the Year. You can materially support us in this endeavour by forwarding names of eminent individuals who might be approached.

Other International Year initiatives

The period 2007-2009 will witness the launching of several other international year initiatives, such as the International Heliophysical Year (on the Earth – Sun relationship), the electronic Geophysical Year (on geo-data and information), and the International Polar Year (focusing on polar regions). Strong liaisons have been built between these initiatives, which together aim to raise public and scientific awareness of the relevance of the Earth Sciences to everyday life.

For more information, please contact iugs.secretariat@nqu.no.

Other Items:

The Swedish geologist of the year

The Swedish Association of Natural Scientists has appointed Dr. [Olle Selenius](#) the Geologist of the year in Sweden. Prof. Selenius I received this award because of his work within medical geology which "has moved the geological science one step further to the future". Prof. Selenius is the Co-Chair of the [IUGS Initiative on Medical Geology](#).

The earlier IUGS IUGS Bulletins are published on the IUGS web:

<http://www.iugs.org/index.htm>

The web also includes news about all IUGS bodies, about the work of the Secretariat and the Executive Committee and links to a number of relevant web-sites.

Wednesday, 24 August 2005
Sylvi Haldorsen (IUGS Vice President)

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