

UNESCO Executive Board supports International Year of Light in 2015

**PARIS and MULHOUSE, FRANCE
ACCRA, GHANA
23 October 2012**

The European and African Physical Societies, on behalf of a global partnership of over 40 scientific societies, academies and other institutions, in collaboration with the UNESCO International Basic Sciences Programme (IBSP), are delighted to announce that the UNESCO Executive Board has enthusiastically supported the proposal to declare an **International Year of Light in 2015**.

Light is at the origin of all life, it plays a central role in human activities, and has revolutionized society through medicine and communications, entertainment and culture. Industries based on light are major economic drivers; they create jobs, and provide solutions to global challenges in energy, education, agriculture and health. Light is also important to our appreciation of art, and optical technologies are essential in understanding and preserving cultural heritage. As light becomes a key cross-cutting discipline of science in the 21st century, it is essential that its importance is fully appreciated. It is equally vital that the brightest young minds from all areas of the world continue to be attracted to careers in this field.

An International Year of Light will raise public awareness of this essential theme, and thus support the missions and priorities of UNESCO in building capacity in education, science and technology for poverty eradication, responding to critical global social challenges, promoting universal access to information, and safeguarding culture. The study of light is accessible to all ages and all cultures; light is a tremendous subject to motivate education at all levels.

The resolution proposing an International Year of Light in 2015 was placed before the 190th Session of the Executive Board held in Paris from 13-18 October 2012 by Ghana, Mexico, and the Russian Federation (Board Members) and New Zealand (UNESCO Member State). UNESCO delegates from Ghana and Mexico introduced the proposal to the Executive Board, explaining the motivation and mission underlying the International Year of Light. The resolution was adopted by the Executive Board joined by co-signatories from a further 28 Board Members: Angola, Bangladesh, Brazil, Burkina Faso, China, Congo, Cuba, Djibouti, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Kenya, Indonesia, Italy, Malawi, Nigeria, Peru, the Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Thailand, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, the United States of America, Venezuela, and Zimbabwe. Other Member States of UNESCO who declared support for the initiative were Hungary, Serbia and South Africa.

This impressive list of co-sponsoring nations reflects the truly international and inclusive nature of the theme of an International Year of Light. The global partnership organising the International Year of Light will now begin detailed planning of a coordinated series of activities for 2015 in parallel with preparing a formal request to the United Nations General Assembly.

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Background Information

The European Physical Society (EPS) provides an international forum for physicists and acts as a federation of national physical societies. Founded in 1968, the EPS now has around 3000 individual members, and brings together 41 national physical societies which themselves represent together over 100000 physicists. The EPS Secretariat is based in Mulhouse, France.

The African Physical Society (AfPS) is a non-governmental professional association legally incorporated under the laws of the Republic of Ghana. It provides a forum to bring together for the purposes of networking, collaboration, and advocacy, all the existing national physical societies of Africa. As an advocate for physics across the continent, the African Physical Society endeavours to increase the resources for physics training and research in Africa, and the economic and social development that follows. The AfPS Secretariat is based in Accra, Ghana.

The International Year of Light partnership

The International Year of Light is an Initiative developed from 2009 by many international scientific societies and other organizations led by the European and African Physical Societies. A resolution in favour of the proclamation of 2015 as the International Year of Light was unanimously approved by the International Union of Pure and Applied Physics (IUPAP) Executive Council at its 27th General Assembly in London in November 2011. A decision also unanimously in favour of this was approved by the Council of SESAME (Synchrotron-light for Experimental Science and Applications in the Middle East) at its 19th session in December 2011.

The activities of the International Year of Light will be coordinated by an International Steering Committee which will ensure effective action at both national and international levels between a wide range of international partners including learned societies, science and technology platforms, educational institutions, non-governmental and inter-governmental organizations etc.

These partners include: the European Physical Society (EPS); the African Physical Society (AfPS); the American Physical Society (APS); the Chinese Physical Society (CPS); the African Laser Center (ALC); the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences; the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM); the Association of Asia Pacific Physical Societies (AAPPS); the Federación Iberoamericana de Sociedades de Física (FEIASOFI); the Fédération Française de Sociétés Scientifiques (F2S); the Canadian Association of Physicists (CAP); the Società Italiana di Fisica (SIF); the Deutsche Physikalische Gesellschaft (DPG); the Institute of Physics (IOP); the United Physical Society of the Russian Federation (UPSRF); the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS); the New Zealand Institute of Physics (NZIP); the Royal Society of New Zealand (RSNZ); the European Astronomical Society (EAS); the Abdus Salam International Centre for Theoretical Physics (UNESCO-ICTP); SESAME; the International Commission on Optics (ICO); the International Society for Optics and Photonics (SPIE); the Chinese Optical Society (COS); the European Optical Society (EOS); the Optical Society (OSA); the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers Photonics Society (IEEE Photonics Society); the Australian Optical Society (AOS); the World Federation of Scientists (WFS); the Diamond Light Source; Education and Training in Optics Conference (ETOP); EYEST Association (Excite Youth for Engineering, Science and Technology); European Technology Platform Photonics 21; Institute of Optics Rochester; Laserlab Europe, the Integrated Initiative of European Laser Research Infrastructures; European Centers for Outreach in Photonics (ECOP); Museo de la Luz (Museum on Light, Mexico); the Commission Internationale de l'Eclairage (CIE); Chandra X-ray Center; the International Society for Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing (ISPRS); the International Committee on Ultra-High Intensity Lasers (ICUIL); the European Society for Photobiology (ESP); International Association of Physics Students (IAPS).

Supporting international scientific unions include: the International Union of Pure and Applied Physics (IUPAP); the International Union of Pure and Applied Biophysics (IUPAB); the International Union of the History and Philosophy of Science (IUHPS); the International Astronomical Union (IAU); the International Union of Theoretical and Applied Mechanics (IUTAM); the International Union of Radio Science (URSI).