

South African Foreign Minister lends support to astronomers UN global citizenship initiative

Today the International Astronomical Union European Regional Office of Astronomy for Development¹ reported to the Secretary General of the United Nations on the results of an UN GA75 Dialogue held on 28 September. The aim of the UN GA 75 Dialogues is to solicit ideas that, if implemented, would help make the world a better place in 2045, when the UN will celebrate its hundredth anniversary. The IAU Dialogue focused on astronomy as a tool for advancing the UN Sustainable Development Goals and in particular how introducing children to the enormity and beauty of the Universe at an early age can develop their global perspective and foster global solidarity.

Speakers included astronomers, educationalists, social scientists, economists, politicians and government leaders. Talks included a keynote address by the South African Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Professor Naledi Pandor. Participants also included Mr. Barry Andrews, an Irish member of the European Parliament, the UNESCO Global Citizenship Education Leader, Ms. Lydia Ruprecht and the President of the International Astronomical Union, Leiden Professor Ewine van Dieshock.

The conclusion of the Dialogue was a unanimous report supported by all participants urging adoption of the following resolution by the General Assembly:

"Before they are 10 years old, every child should be introduced to the inspiring notion that we all inhabit a tiny planet in a vast wonderful Universe, illustrated by the iconic pictures of our earth taken from space. This will help them realise that we all belong to a common humanity (SDG 4.7), who must respect and protect our planet (SDG 13) and advance the cause of peace (SDG 16)"

The report recommended that several pilot projects should be started throughout the world, taking care to include disadvantaged children. These pilots would gradually be expanded to cover all countries before 2030. Sufficient attention and resources should be made available by national governments, industry and philanthropic organisations to accomplish the Dialogue vision within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Every child should be reached by the astronomy global citizenship initiative before 2045.

A highlight of the Dialogue was an inspirational keynote address by the South African Foreign Minister Professor Naledi Pandor, *who as then Minister of Science and Technology, was awarded an honorary professorship of Astronomy for Development by Leiden University in 2017*². She thanked the United Nations for allowing a side event of such calibre to take place during the 75th General Assembly and was delighted that astronomy was chosen as a

¹ The IAU European Regional Office of Astronomy for Development is a partnership between the European Astronomical Society and Leiden University in the Netherlands.

² Only in Dutch version

priority science by South Africa because of its unparalleled ability to inspire an interest in science, especially among young people. According to Professor Pandor, South Africa has long “recognised the unrivalled potential of astronomy to develop generic, mathematical, computational and other technological skills which would be needed for the African knowledge economy. I have no doubt that South Africa’s president, Mr. Cyril Ramaphosa will appreciate and support your efforts to highlight and to use astronomy as a tool to bring our world together at a time when there are many in the world who seek to divide us and to entrench divisions. President Nelson Mandela famously stated that there can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children. For the reasons I've stated, investment in astronomy is an important investment in and for our children. You can count on the support of South Africa in advancing the goals that will emerge from this side meeting.”

Also, according to Irish MEP Barry Andrews, “particular priorities for Ireland include meeting the educational needs of children in countries experiencing both protracted crises and emergencies, and closing the gender gap in access to education. We hope to bring these commitments and values to the table when we take up our seat at the UN Security Council in 2021”. Fostering opportunities in education for young people is an essential prerequisite for achieving sustainable development. Projects that give young people a sense of global citizenship and an interest in science and technology should be supported and encouraged.”

Bolstered by such high-level support, the IAU Office of Astronomy for Development and its 11 regional offices will intensify advocacy at the United Nations and among UN member states to ensure that the vision of the UN GA 75 Dialogue to advance globalism by ensuring that all young children are introduced to the cosmic perspective is achieved before 2045 at the latest.