

Be ready: the International Year of Physics is taking off!

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It has been a long and hard way since the European Physical Society proposed in late 2000 to declare 2005 as the "World Year of Physics" (WYP). This initiative has steadily made progress in its acceptance by the international organisations. The IUPAP endorsed it in October 2002, at its General Assembly in Berlin. The General Conference of UNESCO voted to accept it in Paris, in October 2003. Finally, in June 2004, in New York, the General Assembly of the United Nations Organisation passed by acclamation a resolution declaring 2005 as the "International Year of Physics" (IYP) (see: www.un.org/Depts/dhl/resguide/r58.htm and www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2004/ga10243.doc.htm). At that point, one should recall that only the UN General Assembly has the power to declare "International" years. So the "World Year of Physics" is now the "International Year of Physics"! The UN resolution on IYP has been sponsored by the permanent delegations of Brazil, France, Lesotho, Monaco, Portugal, Singapore and the United Kingdom, and presented by the Lesotho ambassador to the UN, Dr. Lebohang K. Moleko (see: www.un.org/webcast/ga.html). Dr Moleko should be thanked for his efforts to get the resolution passed.

In the mean time, physicists and Physical Societies did not wait for the vote of the resolution at the UN assembly to start to plan and organise events, actions, exhibits and conferences at the national and international level. Two WYP preparatory meetings were held in Graz (July 03) and Montreal (March 04), in which many events planned worldwide have been presented – see the report on the Montreal meeting by Christophe Rossel, in *Europhysics News* 35/3, p. 96, 2004. More recently, in October 2004, the European WYP coordinators met in Mulhouse to present their activity plans, to share their experience and to try to coordinate events between European countries as much as possible. The level of preparation of WYP activities was found to be quite advanced: museum exhibits for the general public around Einstein's legacy and physical sciences in general, radio and television programmes, commemorative coins and stamps, street events on physics themes, theatre plays, conferences, etc. In Portugal, a coordinator in charge of WYP relations and organisation has been officially accredited by the Portuguese government. Also, more global activities, at the European level and worldwide, are well on the way. These include activities such as "physics enlightens the world" (a relay of light signals around the globe), "physics talent search", and "physics as a cultural heritage" (a full account of those global initiatives is given on the web page www.wyp2005.org/). Funding for WYP activities is also growing quickly both at the local and European

level: the European Commission has recently decided to support WYP activities in Europe by funding, at the 2M€ level, via the "Science and Society" programme, many European organisations under the leadership of EPS.

The main objective of WYP 2005 is to promote physics, to highlight its importance and impact in everyday life, and to remind us that physics is part of human culture. Its main target is the general public, and particularly young people. This will be exemplified in the 'kick-off' meeting of the International Year of Physics, "Physics for Tomorrow", which is being held at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris, from 13-15 January 2005. This conference, open to the general public, aims at capturing the attention of the international press and media, so that events and celebrations organised around the world throughout the year will attract public and media attention. Half of those attending the meeting will be young students (500, with age ~16-21) coming from all over the world, including developing countries from Africa and Asia. They will have the opportunity to closely interact with prestigious speakers (among them several Nobel laureates) who will present their views on the role of physics in society and in solving 21st century challenges (energy, environment, development...), on its trans-disciplinary character and its influence on other disciplines, on novel approaches to physics teaching and scientific education, etc.

As expected from an event that opens a year where increasing the public awareness of physics and physical sciences is a major goal, the 'kick-off' conference will exhibit marked features of general public interest. This must be the rule for all the events planned throughout the year 2005, and one expects every physicist to accept his responsibility in this respect during the coming year, being proactive in sharing his visions and convictions about physics and science with Society at large.

Happy and fruitful Year 2005!

