

Why do we need an International Year of Planet Earth?

Around the shores of the Indian Ocean, 250,000 people are dead today because the world's governments have not grasped the need to use our understanding of the Earth more effectively.

Earth scientists are concerned that their knowledge of the Earth, which could save lives and livelihoods, is under-used.

Who is backing the bid?

Three years ago, the International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS) and UNESCO's Earth Science Division began work on an initiative to proclaim an International UN Year of Planet Earth, aimed at ensuring greater and more effective use by society of the knowledge accumulated by the world's 400,000 Earth scientists – a hope expressed in its subtitle, Earth Science for Society and its Web site URL www.esfs.org.

The International Year is endorsed by eight ICSU Unions and other major geoscientific organisations, as well as 17 Associate Partner organizations.

How will it work?

The International Year of Planet Earth plans two main lines of activity: a Science Programme and an Outreach Programmes, which will enjoy equal status and similar budgets.

The Science Programme's effort will be channelled into 10 broad, societally relevant multidisciplinary themes: health, climate, groundwater, ocean, soils, deep Earth, (mega)cities, hazards, resources, and life. Brochures are being printed on each of these themes in which scientists from all corners of the Earth are invited to submit proposals dedicated to specific questions within each theme. Five of the brochures are already published, and the others are due out in June 2005.

An Outreach Programme brochure is also available (in printed form and at www.esfs.org); this publication sets out numerous ways in which greater attention can be drawn to the relevance to society of the Earth sciences, and calls for bids in a 'bottom up' or 'grass roots' approach similar to that employed by the Year's Science Programme and UNESCO's highly successful International Geoscience Programme (IGCP).

What progress has been made to date?

Over the past 12 months the International Year of Planet Earth has gained significant momentum, and has passed three important milestones:

1. **Support by the global geoscientific community** was expressed in the Florence Declaration adopted by the IUGS/IGC Council, representing leading geoscientific communities in about 140 nations and regions.
2. **Political support at UN-level** for proclamation has now been promised by 18 nations together representing more than half of the world's population;
3. **A Draft Resolution** on the International Year of Planet Earth has been adopted by UNESCO's Executive Board at the request of the United Republic of Tanzania.

The International Year of Planet Earth is well on its way to proclamation by the UN. By July 2005 we anticipate that a Resolution to that effect will be on the Agendas of both the UN General Assembly and UNESCO's General Conference due to convene during the last quarter of 2005. That will mark the start of a fund-raising campaign with the aim of raising US\$20million, mainly from industry.

Please give this initiative your support

That achieved, the International Year of Planet Earth will be poised to make a real difference not only to greater awareness and appreciation of Earth as the ultimate source of our everyday needs and the foundation of global society and economy, but also to increased awareness of the dangers posed by the Earth and the knowledge we need if these are to be more effectively mitigated in future.

