

Panel discussion of NOC activities in Middle East and Africa Regions

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Abstract. We schedule a panel discussion of the IAU National Outreach Contacts/Coordinators (NOCs) activities in the Middle-East Africa Region alongside the IAU General Assembly. The NOC network was established in 2012 by the IAU Office for Astronomy Outreach (OAO) to coordinate worldwide astronomy outreach activities. In this panel discussion we will invite the NOCs from the Middle-East and Africa Regions to discuss their activities and issues relating to the region.

Keywords. Outreach, Network.

1. Introduction

The IAU Office of Astronomy Outreach (OAO) has created a network of National Outreach Coordinators (NOCs), formerly known as National Outreach Contacts since 2012 who have been spearheading outreach activities in their respective countries. A panel discussion was held at the 2018 IAU General Assembly to discuss the NOC activities in Africa and Middle East. The countries represented were Ethiopia, Egypt, Madagascar, Jordan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. Each NOC had five minutes short presentation followed by a short session of questioning and answers. It must be understood that NOCs are a formal IAU points of contact [1] for public engagements in the different countries.

2. New IAU National Members

The panel discussion recognized the African and Middle East countries that became IAU national members at the 2018 IAU General Assembly. These are Algeria, Ghana, Jordan, Cyprus, the United Arab Emirates, Madagascar, Morocco and Mozambique, making 90 per cent of the new members joining the IAU at that particular time. The only new member from the other region was Slovenia. This was historical for the combined region and a sign of great progress being made by the region in terms of astronomy activities.

3. Update from countries

The Zambian NOC, Prosperity Simpemba, reported that an inclusive National Outreach Committee consisting of over 12 volunteers has been formed to spearhead astronomy communication and outreach in the country. The team has already rolled out outreach activities to schools [2], universities and the public in the 2018 schedule. Plans were underway to carry out an astronomy road show and the committee was getting ready to run the competition for naming the exo-planet as part of the IAU100 activities. There is need to raise funds for running these activities and increasing the number of volunteers.

In Madagascar, the Malagasy Astronomy and Space Science (MASS) group has been formed to serve as a platform of networking and skills transfer, run astronomy outreach activities and provide support to basic astronomy training. Zara Randriamanakoto reported that that MASS was officially registered and pioneered Madagascars application to become an IAU national member and it came true at the 2018 IAU General Assembly.

Several activities were reported to have taken place in Tanzania. These include the September 1, 2016 annular solar eclipse public events, dark skies project in schools, stargazing with school children and with the public and continued engagement of teachers, school children, armature and professional astronomers in Tanzania, said Dr. Noorali Jiwaji.

In Ethiopia, the main actors in the development and communication of astronomy and space science are the Entoto Observatory Research Centre, the Ethiopian Space Science Society and the Ethiopian Space Science and Technology Institute. These collaborate to propagate astronomy and space science national strategies.

In Uganda, Jordan and Egypt, there are also inspiring efforts being made to develop and communicate astronomy. Uganda has developed the astronomy degree programme and they are working together with the East African Astronomical Society to drive astronomy in the entire East Africa, facilitating co-supervision of students and organizing regional workshops. Jordan is very active and working with professional bodies in the Middle East such as the Jordanian Astronomical Society, Arab Union for Astronomy and Space Science and the Institute of Astronomy and Space Sciences.

4. Conclusion

It was evident from the panel discussion that the NOCs in Africa and the Middle East are making frantic efforts to spread information about astronomy activities in the two regions as well as providing avenues for astronomy development. This was evident from the fact that many countries from the regions joined the IAU as national members.

References

- [1] *IAU Strategic Plan 2020-2030*, p38
- [2] *Capjournal*, No. 23, February 2018, p34