

INTERNATIONAL SPACE YEAR - 1992*Jonathan Spencer Jones*

1992, has been designated International Space Year (ISY). This resulted from an initial proposal made by US Senator Spark Matsunaga of Hawaii, and was inspired by two historic events, whose themes have special relevance for the space age,

- the 500th anniversary of Columbus' voyage to the New World in 1492, with its themes of exploration and discovery, and
 - the 35th anniversary of the International Geophysical Year of 1957-58, with its themes of scientific enquiry and global cooperation.
- The proposal was formally approved at a meeting of the world's space agencies in New Hampshire, USA, in 1988.

The Space Agency Forum (SAFISY), the coordinating body for ISY, currently consists of 35 members, 28 national space agencies and 8 international scientific organisations.

Aims

- The aims of ISY may be broadly summarised as to show
- how we benefit from space,
 - how space helps safeguard our planet, and
 - what we are learning about space and the cosmos.

It is intended that the ISY will reach both industry and the community, and while it will operate on an international basis, it is hoped that developing countries in particular will benefit.

The aims of ISY will be accomplished in two ways, through research and education.

*Research**Earth Science*

The theme for research in the Earth sciences to be initiated during ISY is the space mission "Mission to Planet Earth". This focusses on environmental issues of immediate concern, such as deforestation, ozone depletion and the greenhouse effect, and ten specific projects have been selected. These are based largely on the work of the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme (IGBP), a project on global change under the auspices of the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU). The ISY will help kick off the IGBP, which will be the largest international cooperative scientific venture so far organised.

Space Science

A space science research program is in the course of development. A number of projects have been proposed under the headings of

- The Scientific Study of Space, including studies of the planets and comets and the search for extraterrestrial life,
- Data for understanding the Physical Conditions in Space, including sounding rocket studies of the upper atmosphere and "World Astronomy Days", when observatories around the world will simultaneously observe selected objects on prearranged days, and
- Space Science Outreach, including production of a Venus atlas based on the Magellan mission.

Education

Training in Remote Sensing Applications

In view of the importance of Earth remote sensing, SAFISY has adopted as a major objective that of the promotion of its benefits to developing countries through training activities. It intends to achieve this through the undertaking of projects within these countries, in the areas of

- monitoring and management of vegetation resources,
- geology of natural hazards, and
- urban and environmental planning.

Eleven projects have been proposed for immediate consideration, and a further four for possible future development.

Space and Education

Under this heading, SAFISY has identified three areas for involvement, namely

- Earth observation in education
- space science in education, and,
- space communications in education.

To date, over 80 specific proposals for projects have been made within these categories (and there are likely to be many more), including the preparation of educational materials, special issues of magazines, competitions, and special training courses and conferences. While many of these are aimed at the student, it is nevertheless the intention of ISY to reach all age groups.

ISY and ASSA

While much of the content of ISY is not of immediate relevance to ASSA, I felt that a complete overview would, nevertheless, be of interest. It is clear, however, that ASSA, amongst other bodies, can make a very valuable contribution to ISY within South, and Southern Africa in the area of 'Space and Education'. both by encouraging participation in international activities as well as by arranging its own activities. I am currently investigating these international activities, and would like to encourage ASSA Centres and members to start thinking of possible activities that they might undertake. The Post Office will, unwittingly, be making what may be regarded as the first South African contribution to ISY, with the issue on 1 August 1991 of a new set of definitive stamps for Ciskei featuring the solar system.

ISY is an opportunity that should not be missed in stimulating a greater public awareness and appreciation for astronomy, and space in general, within Southern Africa.