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# INTERNATIONAL ASTRONOMICAL UNION UNION ASTRONOMIQUE INTERNATIONALE

The mission of the International Astronomical Union (IAU), founded in 1919, is to promote and safeguard the science of astronomy in all its aspects through international cooperation. The IAU, through its 11 Scientific Divisions and 40 Commissions covering the full spectrum of astronomy, continues to play a key role in promoting and coordinating worldwide cooperation in astronomy. Strong emphasis is placed on the personal involvement of its over 8,500 Individual Members from 61 Member Countries worldwide. The IAU is integrated in the international scientific community through its membership of the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU).

The tasks of the IAU range from the definition of fundamental astronomical and physical constants and unambiguous astronomical nomenclature, rapid dissemination of new discoveries, organisation of international observing campaigns, and promotion of educational activities in astronomy to early informal discussions of possible future international large-scale facilities.

The IAU is also the sole internationally recognised authority for giving designations and names to celestial bodies and their surface features.

The organisation of scientific meetings is a key activity. The triennial General Assemblies feature rich scientific programmes (over 750 oral and 1000 poster contributions in 1997), the results of which are recorded in the *Highlights of Astronomy*, while administrative business is documented in the *IAU Transactions*. In addition, the IAU sponsors about a dozen carefully selected, high-quality *Symposia* and *Colloquia* each year. Proceedings of these meetings are published under the auspices of the IAU as important records of the status of their scientific fields.

The IAU is active in promoting astronomical education and research in countries where astronomy is not yet fully developed, through the IAU *International Schools for Young Astronomers*, *Teaching for Astronomy Development*, and programmes conducted in concert with ICSU and UN organisations.

Contact with Members is maintained through this *Information Bulletin*, which is published twice per year and distributed free of charge to Individual Members, Adhering Bodies, and major astronomical institutes and libraries throughout the world. The IAU home page on the Internet provides on-line information about and news from the Union, and direct links to its Divisions, Commissions and Working Groups are under construction. The official languages of the IAU are English and French.

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