

His Excellency Mr. Koichiro Matsuura,

Distinguished Representatives,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to address at the Global Launch Event of the United Nations' Year of Planet Earth organized by UNESCO and IUGS. It is also a very exciting moment for me and the geological community all over the world to witness the opening of the International Year of Planet Earth today in Paris at the Headquarters of UNESCO.

The idea of an International Year of Planet Earth originated within the International Union of Geological Sciences when the previous Executive Committee chaired by Dr. Ed de Mulder, explored new ways how best to fulfill its mission as formulated in the Mid Term Vision and Strategic Action Plan of the IUGS.

Proclamation of an International Year was seen as a potentially powerful means of demonstrating how society could profit from the accumulated knowledge of the solid Earth as part of System Earth. Immediate support was then provided by UNESCO, thus making it a joint initiative by UNESCO and IUGS.

The milestone of the initiative came in 2004. At a high-level UNESCO-IUGS information meeting held at UNESCO headquarters in Paris on the 11th of February 2004, six nations (China, Russia, Brazil, Argentina, Italy and Jordan) promised to support proclamation of the International Year of Planet Earth followed by a dozen States who also voiced their support of the idea.

On August 26, 2004, at the joint Council meeting of the IUGS and the International Geological Congress, geological communities from all over the world representing 140 countries and regions gathered under the banner of geosciences for society and adopted a Declaration on the International Year. Since then the members of IUGS who represent geological organizations in the countries and regions have taken serious actions in promoting the idea in their respective countries and regions to various scientific institutions, the public and the government.

Other scientific unions in ICSU (in particular the Scientific geo based union) and many other organizations joined the movement and thus broadened its base.

The IUGS is widely acknowledged as the most prestigious international geo-scientific organization. The aims of the Union are to unite the global geological community in promoting development of the earth sciences through the support of broad-based scientific studies relevant to the entire earth-system, applying the results of these and other studies to preserving Earth's natural environment, using all natural resources wisely, and improving the prosperity of nations and the quality of human life, and strengthening public awareness of geology and promoting geological education in the widest sense.

Given such a mission, the IYPE became one of the most important vehicles on the IUGS road map to expose the Earth sciences to the politicians and the general public, under the banner of “Earth sciences for Society” and IYPE is thus seen as one of IUGS’s most important tools to realize its mission.

The International Year of Planet Earth aims to ensure greater and more effective use by society of the knowledge accumulated by the world's Earth scientists. The Year's ultimate goal of helping to build safer, healthier and wealthier societies around the globe is expressed in the Year's subtitle Earth Science for Society.

The UN sees the Year as a contribution to their sustainable development targets as it promotes wise (sustainable) use of Earth materials and encourages better planning and management to reduce risks for the world’s inhabitants. As stated by the UN Resolution that the General Assembly of the United Nations Convinced that education in Earth Sciences provides humankind with tools for the sustainable use of natural resources and for building the scientific infrastructure essential for sustainable development, Encourages all Member States, the United Nations system and all other actors to take advantage of the Year to increase awareness of the importance of Earth sciences for the achievement of sustainable development and to promote action at the local, national, regional and international levels. And hence, the IYPE has broadened the spectrum of activities in the area of geosciences and their importance to ensuring human security and a sustainable development.

IUGS firmly believes that the 10 themes of the IYPE – climate, health, hazards, oceans, life, soils, resources, groundwater, deep Earth and megacities – not only best address the topics that characterize geology, but also reflect those issues that are crucially relevant to all the people of the world.

We have entered a century in which we have to meet challenges such as climate change and the increasing demands being made upon limited resources. Thus, the International Year of Planet Earth could not be better timed to draw practical and wide-spread attention to the need for all to work together for the future benefit of the human being.

Now, I would like to take this opportunity to urge all members of IUGS and the geological communities as a whole to take concrete actions in their own country or region to help reach the goals of the Year and to help make our planet a sustained and better place to live.

Finally please allow me on behalf of IUGS to express my gratitude to all of those who have contributed to the initiative of the Year and will continue to fulfill its commitment. I offer my heart-felt welcome to all the delegates and participants attending the Opening Ceremony and thank you for your attention.