
Light is Here

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From an idea hatched back in 2009, the International Year of Light 2015 has now arrived in full force! What an amazing two days it was in Paris at UNESCO HQ at the Opening Ceremony, where the international scientific community came together with diplomats and politicians, architects and designers, leading companies in light technologies, representatives from the European Commission, artists and performers, students, volunteers and many more.

Nobel laureate lectures, short messages and thematic

talks covered areas of basic science, innovative lighting solutions for society, light pollution, emerging trends in research, how photonics can solve global challenges, light in art and culture, the history of science, the need for dialogue between scientists and governments to improve science policy. We also heard many inspiring testimonials from NGOs and others working to address concrete problems of lighting and vision in developing countries. All the talks and addresses over the two days were challenging, and the cultural and musical performances and films rounded out the event perfectly. The moving au-

rorae borealis exterior sound and light show projected on the Fontenoy building by Kari Kola and Valoparta was truly spectacular, making the Eiffel tower look insignificant in comparison!

From my own perspective, I was immensely satisfied to see how the international participants embraced the diversity of the different themes of the year, and accepted the challenge to work together not only to celebrate the existing success stories of the field, but also to try to really make a difference to the future.

Events as complex as the Opening Ceremony of the International Year of Light require extraordinary coordination and commitment from many different people. Nothing could be left to chance, and EPS worked closely with ICTP, SPIE, 1001 Inventions and the staff of UNESCO to ensure that all the scientific and cultural aspects of the programme ran without a hitch.

I have to express my most sincere thanks to David Lee for keeping all the logistics running smoothly. The EPS staff did an absolutely outstanding job. Frederick Burr, Ophelia Fornari and Patricia Helfenstein handled registration with efficiency and helped channel the enthusiasm of our student volunteers in the right place; Xavier de Araujo and Ahmed Ouarab were troubleshooters extraordinaire and Xavier must also be acknowledged as the design master of the towering banners, the sponsor boards, not to mention the beautiful printed programme. Jorge Rivero was remarkably calm and composed in directing the very complex audio-visuals from the back of the room with UNESCO staff, and in checking and double checking that all presentations

and movies ran without any mistakes. Thanks to IAPS, Young Minds and FEMTO-ST, we had over 30 students on hand for tasks ranging from bag packing (and unpacking) to running around in the cold to rig lights, to setting up stands, to working onstage to help speakers. A special thanks also goes to Mariane Penasa and Jean-Michel Raimond for sourcing material so that Bill Phillips could show the world what experimental science and explosions on stage were all about.

There were two special elements that pleased me greatly. Firstly, the amphitheater at UNESCO was filled with not only scientists, but also diplomatic staff, research administrators, local and national politicians, as well as many more from other sectors. I think that we showed them all that scientists do understand the need to engage with the public, that we appreciate the importance of linking what we do with the needs of society, but at the same time, I hope that we made it very clear that it is the basic curiosity-driven research that actually enables all the problem-solving technology that we have today. Secondly, I think that this Opening has now provided an example to others everywhere about how to organize events during this International Year. The blend of science, culture and policy in a programme is exactly what is needed to ensure that the science is appreciated by a broad public and that the messages reach out beyond our own community to have much broader impact.

We can hope now that similar events now take place throughout 2015 around the world, and that we will really look back at the Opening Ceremony of the International Year of Light as the start of a science movement that will have lasting impact.

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