

ESO at the XXVIIth IAU General Assembly

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The General Assembly of the International Astronomical Union (IAU) is held every three years and is one of the largest astronomical conferences in the world. The XXVIIth General Assembly was held this year in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil from 3 to 14 August and had 2109 registered attendees from all around the world. It is the first time that an IAU General Assembly has been held in Brazil. In the last decade, astronomy in Brazil has experienced a period of major growth and development triggered by significant investments from the Brazilian government. The astronomical community has grown to almost 200 astronomers and in 2008 they were responsible for nearly 2% of the total number of astronomical scientific papers in the world, which is impressive for a developing nation.

More than 50 ESO staff including the Director General, Tim de Zeeuw, attended various parts of the two-week-long meeting. On the science side the participants attended six Symposia, sixteen Joint Discussions and ten Special Sessions and heard a balanced mix of review talks and cutting-edge presentations. On the outreach and press side ESO had an impressive exhibition stand (see Figure 1), and the IAU Press Office and the office for the International Year of Astronomy 2009 were also staffed partly by ESO personnel. The Press Office hosted more than 80 members of the press, mainly from Brazil, and more than 50 interviews were set up.

At the ESO stand it was decided to host a social event on some of the afternoons. The *ESOHour* quickly became quite an attraction (see the lower photograph on the Astronomical News section page, p. 46). One can only guess whether the popularity was due to the impressive display of large ESO pictures or the supply of great Brazilian food and drink ...

Five Resolutions were approved by vote at the Closing Ceremony of the General Assembly including a decadal plan for the global development of astronomy called



“The Strategic Plan: Astronomy for the Developing World”, which is seen as a successor to the International Year of Astronomy 2009.

Figure 1. The ESO stand at the IAU General Assembly was often a focal point for intense discussions and meetings.

The IAU General Assembly was embraced by the local authorities and media, and the resultant press coverage was impressive (see Figure 2). Several of the articles and television programmes featured ESO’s telescopes prominently. Director General Tim de Zeeuw for in-

stance appeared on the Brazilian national evening news programme *Jornal Nacional* with a long segment about the E-ELT (see the upper photograph on the Astronomical News section page, p. 46). *Jornal Nacional* is seen by between 40 and 50 million viewers.



Figure 2. The IAU General Assembly and ESO were also visible in the Rio streets. Large signs were posted in the Maracanã football stadium during the Sunday game, and advertisements for parallel outreach events (shown here presenting ALMA) were posted on billboards on the pavement.