

DECLARATION  
IN DEFENCE OF THE NIGHT  
SKY AND THE RIGHT TO  
STARLIGHT



LA PALMA DECLARATION  
Canary Islands, April 19-20, 2007





# StarLight

DECLARATION  
IN DEFENCE OF THE NIGHT SKY  
AND THE RIGHT TO STARLIGHT

(La Palma Declaration)



International Conference in Defence of the  
Quality of the Night Sky and the  
Right to Observe the Stars

La Palma, Canary Islands, Spain - 2007



Photograph of the starry sky over La Palma taken on April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2007, the night when the Starlight Declaration was adopted.

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*Final revised version of the Declaration adopted at the Starlight 2007 Conference.*

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Javier Méndez (ING) and Nik Szymanek. M51 Galaxy - William Herschel Telescope.

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# DECLARATION IN DEFENCE OF THE NIGHT SKY AND THE RIGHT TO STARLIGHT

(LA PALMA DECLARATION)

The participants in the International Conference in Defence of the Quality of the Night Sky and the Right to Observe the Stars, meeting in La Palma, Canary Islands, Spain, on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of April 2007, jointly with the representatives of UNESCO, UNWTO, IAU, UNEP-CMS, COE, SCBD, MaB, EC and Ramsar Convention,

*Aware* that a view of the starlight has been and is an inspiration for all humankind, that its observation has represented an essential element in the development of all cultures and civilisations, and that throughout history, the contemplation of the firmament has sustained many of the scientific and technical developments that define progress;

*Guided* by the principles announced in the preamble of the Explanatory note concerning Proclamation of 2009 as International Year of Astronomy (33<sup>rd</sup> session of the UNESCO General Conference) that defines the sky as a common and universal heritage and an integral part of the environment perceived by humankind;

*Recalling* that humankind has always observed the sky either to interpret it or to understand the physical laws that govern the universe, and that this interest in astronomy has had profound implications for science, philosophy, culture, and our general conception of the universe;

*Recognising* that the quality of the night sky and thus the capacity to access the light of stars and other celestial bodies within the universe is deteriorating at an alarming rate in several areas, that its contemplation is increasingly difficult, and

that this process faces mankind with the generalised loss of a cultural, scientific, and natural resource with unforeseeable consequences;

*Conscious* that the deterioration of the clarity of the night space has started to emerge as a serious risk to the continuity of astronomic observations, a branch of science that presently provides a flow of direct and indirect benefits which are increasingly valued;

*Bearing in mind* that the Rio Conference of 1992 proclaimed the necessary defence of the “integral and interdependent nature of the Earth”, and that this defence naturally includes the dimension of the night skies and the quality of the atmosphere;

*Acknowledging* that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of Future Generations states that persons belonging to future generations have the right to an uncontaminated and undamaged Earth, with pure skies, and are entitled to enjoying these as the ground of human history of culture and social bonds making each generation and individual a member of one human family;

*Mindful* of the validity of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, and of the different international declarations on sustainable development and the conventions and protocols concerning the environment — all these safeguarding cultural diversity, biological diversity, the landscape, and thus the conservation of cultural heritage and combating climate change, all of which have a direct or indirect influence on the need to safeguard the clarity of the night skies.

*Considering* that the scientific, cultural, educational, environmental, safety, and energy benefits of preserving a dark night sky need urgent attention and action;

*Aware* of the need to establish efficient and urgent alliances among the leading players, whose decisions can have an influence on reversing the process of degradation that is affecting the quality of the night sky, with a view to providing all the possible assistance needed to protect and conserve the cultural and natural heritage of Starlight;

*APPEAL* to the International Community, and, in particular, *URGE* governments, other authorities and public institutions, decisionmakers, planners and professionals, private institutions and associations concerned, the world of science and of culture, and all citizens individually, to adopt the following principles and objectives of this declaration:

- 1 An unpolluted night sky that allows the enjoyment of the contemplation of the firmament should be considered an inalienable right of humankind equivalent to all other environmental, social, and cultural rights, due to its impact on the development of all peoples and on the conservation of biodiversity.
- 2 The progressive degradation of the night sky must be considered an imminent risk that must be faced, in the same fashion as the main problems concerning resources and the environment are addressed.
- 3 The conservation, protection, and revaluation of the natural and cultural heritage associated with night landscapes and the observation of the firmament represents a prime opportunity and obligation for cooperation in safeguarding the quality of life. For all decisionmakers, this attitude implies a genuine challenge involving cultural, technological, and scientific innovation, requiring a major constant effort to enable us to rediscover the presence of the night sky as a living part of our heritage.
- 4 Access to knowledge, armed with education, is the key to allow the integration of science into our present culture, contributing to the advance of humankind. The dissemination of astronomy and the scientific and cultural values associated with the contemplation of the universe should be considered as basic contents to be included in educational activities in all areas, impossible to fulfil without a reasonably unpolluted sky and proper training of educators in these subjects.
- 5 The negative effects of emissions and of the increased intrusion of artificial light on the atmospheric quality of night skies in protected areas have an impact on several species, habitats, and ecosystems. Control of obtrusive light must be a basic element of nature conservation policies and should be implemented in the management plans of the different types of protected areas to fulfil their mission in protecting nature and biological diversity.

6 Mindful that a starry night sky forms an integral part of the landscape perceived by the inhabitants of every territory, including urban areas, the landscape policies established in the different juridical systems need to adopt the pertinent standards for preserving the quality of the night sky, thus allowing them to guarantee the common right to contemplate the firmament.

7 The intelligent use of artificial lighting that minimises sky glow and avoids obtrusive visual impact on both humans and wildlife has to be promoted. Public administrations, those in the lighting industry, and decisionmakers should also ensure that all users of artificial light do so responsibly as part of an integral part of planning and energy sustainability policies, which should be supported by light pollution measuring, both from the ground and from space. This attitude would involve a more efficient use of energy so as to meet the wider commitments made on climate change, and for the protection of the environment.

8 Areas suitable for unimpaired astronomic observation constitute an asset in short supply on our planet, and their conservation represents a minimum effort in comparison with the benefits they contribute to our know-how and to scientific and technological development. The protection of sky quality in these singular places must be given priority in regional, national, and international scientific and environmental policies. The measures and provisions must be made to safeguard clear skies and to protect such spaces from the harmful effects of light, radio-electric emissions, and air pollution.

9 Among others, tourism can become a major instrument for a new alliance in defence of the quality of the night sky. Responsible tourism can and should take on board the night sky as a resource to protect and value in every destination. Generating new tourist products based on the observation of the firmament and the phenomena of the night, opens up unsuspected possibilities for co-operation between tourism stakeholders, local communities, and scientific institutions.

10 Sites included in the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, Ramsar Wetlands, World Heritage Sites, National Parks, and all those protected areas which combine exceptional landscape and natural values relying on the quality of their night sky, are called for including the protection of clear night skies as a key factor strengthening their mission in protecting nature.



All the necessary measures should be implemented to inform and to raise awareness among all the main actors involved in protecting the night environment, be it at local, national, regional, or international level, of the contents and the objectives of the International Conference in Defence of the Quality of the Night Sky and the Right to Observe the Stars, held on the Island of La Palma.

## FINAL RESOLUTIONS

The International Conference in Defence of the Quality of the Night Sky and the Right to Observe the Stars considers it essential to make the following public appeals:

1. In consonance with the principles announced in this Declaration, the Conference invites the authorities of States to take appropriate measures in order to safeguard the cultural and natural heritage of Starlight, and formulate actions plans to provide effective protection of night sky, particularly in areas of interest for astronomic observation, protected areas that are sensitive to the loss of natural light from the night, and places of special importance related to astronomical heritage.
2. The Conference agrees to refer the Declaration on the Defence of the Night Sky and the Right to Starlight to the Director-General of UNESCO for its acknowledgement and, if appropriate, recommendation to the Agencies and Bodies of the United Nations system as well as to the International Conventions related with the principles and objectives approached by the Declaration and other organisations directly involved, such as the IAU (International Astronomical Union)
3. At the request of the Canary Island Government, once it has been adopted at a meeting of the Canary Islands Government Council in April 2007, the Conference decides to submit a proposal to UNESCO through the Spanish Government to declare March 21<sup>st</sup> a World Right to Observe the Stars Day. The campaign will be launched under the name “The World Night”.
4. The Conference proposes to the UNESCO-MaB Secretariat to present the final conclusions and achieved agreements at the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Biosphere Reserves Congress, to be held in Madrid in 2008, with a view to include night sky protection, if appropriate, into the new Action Plan for Biosphere Reserves, acknowledging the important role that Biosphere Reserves can play as a network of true sustainable development laboratories.
5. The Conference requests the five Conventions in the Biodiversity Liaison Group, to examine the outcomes of its deliberations and, if appropriate, take to their governing bodies a combined view of the role of the conventions in helping increase protection for the night sky, understanding that this action will have positive effects on the conservation and wise use of biodiversity. The Conference also recommends to the IUCN (World Conservation Union) to examine this issue at its 4<sup>th</sup> World Conservation Congress foreseen for Barcelona in late 2008.
6. The Conference requests the UNESCO World Heritage Centre to inform the World Heritage Committee at its 31<sup>st</sup> session to be held in Christchurch, New Zealand, 2007, on the development of an agreement within the framework of the UNESCO Initiative “Astronomy and World Heritage” and Initiative “Starlight”, with a view to define a concept of “Starlight Reserve” in order to nominate properties which can contribute by its exceptional night landscape to the astronomical researches world-wide.

## ADDITIONAL RESOLUTION ON THE STEERING COMMITTEE AND THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE.

Having closed the Conference, and having adopted the “Declaration on the Defence of the Night Sky and the Right to Starlight”, in view of the importance of the agreements reached, provisions need to be made for the future. Continuity of the work and of the co-operation already achieved is of vital importance and, to consolidate the results achieved thus far, it is appropriate and necessary to follow up and implement the principles of the Declaration and the recommendations for the Action Plan.

To this end, the following decisions are adopted:

1. To create a Steering Committee to monitor the Declaration and its Action Plan (Starlight Initiative), made up of the international agencies and institutions represented on the Conference Organisation Committee, with the addition of representatives of World Tourism Organization, European Landscape Convention, International Astronomical Union, Ramsar Convention, UNEP Convention on Migratory Species, Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Spanish National Commission for UNESCO, as well as of any initiatives and organisations related with the different subjects, competences, and disciplines that have an impact on the protection of the night sky that may be required, once the Committee has decided to do so.
2. The Starlight Initiative Steering Committee shall ensure the dissemination, promotion, and circulation of the Declaration and its Action Plan, and its good implementation, following the recommendations of the Scientific Committee and to engage in all and any kind of activities that guarantee its continuity.
3. The Steering Committee is charged of the dissemination and follow-up of the Starlight Conference agreements and it would take on the responsibility to present the Declaration to and disseminate among the main stakeholders, including governments, local authorities, scientific institutions, dark sky initiatives, and organisations involved in environmental protection and promotion of sustainable development.
4. The Scientific Committee shall also propose drafting reports, conducting studies, campaigns, co-operation proposals, initiatives, and actions aimed at protecting the skies and enhancing their value, particularly contributing to the fulfilment objectives outlined in the Starlight Initiative.
5. Among the specific initiatives arisen from the Starlight Conference, which will be approached by the works to be developed by the Scientific and Steering Committees, there are:
  - The establishment of a partnership with the Sustainable Energy Europe Campaign and development of a joint initiative, with the collaboration of European Renewable Energy Council, aiming to develop actions approaching night sky defence and its relation with the promotion of energy saving, the efficient use of energy and renewable energies.
  - Development of a cooperation agreement between the Starlight Initiative and the UNESCO World Heritage Centre through its thematic initiative “Astronomy and World Heritage”, that

would also include the start of international consultations aimed to develop the “StarLight Reserves” concept.

- To refer the Declaration to the European Parliament and the European Commission in order to disseminate its principles and, if appropriate, adopt them at the most pertinent level, reminding that clear sky defence is an important component of the fight against climate change.
- To work jointly with the World Tourism Organization and ITR in order to promote awareness and knowledge related with night sky as a resource to put into value, supporting the development of new responsible destinations and tourist products based on star observation and night sky resources.
- To strengthen cooperation and mutual support with the initiatives and organisations involved in the defence of night sky quality, particularly with IDA (International Dark Sky Association).
- To work jointly with the European Landscape Convention to implement the new dimension of night landscape within the Convention.
- To develop new ways of cooperation with organisations involved in culture promotion, in particular Unión Latina and the European Society for Astronomy in Culture, to put into value the cultural heritage related with the observation of the firmament.
- To work jointly with the International Commission on Illumination (CIE) in order to promote the intelligent use of lighting in all exterior applications. This to be with the aim of minimising both the use of energy and the spread of obtrusive light into the natural environment, particularly that upwards into the sky.



# StarLight2007

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**UNESCO** (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization)

**UN-WTO** (World Tourism Organization)

**COUNCIL OF EUROPE** (Spatial Planning and Landscape Division)

**IAU** (International Astronomical Union)

**Ramsar Convention on Wetlands**

**CMS-UNEP** (Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals)

**SCBD** (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity)

**MAB** (Man and Biosphere Programme)

**DG-TREN - European Commission** (Sustainable Energy Europe Campaign)

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**FECYT** (Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology)

**ESO** (European Southern Observatory)

**Spanish National Commission for UNESCO**

**CIE** (International Commission on Illumination)

**IDA** (International Dark Sky Association)

**EREC** (European Renewable Energy Council)

**SEAC** (European Society for Astronomy in Culture)

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Optical Infrared Co-ordination Network  
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Gobierno de Canarias



International Conference in Defence of the Quality of  
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**StarLight 2007**