

STARLIGHT DECLARATION

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

LA PALMA, APRIL 20th, 2007



STARLIGHT
A COMMON HERITAGE

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 19th and 20th 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 civilizations, 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 the Proclamation of 2009 as International Year of Astronomy (33rd 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 which govern the universe, and that the interest in astronomy has had profound implications for science, philosophy, culture, and our general conception of the universe;

Recognizing 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 generalized 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 barrier 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 protection 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 untainted skies, and are entitled to enjoy these as the basis 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, which together 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;

Attentive to the urgent need to establish efficient alliances among the leading players, whose decisions can have an influence on reversing the process of degradation 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 and 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 that the main problems concerning resources and the environment are addressed.

3 The conservation, protection, and revaluation of the natural and cultural heritage associated with nocturnal landscapes and the observation of the firmament represents a prime opportunity and a universal 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 everyone to rediscover the presence of the night sky as a living part of the heritage of mankind.

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, which require a clear and 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 nocturnal 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 skyscape, 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, 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 strategy 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 nocturnal skyscape. Responsible tourism can and should take on board the night sky as a resource to protect and value in all destinations. Generating new tourist products based on the observation of the firmament and the phenomena of the night, opens up unsuspected possibilities for cooperation among 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 to include the protection of clear night skies as a key factor strengthening their mission in conserving 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 Session of the Starlight Conference, reading and adoption of the Declaration. From left to right: Anna Sidorenko-Dulom (Word Heritage Center), Malcom Smith (IAU), Maguelonne Déjeant Pons (European Landscape Convention), Miguel Clüsener-Godt (UNESCO-MaB), Juan Antonio Menéndez Pidal (Secretary General of the Conference), Jafar Jafari (President of the Starlight Scientific Committee), Antonio San Blas (La Palma Biosphere Reserve), Javier Gallego (University of Valencia), Cipriano Marín (Coordinator of the Starlight Initiative), Peter Bridgewater (Secretary General, Ramsar Convention).



Public reading of the Starlight Declaration by the poetess Elsa López, at the San Francisco Monastery of Santa Cruz de La Palma.



Public presentation of the Conference agreements by the President of La Palma Biosphere Reserve, José Luis Perestelo Rodríguez.



A moment of the public signature of the Starlight Declaration. From left, Luis Martínez (IAC) and Francisco Sánchez (Director of IAC).

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

(Short Declaration)

The participants of the International Conference in Defense of the Quality of Night Sky and the right to observe stars, jointly with the representatives of UNESCO, UNWTO, IAU, other international agencies named in the longer version, and members of the academic community, meeting in La Palma, Canary Islands, Spain, on 19 and 20 of April 2007, are aware that the Starlight vista has been and continue to be an inspiration of the mankind, and that its contemplation represents an essential element in the development of scientific thoughts in all civilizations. Therefore, it is declared that:

- a.** An unpolluted night sky that allows the enjoyment and contemplation of the firmament should be considered an inalienable right equivalent to all other socio-cultural and environmental rights. Hence the progressive degradation of the night sky must be regarded as a fundamental loss.
- b.** Knowledge—armed with education—is a powerful vector that can heal the growing rift between today’s society and science and contribute to the advancement of the mankind as a whole. The dissemination of astronomy and of the scientific and associated cultural values should be considered as basic contents to be included in educational activities.
- c.** Control of obtrusive light must be a basic element of nature conservation policies since their impact on several species, habitats, ecosystems, and landscapes.
- d.** Protection of the astronomical quality of areas suitable for the scientific observation of Universe must be given priority in national and international scientific and environmental policies.
- e.** The intelligent use of artificial lighting that minimizes sky glow and avoids obtrusive visual impact on both humans and wildlife should be promoted. This strategy 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.
- f.** Tourism, among other players, can become a major instrument for a new alliance in defence of the quality of the nocturnal skyscape. Responsible tourism, in its many forms, can and should take on board the night sky as a resource to protect and value in all destinations.

Necessary measures should be implemented to involve all parties related to skyscape protection to raise public awareness—be it at local, regional, national, or international level—about the contents and objectives of the International Conference in Defense of the Quality of the Night Sky and the Right to Observe Stars, held in the Island of la Palma.

Dated 20 April 2007, La Palma, Canary Islands, Spain.



Group photo of speakers and delegates of the Starlight 2007 Conference.

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 action 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 organizations directly involved, such as the International Astronomical Union (IAU).

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 21st 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 3rd 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 World Conservation Union (IUCN) to examine this issue at its 4th 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 31st 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 their exceptional night landscape to the astronomical researches worldwide.

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 cooperation 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 Organization Committee, with the addition of representatives of UN 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 organizations 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 shall engage in all and any kind of activities that guarantee its continuity.

3. The Steering Committee is charged with the dissemination and follow-up of the Starlight Conference agreements; it shall take on the responsibility of presenting the Declaration to and disseminating it among the main stakeholders, including governments, local authorities, scientific institutions, dark sky initiatives, and agencies involved in environmental protection, defence of cultural diversity, and promotion of sustainable development.

4. The Scientific Committee shall also propose drafting reports, conducting studies, campaigns, cooperation proposals, initiatives, and actions aimed at protecting the skies and enhancing their value, particularly contributing to the fulfilment of the objectives outlined in the Declaration.

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, mindful that clear sky defence is an important component of the fight against climate change.
- To work jointly with the UN World Tourism Organization and Institute of Responsible Tourism (ITR) in order to promote awareness and knowledge related with night skyscape 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 organizations involved in dark sky conservation, particularly with International Dark Sky Association (IDA).
- To work jointly with the European Landscape Convention to implement the new dimension of night landscape within the Convention, considering that landscape, including skyscape, is a key factor in the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of individuals and societies.
- To develop new ways of cooperation with organizations involved in culture promotion, in particular Unión Latina and the European Society for Astronomy in Culture (SEAC), 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 upwards into the sky.

