



*Most of the activities described below are documented extensively at the following link:*

*In addition, specific links are pointed out at times.*

<http://siriusalgeria.net/sirius09>

السنة العالمية للفضاء '2009'  
 الحصاد الوافر



*"Outreach & Education,"*

To put things in context, our Association, an independent association of regional character under Algerian law, has always been very much present on the Algerian public scene ever since its inception in 1987. It was only natural for it to be mobilized for the IYA-2009, and in fact as it is widely acknowledged, it was instrumental in giving the IYA 2009 in Algeria an early start. In addition to its role in structuring the National Committee for the Celebration of IYA 2009 in June 2008 well ahead of the actual opening, it devoted its Seventh Salon of Popular Astronomy in October 2008, a large astronomy gathering that Sirius organizes yearly at Constantine, to the theme of the coming astronomy year so as to give it an early kick. Most of the important associations from all over Algeria participated to that National Astronomy Salon and wide ranging strategic discussions were held on how best to spread the (astronomy) word during the coming 2009 year.

Sirius was also much present at the grand opening in Paris in January 2009, representing proudly the Algerian amateur astronomy community.

How an independent, under funded, astronomy association could make a perceptible change on the astronomy scene in Algeria is a feat of significance and worthy of recognition and which may ultimately be inspiring to others.

The Sirius Executive Bureau met several times during 2008 and 2009 to plan for large scale astronomy activities in due respect of the celebration of IYA2009 which will provide high visibility of Astronomy in our country. We, in particular, targeted the “100 Hours” as our French partners, the SAF, contacted us in this respect in 2008. We also programmed a large Youth Astronomy Arab Meeting to be held in Algeria, and put on our agenda various schools and Universities for astronomy exhibitions and talks.

## **1- Public Astronomy Sighting: for the Pleasure of the Eyes**

There is no astronomy without stargazing, and there should be no public action without sharing those night visions, so was our strong convictions at Sirius. This is why we planned from early on that we should participate at all the public sighting actions that will be organized in the context of IYA-2009.

### **- *The 100 Hours of Astronomy***

The first sighting program was incontestably the “100 Hours of Astronomy” program, one of the cornerstone programs of the year 2009. Suffice is to say that our Association won the first prize in the most coveted category of the “*Most publicized 100 Hours of Astronomy registered event*”. This prize is a tribute to the skills of Sirius in dealing with the various media in a most effective way, and it has been described as the most significant prize gotten by an Algerian astronomy association since the independence of Algeria in 1962!

### **- *The Total Solar Eclipse of June 22, 2009 from China***

Sirius went on planning for a National Caravan for the observing the July 22 total Solar Eclipse from China, dubbed the eclipse of the century in view of the exceptionally long duration of its totality. It included the three laureates of the scientific competition *Cirta Science III* as well as amateur and professional astronomers from various parts of Algeria. We were proud to have set up this caravan who enabled Algeria to be represented to this exceptional astronomical event where all the Third World countries including the other Arab countries were conspicuously absent.

### **- *The Galilean Nights***

Another great public sighting program later in the year was the Galilean Nights on the 23-24 October. Here was another opportunity to bring out our telescopes and other optical instruments and do some outreach on public premises. Indeed, on two successive nights, a public gathering was organized on the plaza of the largest Mosque in Africa, the Emir Abdelkader Mosque at Constantine, whose location is quite suited for astronomy sighting in view of the low ambient illumination, yet convenient enough for its closeness to centre city. In addition, a rich program of lectures and workshops was going on in parallel during these days.

### **- *The Partial Lunar Eclipse of December 31, 2009***

The last significant astronomical event of the year 2009 was certainly, as far as the Euro-African and Asian countries, was the partial Lunar Eclipse of December 31, 2009. A strong media action was organized in addition to the organisation of a sighting campaign. A long string of newspapers and radios published/broadcasted the Sirius detailed communiqué on the eclipse and its circumstances while live interviews were carried out.

## **2- Linking with the Outer World and the Mediterranean Countries**

Two international astronomy meetings were organized by Sirius during the year, one in early August 2009, the Third Arab Youth meeting on Astronomy and Space Sciences aimed at the Arab world and with the participation of 11 countries, and the other one, more Mediterranean this time, the Eight Salon in Popular Astronomy with quite few countries from Europe and the Arab world.

Those two events have drawn hundreds of participants and were open to the general public. It also featured the World exposition TWAN (The World at Night) that we borrowed from the CRAAG at Algiers where it was brought to by the Algerian Spoc. It enables the public to taste astrophotography brought to a high degree of refinement, as well as giving an international and multicultural cachet to our events, bringing home the message that Astronomy is practised under one Sky.

### **3- “Operation Maghreb of the Peoples”: Linking with the Tunisian Associations**

Our association linking to two large Tunisian associations is a bright example of regional cooperation through common action. We were indeed able during 2009 to establish strong links with the two large Tunisian Astronomy Associations, namely the Tunisian Astronomical Society (SAT) and the national Association Jeunes-Science, and we involved them in all of our large activities. In return, we participated with strong delegations to their most significant 2009 gatherings.

In view of the very average relationship between our two countries, there are very little cultural exchanges between them and a lack of incentive to initiate such exchanges. In fact, there is no regular public transportation between our two countries and all the travelling has to take place through illegal although tolerated taxis unless one travels by air, an expensive mean of transportation, especially when the only route is between the two capitals Algiers and Tunis. Now, from Constantine, Algiers is farther than Tunis in land distance!

Our exemplary relationship with the Tunisian astronomy associations resulted in many cross border exchanges throughout the year 2009. This crisscrossing of the common borders between our two countries will grow stronger in the future, and that is one way of breaking artificial frontiers and creating brotherly links, as well as a step in constructing a “Maghreb of the Peoples”, as opposed to a “Maghreb of the governments” exposed to the hazards of their fluctuating relationships.

### **4- The 2009 “Media Blitz”: Winning over the Media to the (Astronomy) Cause**

Our media campaign was, in a well deserved way, described as a “media blitz”: Events organized by Sirius during year 2009 were indeed shown on National TV news five times during the year (and some 15 times if counting re-broadcasting), some 50 times on National radio channels and an estimated 600 times in the various newspapers (news, interviews, communiqués...). Most of the “hits” as it were came from major operations like the “100 hours of Astronomy”, the “Galilean Nights”, crescent visibility for each of the start and the end of Ramadhan while the official news agency, Algérie Press Service (APS), run bulletins from our communiqués close to 10 times. Thus, millions of people in Algeria have heard some repeatedly, about the Astronomy events during the year, thanks to these reaching out actions.

As an example of a success we are quite proud of, is the media campaign held during the “100 Hours of Astronomy” which felt during the presidential campaign here in Algeria and for which there were many restrictions on the access to the media for everything which wasn’t related to the Presidential campaign. Yet we succeeded in reaching out to the public.

Our action toward the radios was also significant and although it is not as prestigious as the “heavy media” like TV broadcasting, it enables us to routinely and on short notice inform

millions of people of breaking astronomical news thanks to the high credibility Sirius is credited with. In fact, our Association has become throughout the years the almost exclusive reference on Astronomy for those media.

Never before perhaps did the media was so intensively used for promoting Astronomy and the IYA 2009 goals.

## 5- Introducing Astronomy to the Public and at Educational Institutions

In addition, our Association provided the public with the necessary tools to understand astronomy as a science of the Universe through many local talks given by our experienced members at Elementary, High Schools and cultural centres.

The University was not forgotten as quite few events were planned under the motto of: *Bringing the Intl. Year of Astronomy 2009 to the Campus*, the largest one being a 3-day multi-activity event held in June at the main Constantine University campus. In addition, large astronomy expositions were held in the various other campuses, most notably at the Engineering one at Chaabat Erassas, at the School of Medicine (Chalet des Pins), and at the Veterinarian School at El-Khroub.

We organized during February till April 2009 a regional competition in scientific culture focusing on Astronomy and involving in the first stage of the selection process the best 500 students from 47 High School. The three laureates were rewarded with being part of the national scientific caravan Sirius organized to observe the total solar eclipse of July 22, 2009 from Shanghai in China. The financing of the travel was secured through a grant from the Constantine City Council (APC).

In addition Sirius travelled widely across Algeria to participate and dynamise the other astronomy events, in Ain-Beida, Algiers, Béjaia, Annaba, Oum El-Bouaghi, Skikda, El-Khroub... It also organized astronomy events in the Sahara desert region in the deep South, most notably at Djemaa (Wilaya of El Oued), Guerara (Wilaya of Ghardaia) and Ouled Djellal (Wilaya of Biskra).

## 6- Working with the Physics Teachers community

***“Astronomy is to physics what flour is to the baker”.***

We also organized a series of Astronomy Skill Building Workshops with physics teachers. Some 150 High School physics teachers in two batches from various High Schools in Eastern Algeria were involved.

Sirius organized a series of Astronomy Skill Building Workshops with the physics teachers in the Constantine Governorate. In all, some 150 High School physics teachers from various High Schools in Governorate benefited from the program.

Each workshop typically consisted of a day long special International Year of Astronomy 2009 program, focused on astrophysics, where it was argued that every physic teacher is ipso facto an astronomer, or should so be! The year 2009 was thus implicitly their year too. The motto was appropriately chosen: ***“Astronomy is to physics what flour is to the baker”***. The Cosmos as it was argued the largest physical laboratory one can imagine, dwarfing all the earthly ones in the range of physical conditions reigning in it from extreme densities to most dilute ones, in temperatures, kinds of matter, and certainly in the time of the experiments! The Universe is indeed every physicist dreaming place with a bestiary of celestial objects like quasars, black holes, blazars, pulsars, with all types of matter from ordinary one in its various phases including degenerate form, plasma form, to more exotic and speculative ones like Dark matter, Dark Energy, monopoles, wimps...

From the offset, the program was meant to inject new vigour to the physics teacher community battered by a big lack of vocations as physics has become greatly unpopular with



the students. The enthusiasm of the teachers at those meetings surpassed our expectations and we had to go beyond the imparted time to deal with all the inquiries.

## **7- APODAR, the APOD's mirror, the "Thuraya" electronic bulletin, and the "Sirius Voice" newsletter**

- One important scholarly project carried out by Sirius and which saw the light during the year 2009 is APODAR, the Arabic mirror site of the famous NASA site APOD, standing for the Astronomy Picture of the Day. This site whose numbers of visitors already run in the hundreds daily from all over the Arab world and beyond, can be a tremendous pedagogical resource for teachers as well as a great source of inspiration for the lay people. It is a team of young Sirius members under a scientific supervision which do the daily translation and page making.

- Furthermore, a new communication medium has seen the light, called "Thuraya, the Sirius Mirror". Thuraya, which is the name of the Pleiades in Arabic, has for editor is a **17 year old High School student** (Hichem Guergouri) Sirius member. The contributions are however coming from all over the Arabic world, and are under a rigorous scientific supervision. It is meant to be an electronic bulletin of news and views related to Astronomy geared in particular to the inter-nauts, and thanks to the Sirius site where it is available for downloading; it should quickly build up a sizeable readership.

- In addition, Sirius Voice, the Association's newsletter continued to be published, and we managed to get printed a special international issue published for the Third Arab Salon on Popular Astronomy with the participation of professional and amateur astronomers from 11 Arab and European countries!

## **8- The Aurès Observatory Project**

The Aurès Observatory project was set during 2009 on firm ground by becoming a funded national project with vital contribution of some members of the Sirius Astronomy Association. We mention most notably his President who spearheaded the efforts to have a National Observatory Project in Eastern Algeria so as to cater to the needs of the Graduate Study Program that he is heading ("Ecole Doctorale d'Astrophysique" at Constantine University), but also Prof.A.Bouldjedri from Batna Univ., a founding member of Sirius and now the head of the project. Furthermore this project was also well publicized by Sirius in the media on various circumstances.

In fact from its very inception, the Observatory was given a public role both towards the society at large and also the various astronomy associations, as one can see from the communiqué issued with the opening of the "Ecole Doctorale", and prepared by Prof.J.Mimouni its coordonnateur and Sirius president.

We hope to see in 2010 the groundbreaking...

## **9- Few Important Points about the Project**

We would like to emphasize few strong points about the project:

1 - It was carried out by an NGO with spare resources, building on the experience and dedication of a small group of women and men, some are professionals but most of them are university students. The sixty or so members (2/3 of them being female by the way), all worked on a voluntary basis during their spare time and none got remunerated.

2 - We must also acknowledge that most of what was done couldn't have been possible without the freedom to assemble and carry out activities from our own choosing that enjoy

scientific and cultural associations in our country. In particular we didn't have to report to an administrative body or seek any prior permission before carrying out any activity.

3- While some part of the budget was from fund raising activities and internal resources, a good part was secured from city and state subventions. Yet the rigorous use of the tight budget was a key to success as we often were striving with extremely tight financial constraints. We believe however as a general rule that should the same activities have been carried out by a government body, the budget would have been at many fold higher for a less inspiring result. This is a tribute to the cost effectiveness of the NGO's work.

4 - Thanks to their early strong involvement with the project, many of our members have become well skilled in some specific activities. We mention in particular media communicators, team leaders (their involvement with the organisation of seminars...), and even science lecturers (High schools, cultural centers, and youth audience in general), in addition to specific ones like scientific theatre, mirror polishing...

5 - The various activities were carried out by competent members of our Association with an experience spanning many years, and under the supervision of astronomers. It also benefited greatly from the expertise of friends of the association in universities and research centers, most notably from Batna University and the CRAAG in Algiers. This allowed the activities to proceed while providing the various audiences and readership accurate, timely and relevant information. We also wish to acknowledge the excellent coordination for many of these activities with the Spoc and his role in disseminating the information.

6 - These activities carried out during 2009 are the springboard for many others to come during the forthcoming years. We also believe that the success we obtained, especially in working with the media for a wide range of sky observing activities as well as in motivating the public, can be much inspiring to others provided provisions of point 2 above are secured.

## **In Summary**

We think that our Association has done a unique job at the measure of the importance of the International Year of Astronomy 2009, in promoting the IYA2009 goals and advancing the case of public scientific knowledge. In return, we believe that the impetus provided by the IYA09 and its label helped us much in our public outreach and the receptivity of the media to our solicitations.

We felt that connecting millions of Algerians to the World as it celebrated IYA through astronomy campaigns like the "100 Hours" and the "Galilean Nights" was a golden way to inject a hefty dose of scientific culture as it celebrated with appreciation the unity of Mankind, one under one Sky.

Year 2009 ended, a new one has started, and actions initiated during that Mirabilis year will be pursued with new vigour. Of course other associations were involved in the IYA2009 in Algeria, and we did work hand to hand with them, yet we believe that our action in popularizing Astronomy was unique in its scope, elaborate means used, our wide and innovative ways of using the various media, and in its overall effectiveness.

Thanks to all the actors, Astronomy is now more than ever part of the cultural landscape in Algeria. And indeed, in the wake of the astronomy year, tens of new astronomy clubs have sprout out across Algeria. It is important now to cater for their needs so as their existence won't be ephemeral like dragon-flies.