

Statement of Italy

at the Global Launch Event of the International Year of Planet Earth
(UNESCO Headquarters, Paris, 12th February 2008)

Mr Matsuura,

Honourable Ministers,

Mr. Director of the International Year of Planet Earth and distinguished
Members of the Board of Governors,

Distinguished delegates,

Dearest students,

On behalf of the Italian Government I would like to express gratitude to UNESCO for hosting us today and for the excellent organisation of this Global Launch Event ceremony.

We have strongly be willing to attend this important event today to have the opportunity to reaffirm, in front of all of you, our appreciation for the proclamation of this International Year and to pinpoint the expectations we have on the effects that its celebrations will generate.

Mr. Master of Cerimony,

Italy has been among the Countries which have believed since the beginning in the need to promote an International Year of Planet Earth, the first International Year on Earth Sciences ever proclaimed by the United Nations.

The study of Earth Sciences has always been a fundamental part of the culture of my Country and it is not accidental if Italy was among the very first Countries to establish a National Geological Survey already in 1867.

Through APAT – the Italian Agency for Environmental Protection and for Technical Services – we have also always been supporting, and we directly participate to the activities of EuroGeoSurveys, the Association of the Geological Surveys of Europe, which aims at increasing the contribution of geosciences to EU affairs, at providing technical advice to the European Union and to promote a network between the national geological surveys.

Such a participation at all levels increases our attention to these issues and allows a broader awareness of the importance of the contribution that the Earth Sciences bring to social life and to the economy of our territories. It is

more evident today than ever before their fundamental contribution to the protection of the natural environment. For this reason, we believe that in the current particular moment in time the profile of Earth Sciences should be further enhanced.

This is among the reasons which have allowed Italy to particularly appreciate that the International Year of Planet Earth was conceived to develop in a three-year period, from 2007 to 2009.

The importance that Italy attributes to this event has led the Italian Government, on the one hand, to fund it with 700,000 euro, and on the other to establish, through a Decree by the Minister for Environment, the National Committee which is chaired by the Minister himself.

The Committee, which has the mandate of identifying the initiatives to be promoted during the celebration, is supported by a Technical-Scientific Committee, chaired by the Director of the Geological Survey of Italy and composed of all the main stakeholders operating at national level in the public, private and research sector, among which ENEA, CNR and INGV.

The celebration, in presence of the President of the Italian Republic, will represent the culminating event among the planned ones.

Dear Mr. Master of Ceremony,

For the above mentioned reasons, Italy fully shares the contents of the Declaration that is going to be read at the end of this day and which, I am sure, will be acclaimed by all participants.

I would now like to discuss some of the points of the Declaration which I find particularly significant.

The concepts expressed in the foreword of the Declaration do not just highlight the many fields in which Earth Sciences operate. They also show that it is extremely important to establish a broad environmental knowledge and awareness.

Equally important is environmental communication. We have to work out how to make more easily available and immediately accessible, both to institutions and the citizens, those environmental data that are acquired through the sciences.

Just last September a national conference on climate change was held in Italy. It was an opportunity to pinpoint the state of the knowledge from both a mitigation and an adaptation perspective so far acquired. Well, it is indeed needless I point out here that the first scientists to study climate changes were geologists.

The international project OneGeology, in which the geological maps of all areas of the world will be jointly elaborated by the Countries participating and made available in internet for free together with other data is one example of good information in the field of environment. Only science-based global information, put freely at disposal of everybody, from the general public to scientists and practitioners, through different levels of accuracy and communication form, can really favour the growth of a widespread and objective knowledge. Also for this reason we contribute enthusiastically to OneGeology through the Geological Survey of Italy.

A topic we particularly care about is to make geoparks as more valuable as possible. We are convinced that the activity successfully promoted in this framework by UNESCO should be strongly supported. Geoparks, astonishing and fascinating environments of knowledge and leisure, which make the tourist to get closer to the comprehension of the natural wonders produced by millennial processes transforming the Earth, represent an extremely powerful tool of outreaching and, at the same time, of regional economies development and, thus, of sustainable development.

Dear Mr. Matsuura,

I am, therefore, delighted to inform you that APAT, the Italian Agency for Environmental Protection, puts its organisation at disposal of UNESCO to coordinate and facilitate the preparation of the Italian candidatures to be submitted to the attention of the European Geoparks Network for the establishment of new geoparks.

Honourables delegates,

We hope that the emotional impact that the Year is generating among our populations, independently on age and social background, is strong enough to create a concrete basis for avoiding that the scientific and outreach activities do not end on 31st December 2009. We hope that an International Centre on Earth Sciences for sustainable development could really come into being. And that a similar body could be discussed also within the European Union framework.

In the frame of the International Year of Planet Earth celebrations, Italy will host in Rome next October the General Assembly of EuroGeoSurveys, the Association of Geological Surveys of Europe, and I trust that it will be an opportunity for the Directors General of the member Surveys to discuss the possible creation of a European Agency on Earth Sciences, so that this issue could be subsequently brought to the attention of the European Union bodies.

Believing that global challenges like those launched by the International Year of Planet Earth require global efforts, and that such efforts Italy is ready to support, I wish you all much success in these efforts.

Thank you for your attention.