

Bringing New Nations into Space

Dr. Feuerbacher is the current president of the International Astronautical Federation. He earned a Ph.D. in physics from Ludwig Maximilian University, in Munich, in 1968. He has participated in many science missions of the European Space Agency, and holds eight patents. He was interviewed by Marsha Freeman on the final day of the IAF Congress in Daejeon, South Korea, Oct. 16, 2009.



IAF

EIR: Congratulations on a very successful Congress. You mentioned that there were more people attending than you had expected.

Feuerbacher: Yes. You see normally we expect high attendance in the traditional space countries, in Europe and in the United States. If you are outside, it usually goes down a bit. So we extrapolated from the [2007] Congress in Hyderabad [India], and added a bit of financial crisis, and if you do that, you end up [expecting] less than 2,000 participants. But we had clearly more than 3,000—about 3,300. That was a real surprise for us. I think [the Koreans] did a very good job in advertising the Congress.

EIR: You had mentioned to me last year that one of your goals as president of the IAF was to bring in more young people. It seemed to me that this Congress had many more youth than previous meetings.

Feuerbacher: That has been very, very successful, and the same is true for the Space Generation Congress. We have a youth grant competition newly established within the IAF, which is for students from emerging space countries. And we had 12 young students who came here on those grants. In addition, we have the young professional program. Overall, I estimate that more than 25% of [the attendees] at this Congress are below the age of 33.

EIR: Another goal of yours, as you had previously indicated, was to bring in a larger number of emerging countries.

Feuerbacher: This is a remarkable development. More and more nations recognize the benefits that space can bring to their population. In the past, space was regarded as a technology toy, more or less, or prestige for the country. Now, really, I think, the message has penetrated, that it is really the benefit for the people that counts. That means that many more nations get interested in space. We have more than 70 nations represented here. We're working towards our first Congress in Africa, which will be in 2011.

EIR: It tends to be the small satellite sessions at the Congress, where you see new countries emerging in to space technology, since these are more affordable, small learning projects, which do not require very much of a space industry or infrastructure. Many of the people have gotten their education abroad, and then come back to their country, and build on that.

Feuerbacher: You know, it's not necessary for a country to have an evolved space industry to harvest fruit from space. Today, we have large archives of data which are very freely accessible, and the policy to give out data at very low cost, or even for free, to other nations is getting more and more popular. Also, the data are now available in a form in which they are really usable, which is very critical in this context. So, you don't need a very high standard of education to be able to make use of them. Many countries don't have their own space industry; don't have their own satellites, but they still actively make use of the benefits for their particular country.

EIR: So, being a user of data from other nations' satellites seems to be the first step.

Feuerbacher: Yes, and I think that's the best way of doing it. Not to start at the high-tech end, but start at the low-tech end. Educate the young people, and in this way you create a workforce which is self-propagating. These young people have to first have access to space, and they educate themselves to become more skilled, and in this way, you can build up the basics which bring a country a whole step forward.

Technology Drivers Can Overcome the Crisis

EIR: Looking at the global situation, what do you see as the impact of the economic crisis on space programs?

Feuerbacher: It's different, in different countries. Some countries actually see space technology as an innovation driver, and therefore, a means to overcome the crisis. Others act differently, but I think, overall, it actually helps to improve global cooperation. Because it's more and more difficult for individual countries to have very complex space missions so there is an incentive to cooperate. This is a good thing.

EIR: How important do you think international cooperation will be in the meeting the space goals of this century?

Feuerbacher: If you're looking at big goals, like going to the Moon, or to Mars, with humans, it turns out more and more that this is a task of global dimension. You have to go even beyond cooperation like we have on the International Space Station. We have to include everybody. We now have to start these new processes, which means that we don't have dominators any more. We have partners on an equal level, whether this is a small country, like Nigeria, that can contribute a little bit, or it's a big country like the United States or Russia, that has developed technology. We can bring it all together, and finally come up with a global effort. I think that's a good direction.

EIR: How do you see bringing countries like Nigeria into a global effort? What can they contribute?

Feuerbacher: Countries like Nigeria are very much concentrated on their national problems. Things like climate change, desertification, water shortages, food, and so on. And this is correct. But as they use space technologies to help meet these demands, they develop higher skills which will enable them to also contribute to a larger task. They will have to find their niche. They don't have it yet.

You know that at the end of May 2010, the IAF is running the Global Lunar Conference. We want to bring together all nations interested in the Moon, one way or the other. First of all to make contacts, but also to sketch out the ways that future advances can be made in the revisit of the Moon, and later also use it as a stepping stone to go to Mars.

EIR: In two years the IAF Congress will be in South Africa, which will be a real eye-opener. Very few people in the U.S. had any idea even about South Korea's space program, before this Congress in Daejeon.

Feuerbacher: I hope that our Congress here has

helped the Koreans to get their ambitious and dynamic space program more known to the rest of the world and that it gives them a little more accessibility to other programs. Here, in this country, the interest is very high. The President [of Korea] said in his opening speech [to the Congress] that 90% of the population watched the KSLV-1 rocket launch on TV. I don't think that happens in any other country in the world.