

International Lunar Decade

Louis D. Friedman¹ and Bruce H. Betts¹

¹*The Planetary Society, 65 North Catalina Avenue, Pasadena, CA 91106, USA*

Ph: +1-626-793-5100, Email: louis.friedman@planetary.org

Abstract. This is an extraordinary time for lunar exploration. Lunar missions are in development in China, Japan, India, the United States, and Italy. Europe just completed the successful SMART-1 mission. With so many nations, and perhaps private groups, focused on going to the Moon, The Planetary Society has proposed an International Lunar Decade to help coordinate these disparate efforts and to share the results with the world.

The International Lunar Decade would commence in 2007 with the launches of Japan's Kaguya mission (formerly known as SELENE) and China's Chang'E. It would end when humans return to the Moon -- by 2018, we hope, but at least by 2020.

The Planetary Society has long championed international cooperation both for enhancing the scientific return from space exploration and to capture the public interest that comes from global ventures. One of the chief attributes of space exploration is the inspiration it provides to the people of Earth through discovery, adventure, and great achievements.

The interest of many spacefaring nations in lunar missions is an opportunity to enhance international cooperation and to realize a benefit greater than just that of the individual missions.

The International Lunar Decade takes inspiration from the International Polar Year (2007-08), the International Space Year (1992), and, perhaps the best precedent, the International Geophysical Year (1957-58). After a considerable slow down in Antarctic exploration, the International Geophysical Year (IGY) vigorously renewed exploration of that forbidding landscape, and, in fact, triggered the Space Age, when the Soviet Union launched Sputnik 1 as part of their IGY program.

We hope an International Lunar Decade might spur a similar reinvigoration of lunar exploration and perhaps lead to the next great -- and maybe even unforeseen -- step in space exploration. The Planetary Society has advocated the establishment of an International Lunar Way Station as a first step towards a Planetary Outposts exploration strategy, which systematically builds sustained robotic, then human assets at selected sites on a given planetary body. For this, or any other international strategy for exploring the Moon, the ILD would create the structure to pursue needed first steps such as common communications elements, gravity mapping, site selection, etc.

The International Lunar Decade has now been endorsed by the International Lunar Exploration Working Group and COSPAR (the International Council of Scientific Unions' Committee on Space Research), and has received foundation support from the Secure World Foundation. In addition, the concept has been presented to the International Astronautical Federation General Assembly for consideration, and the Society plans to present it to the United Nations Committee on Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Planetary Society acknowledges the support of its members and the Secure World Foundation.

PRINCIPAL AUTHOR'S BIO (~50 WORDS)

When Louis Friedman helped co-found The Planetary Society, he brought to his position as Executive Director a wealth of experience in the space exploration community, including 10 years at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory and five at AVCO Space Systems Division. He has been a guiding force with the Society for over 25 years and remains as excited as ever about humanity's journey into the solar system.