

*From the Council of the RAS and Burlington House*

## 2009: International Year of Astronomy?

*The RAS is supporting moves within the United Nations to declare 2009 the Year of Astronomy, commemorating 400 years since Galileo moved astronomy into the modern world by using a telescope to observe the skies.*

It is hoped that focusing attention on astronomy for a year through the UN would foster enthusiasm for and interest in astronomy worldwide, especially among young people.

Astronomy has an important place among the sciences: it is embedded in cultures around the world and yet it also acts as a bridge to the hard sciences, physics and maths. A Year of Astronomy would foster extra efforts from universities, schools, museums, observatories, societies and others, to explain astronomical progress and generate enthusiasm about the subject.

The current Einstein Year focusing on physics has been successful in showing how physics underpins the modern world; it is hoped that a Year of Astronomy could bring similar interest to astronomy, especially among the young. The decline in popularity of subjects such as maths and physics is a cause for concern; the Society hopes that a focus on astronomy would show the relevance of these subjects and perhaps encourage young people to study them.

Further details of the Society's support for this initiative can be found on the RAS website, in the news section.

- The prospective Year of Astronomy in 2009 would add to the forthcoming group of international years in the RAS areas of science.

The year 2007/08 marks 50 years since the spectacularly successful International Geophysical Year 1957. To mark the occasion there will be:

- International Heliophysical Year <http://ihy2007.org/>
- International Polar Year <http://ipy.org/>
- Electronic Geophysical Year <http://egy.org/>
- International Year of Planet Earth <http://www.esfs.org/>.

It is hoped that “demonstrating the beauty, relevance and significance of space and Earth science to the world”, as the IHY website puts it, will inspire young people to take part in these endeavours in the future.