



Speech from Dr. Catherine Cesarsky, Chair of the Board of Directors, SKA Organisation, on the occasion of the signing of the SKA Observatory Convention in Rome on Tuesday 12 March 2019

Ministers and Vice Ministers. Ambassadors. Members of the delegations. President of INAF. Invited guests.

The Roman Empire was known as “the empire without end”, an expression coined by Virgil, or here shall I say: Publius Vergilius Maro? The Square Kilometre Array may very well be on its way to become its equivalent in the science world. Nowhere else is the role and impact of science diplomacy more evident.

Today, we have taken a big step. Together, we have created the Square Kilometre Array Observatory, only the 2nd intergovernmental organisation in the world to be dedicated to astronomy. The last time this happened was in 1962, when the European Southern Observatory was created. I know this very well, since I was Director-General of ESO for 8 years.

ESO was born with just 5 members. When I took over in 1999, they were 8, and when I left in 2007 they were 13; they are now 16. Today, the SKA Observatory is born with countries spread over 4 continents. And I’m absolutely confident that, like ESO, it will grow: over the years more countries will wish to join this adventure of the human mind.

2019 is a momentous year for the SKA. For the past year and a half, I have been Chair of the Board of Directors of the SKA Organisation, which is overseeing the global effort to deliver the SKA.

I have watched international teams of experts in many fields overcome technical hurdles put in their way to deliver the engineering design for the telescope. After 6 years of intense work and through many reviews, this process is wrapping up.

I have watched other experts navigate through the intricacies of international relations to deliver the organisation that will soon take forward this design into construction. After four rounds of negotiations over close to 4 years, this too is now wrapping up.

For those who think this is a long time, I'll simply say that Rome wasn't built in a day either...Roma non fu fatta in un giorno.

Those two processes have been running in parallel, but are inextricably linked and interdependent. And so, as the SKA Observatory is born, the engineering design is being finalised.

By the time the new organisation is up and running, there will be a proposal on the table, ready to be approved by the representatives of the member countries so that the construction of SKA can start.

Today, we have laid the foundations that will enable us to make the SKA a reality, and we should all take pride in that.

Thank you.