



Speech from Prof. Philip Diamond, Director-General, SKA Organisation, on the occasion of the signing of the SKA Observatory Convention in Rome on Tuesday 12 March 2019

Thank you Minister Bussetti, Ministers and Vice Ministers. Ambassadors. Members of the delegations. President of INAF. Members of the SKA Board of Directors, Invited guests.

Leonardo Da Vinci apparently once said “Learning never exhausts the mind” and “The noblest pleasure is the joy of understanding.”

A great inventor and engineer before his time, I’d like to think Da Vinci would have approved of the SKA, designing a great and complex machine to try and make sense of the world around us.

Learning and understanding is what drives both engineers and astronomers. It is to answer the biggest questions – how did the first galaxies form? Was Einstein right? What is Cosmic magnetism? Is there life in the universe? - that we are building the biggest science instrument on the planet.

Like Galileo’s telescope in its time, it is my profound belief that the new telescope that is the SKA will revolutionise how we understand our place in the universe.

The SKA, like most cutting-edge research infrastructures, is a generational project. In its 30-year history, the SKA has had its share of key moments. From the early concepts at the end of the 1980s, the first discussion of a next generation array in 1993, the first central office in 2001 (I would like to acknowledge the presence today of Prof Richard Schilizzi, the first SKA Director), the site selection in 2012, the start of the engineering design phase in 2013 to today.

Designing, building and ultimately operating the world’s biggest science instrument requires decades of expertise, innovation, perseverance, and a global collaboration unlike any before. The only way to ensure this is through an intergovernmental

organisation. Have no doubt about it, today is another key moment in the history of the SKA.

A moment like this is only possible through the efforts of many people. I can't name them all, but I would like to acknowledge the late Prof. Nanni Bignami, who's idea it was to ask the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to coordinate the negotiations to establish an IGO. Then Enrico Vicenti and his team, who guided the countries through a complex process and brought us to this signing today. Key to driving through the negotiations were Daan du Doit of DST South Africa, Simon Berry of SKA Organisation and our two international legal experts, Theunis Kotze and Tulio Scovazzi.

What I see today is a global commitment, across borders, across continents and across hemispheres to rally behind this vision to tackle the biggest questions. It is a commitment that opens up the door to decades of science diplomacy and a generation of ground-breaking discoveries through one of the most exciting human adventures of the 21st century.

I would like to thank you all for your support, in particular our Italian colleagues for having capably led the negotiations over the last few years and Nichi D'Amico and his INAF colleagues for hosting this historical event today. I certainly look forward to working with each and every one of you to make the SKA a reality.

Thank you.