

INTERNATIONAL SPACE EXPLORATION FORUM: BACKGROUND

The United States will be hosting the ministerial-level International Space Exploration Forum (ISEF) in Washington, DC on Thursday, January 9, 2014.

The ISEF builds on a process started at the European Union-hosted High Level International Space Exploration Dialogue, held in November 2011, in Lucca, Italy. There is strong international consensus to continue this process to build support for global cooperation in space exploration.

Once the domain of the two superpowers, many countries now have substantial space programs, with several more developing space capabilities. A forum for informal policy discussions among the key space faring nations will be useful, especially given fiscal constraints and growing interest worldwide.

The ISEF comes during an historic transition point, moving to full utilization of the International Space Station (ISS) with an increased private sector role, while using the ISS as a bridge to extend humanity's reach beyond low-Earth orbit. Also, a growing number of companies are developing ambitious plans for space launch, space operations (including resource prospecting), space tourism, and other activities in space.

Recognizing the role space exploration can play in addressing planetary challenges, furthering innovation and economic development, fostering scientific advancement, developing international cooperation, and stirring the imaginations of the next generation of explorers, the ISEF provides a venue for space-faring nations to reinforce international cooperative efforts in these fields. This cooperation can result in better outcomes than exploration initiatives pursued solely on an individual nation's own initiative.

Space exploration benefits all humankind. Governmental-level support for, and international cooperation in, human and robotic space exploration are critical. The high costs of space exploration mean that approaches which leverage the capabilities of many governmental and non-governmental actors through bilateral and multilateral cooperation will be increasingly necessary.

Among the outcomes that might be reached at the ISEF include:

- Renewed commitment from space-faring nations for space exploration as an important public investment that benefits all humankind and helps to ensure the long-term sustainability and development of this important domain.
- Commitment to further development and exploration of space, in part by the encouragement of dialogues underway in the United Nations Committee on Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, International Space Exploration Coordination Group, and other fora in a step-wise manner that builds on our success to date, drives innovation and new technologies, and increases collaboration and integration between human and robotic exploration to return the most benefit to the global community.

- Acknowledgment and commitment to the ISS as a long-term platform to enable the utilization of space for global research and development.
- Continued discussion of best practices for international cooperation in the exploration and use of outer space for global benefit, to include consideration of commercial investment in exploration and utilization activities under national responsibility.