

PUBLIC AFFAIRS HIGHLIGHTS IN CHILE: ACHIEVEMENTS OF 2004

VALENTINA RODRÍGUEZ AND FELIX MIRABEL,
EUROPEAN SOUTHERN OBSERVATORY

ONE OF THE PRIORITIES OF ESO is to contribute to the academic, educational and cultural development in Chile, fostering excellent relationships with its people and government at all levels. Here we present three 2004 highlights of our extensive outreach programs in Chile.

PRESIDENT LAGOS VISITS PARANAL

The ESO Paranal Observatory was honored with a very special overnight visit on December 9th to 10th, 2004. The President of Chile, Ricardo Lagos Escobar and his wife Luisa Durán, arrived to the VLT for the first time and were hosted by the ESO Director General, Dr. Catherine Cesarsky; ESO's Representative in Chile, Mr. Daniel Hofstadt; Prof. Maria Teresa Ruiz, Head of the Astronomy Department at the Universidad de Chile, and ESO staff members. The distinguished visitors were shown the various high-tech installations at the observatory, including the Interferometric Tunnel with the VLTI delay lines and the first Auxiliary Telescope. Explanations were given by ESO astronomers and engineers and the President, a keen amateur astronomer, gained a good impression of the wide range of exciting research programs that are carried out with the VLT. President Lagos participated in the imaging of the barred spiral galaxy NGC 1097, located at a distance of about 45 million light-years (see cover).



President Ricardo Lagos, ESO Director General, Dr. Catherine Cesarsky, and Dr. Jason Spyromilio, future Director of La Silla-Paranal observatories.

INTERACTIVE ASTRONOMY

One of the most popular stands at the Interactive Museum in Santiago (MIM) is the new Astronomy Exhibition developed by ESO in collaboration with MIM. Since the opening on November 12th 2004, this astronomical journey has captured the attention of children and adults with four dynamic videos and a unique space walk through galaxies, nebulae and planets. In 20 minutes, visitors not only learn basic concepts of astronomy such as gravitation, spectroscopy and space-time, but also enjoy some of the most stunning astronomical images collected by ESO telescopes in Chile.



ESO's Representative in Chile, Daniel Hofstadt, and MIM Director, Haydée Domic, join Mrs. Luisa Durán de Lagos (in the centre) during the opening of the Astronomy Exhibition.

PLANETARY ECOLOGY SUCCESS

Since 1997 ESO has sponsored in Chile the PROED programs of Planetary Ecology, Helios and Universum, making astronomy more accessible for students and teachers of public schools from the II, III and IV Regions in Chile.

ESO support has made it possible to train teachers, develop kits of didactic materials, provide access to amateur telescopes, astronomy exhibitions, regional and national Workshops on Astronomy for schools and the establishment of science-teachers networks.

The success of these programs is based on innovative and participative methods, including experiments in the classroom with the students.

An example of this is the Planetary Ecology program, almost completely financed by ESO for children between 8 and 12 years. There are already 268 trained teachers in 153 schools using this program to teach students about space, earth, water, air and the ecosystem in an imaginative way.

Chilean students of the Planetary Ecology program supported by ESO.

