

de nuestro país la que entregará a la humanidad la posibilidad de descifrar innumerables misterios que han desafiado al ser humano durante toda su historia.

Los científicos observarán desde el desierto estos cielos azules y estre-

llados. Los chilenos estamos abriendo nuestros ojos y nuestras mentes; a través del conocimiento, de la educación y de nuestra participación activa en la exploración de las nuevas fronteras. Sigamos pensando en grande, sigamos proyectándonos al tercer milenio, sigamos

comprometiéndonos con la reforma de nuestra educación, sigamos optando con decisión por las personas. Esta es la única forma que nos permitirá superar las barreras que nos separan del desarrollo.

Muchas gracias.

## The VLT Opening Symposium

*J. BERGERON, ESO*

The beginning of the VLT era was marked by two major events: the VLT Official Inauguration Ceremony at Paranal on 5 March 1999, preceded by the VLT Opening Symposium on 1–4 March. ESO is indebted to Professor J.A. Music Tomicic, Rector of the Universidad Católica del Norte, for hosting this symposium. Another major event occurred on the night of 4 March: First light was achieved ahead of schedule at Kueyen, the second 8.2-m VLT unit telescope.

The symposium was dedicated to science opportunities with the VLT and has provided a forum to the 201 participants for discussing current and new projects in several rapidly evolving fields. It consisted of Plenary Sessions on “Science in the VLT Era and Beyond” and three parallel workshops on “Clusters of Galaxies at High Redshift”, “Star-Way to the Universe” and “From Extrasolar Planets to Brown Dwarfs”.

The first Plenary Sessions were devoted to a presentation on Science with FORS and ISAAC by the respective instrument PIs. The hand-over of these instruments to the community for general observations with Antu, the first VLT 8.2-m unit telescope, occurred on 1st April 1999. All areas of astronomical research were discussed in the Plenary Sessions, from where we stand in cosmology to the new frontiers in the solar system. The last Plenary Sessions were devoted to Science in the millimetre wavelength with a new giant telescope project in the Atacama desert of Chile, and the synergy between the VLT and the NGST.

Workshop 1 “Clusters of Galaxies at High Redshift” focussed on the different

ways and new prospects in finding clusters of galaxies at  $z \lesssim 1$ , the cosmological constraints derived from the existence of high-redshift clusters, the content and morphology of cluster members and the gravitational effect of distant compact clusters which magnifies our view of the distant universe.

Workshop 2 “Star-Way to the Universe” concentrated on the use of different stellar populations as distance indicators, age indicators and abundance indicators, thus on the resulting constraints on the age of the universe, the star-formation history of various types of galaxies and the role of different stellar populations in the chemical evolution of galaxies.

Workshop 3 “From Extrasolar Planets to Brown Dwarfs” presented the extraordinary progress made in the discovery of sub-stellar mass companions orbiting solar-type stars and the various prospects for extending the search for planets to stars of all types and to planets with smaller masses and a wide range of separations from their parent stars. Several presentations were also devoted to the physical properties of giant planets and brown dwarfs, the low end of the stellar mass function and formation theories.

A summary of the Symposium highlights will be given in a forthcoming issue of *The Messenger*.



*Prof. Juan Andrés Music Tomicic, Rector of Universidad Católica del Norte.*