

Shining light on sustainability – a legacy for the International Year of Light

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Ending poverty through sustainable economic growth, supporting gender equality and inclusive education, and enabling access to sustainable energy are among the goals that the United Nations recently included on its 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. These are very ambitious objectives of course, but the International Year of Light (IYL2015) has seen scientists worldwide work together to explore concrete ways that photonics can help achieve them.

As part of IYL2015, academic and industry organizations around the world have joined forces to raise awareness of the many ways in which photonics impact our lives in areas such as energy, education, climate-change, and health. Their efforts have resulted in IYL2015 being amongst the most successful and visible of any of UNESCO's international observances, with thousands of activities involving millions of people in more than 100 countries worldwide.

IYL 2015 has provided the perfect opportunity to expand international cooperation within the photonics community itself, as well as to reach out towards new partners. As a result we have seen real strengthening of international actions aiming to ensure that research in this essential field continues to be recognized and supported such that long-term impact on society is assured. The general public and young people have been crucial targets of numerous events explaining how photonics is ubiquitous in our daily lives and to stress the importance of STEM education. Special symposia have been run in order to persuade decision-makers of the importance of photonics in society, especially for tackling important issues in developing countries. As an example, there have been several joint initiatives by non-governmental organizations and industry to put long-term programmes into place to raise awareness of the need for reliable and safe lighting for education and improved quality of life for the billion people worldwide who live in light poverty. We would like to extend sincere thanks to all IYL2015 partners and the tens of thousands of volunteers of all age groups who have made the year such a success.

With the International Year now coming to a close, it is essential for us to build on all that we have achieved in order that 2015 is viewed as a foundation for the future rather than simply an end in itself.

A nice image to bear in mind is that the International Year has opened a door and illuminated a path that will ensure a better tomorrow for all.

With the door now open, it remains only for us to walk through it!