

Dear President of Europlanet, Professor Nigel Mason

Dear President of the Portuguese Astronomical Society, Professor André Moitinho

Dear President of the Europlanet Executive Committee, Professor Manuel Grande

Congress participants

It is a great honour that on behalf of all Cascalenses, we greet the participants of the Europlanet Science Congress and the Astronomy Education Alliance Meeting, different scientists and academics who, coming from all parts of the world, are gathered here, in Cascais.

For those who don't know us, and I imagine that the vast majority haven't yet had the opportunity to get to know us, this is exactly what Cascais is: a meeting point.

At first sight, Cascais is its golden sand beaches, quality of life, well-cared-for heritage, living culture or the basis for Portuguese identity on the Atlantic coast.

All this makes us one of the best destinations in the world to live, and this is not stated by us.

Cascais is all this but also much more. It is a meeting point for people, for religions or cultures, as can be proven by the more than 80% of the nationalities of the world that fit into our small 97 square km territory.

But Cascais is also a gathering point for ideas. We are proud of the tradition that has been built by the free men and women of this land for decades, and that makes us a window from the world onto the world.

Here we never settle, and we believe that there are always local answers to global problems.

In Cascais there are no frontiers between men, or walls between ideas.

In the next few days you will give continuity to this tradition of liberty and pluralism.

Ladies and gentlemen,

You are men and women of science. I am a man of management, currently in politics. Therefore I don't risk an adventure into the fascinating but complex world of astronomy.

I will share with you only a small reflection as a politician and citizen.

2014 is a special year.

In 2014 we must remember, never to forget, that we have come 100 years since the beginning of the first Great War.

It is in 2014 that we mark the passage of 25 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall, and 40 years since 25 April, the revolution that restored freedom in Portugal.

Or, at local level, it is the year in which our village of Cascais celebrates its 650-year anniversary.

Within this perspective, 2014 captures our attention, because it is a point of convergence in history.

Curiously, it is also in 2014 that we mark 45 years since one of the most extraordinary pages in the history of mankind: men landing on the Moon.

Going back to those days, I recall the illusion that filled our idealistic hearts.

Many of us, independently of our religion or colour or nationality, became conscious of our paradoxical condition: we were small before the vast dark immensity of outer space, but big in the confirmation of mankind's genius.

Aldrin and Armstrong were responsible for a new feeling: on 20 July 1969, we were for the first time part of the same family.

We became aware of our common humanity.

Forty-five years later, as many of you tell us, Earth seen from space continues to be a fascinating place.

It is a place of tranquillity, beauty and unity.

But down here there are no signs of the first, and the second goes hand in hand with madness.

Unfortunately, everywhere, kindness is giving way to hatred, religious fanaticism and to the politics of tyrannical power.

It is curious how we need, more than ever, to find in the infinitely far, in the unknown, our sense of collective unity.

Unfortunately, even this memory and this worldwide heritage seem to be at risk.

The great powers and the great economic groups are again turning to space exploration.

I fear that they do so more out of an interest in power for some than out of curiosity and the scientific progress of all.

The greed and dysregulation that is ruining our world down here, is also threatening the world up there.

Numbers that you know show that the terrestrial orbit is being threatened by transformation into a big trash heap for which no one is responsible, and for which risks to mankind are far from being known to their full extent.

Even wars have already crossed the frontiers of the planet, and today are being fought up there by the machines of nations that see space not as mankind's common resource, but as the backyard of their belligerent impulses.

At the same time, never before as in the 21st century, have our lives down here depended on what is up there.

The internet, TV, ship routes and navigation plans for airplanes, crops, mobile phones, weather prediction...

Virtually everything in our lives is touched by technology that has its habitat in space. We can't risk that due to people's negligence.

Because it has such crucial importance in our collective life and in the last instance because it gives us an irreplaceable element of identification, it is time to stand up for the defence of sustainable space exploration.

It is said that in order to care, we need to know. We trust you to share with us all the knowledge of the fabulous world that exists beyond our planetary limits.

I end with a brief thank-you to NUCLIO: Núcleo Interativo de Astronomia. Based in São Domingos de Rana, NUCLIO has been an active partner of the Cascais municipality in the noble mission of creating awareness in order to promote care, to motivate questioning and to teach our young and children that not even limits have limits.

I congratulate its management, in particular Rosa Doran, for the national and international projection reached and her efforts that have ended in the realization of this meeting in Cascais.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I hope that in this young village of 650 years you will find all the conditions for a rich and fruitful debate.

And know that today, as always, you are very welcome in our house: Cascais.

Come back, always

Thank you

Carlos Carreiras  
Mayor of Cascais  
Portugal  
08 September 2014