

# PRESS RELEASE

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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **The Birth of a New Star :**

### **The African Astronomical Society (AfAS)**

[CapeTown, South Africa, 25-26 March 2019]

[80 Delegate from 20 countries and scientific institutions drawing the future of Astronomy in Africa]

[Establishing Astronomy as a fundamental science to be developed at the continental level and its great socioeconomic impact for development in Africa]

[Getting ready for the 2024 great African's World astronomical rendez-vous]

### **AfAS: A New Star is Born**

After months of consultation and planning, a new professional astronomy society with a clear mandate took off the ground in the wake of the «Astronomy in Africa» meeting hosted at the South African Astronomical Observatory in Cape Town on 25-26 March 2019. This meeting which focused on the strategy, policy, and governance issues related to the field, as well as plan the future of astronomy on the continent, after an intense two days of [presentations](#) and discussions which led to the adopting of a new [constitution](#), has finally given birth to a new star. This star in the African Skies (a sky renowned for its immaculate dark skies away from light pollution) was christened the African Astronomical Society (AfAS). Key to the coming of age and structure of this ambitious continental association was the generous offer by the South African government to host a staffed secretariat for the first 3 years. The meeting,

which brought together some 80 delegates from 20 countries including astronomy researchers, stakeholders from government and research institutions, concluded by electing an Executive Committee to take the organisation forward.

## A Continental Association not Shy of Ambitions

This meeting was held at the birthplace of modern astronomy in Africa, namely the Southern African Astronomical Observatory in Cape Town, where the first modern astronomical observatory in Africa was set up. The discussions build upon the massive international projects in the region such as the Square Kilometre Array (SKA), the Southern African Large Telescope and African Very-long-baseline Interferometry (VLBI) Network. These projects already involve several African countries and scientists working on these are leading cutting edge research globally. These are complemented by capacity building efforts training young Africans in astronomy, engineering and related fields, such as the [DARA Newton Fund program](#). The scientific potential of other facilities in countries like Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mozambique, Morocco, Egypt, Algeria, to name of few, were also touched upon during the meeting. Scientific expertise and commitment to astronomy in Africa recently received a boost when Cape Town was chosen to host the biggest conference in astronomy, the International Astronomical Union General Assembly (IAU GA), in 2024. This will be the first time that the GA is hosted in Africa since the founding of the IAU in 1919.

In the words of Kevin Govender, director of the International Astronomical Union's Office of Astronomy for Development, which was the local organiser:

*"This meeting is of particular significance given the growing stature of astronomy on the continent. Given the amazing spirit of cooperation and camaraderie that prevailed in this meeting, I am confident that the future of astronomy in Africa has just become significantly brighter."*

## The Elected Executive Committee : Expertise, Diversity and Representativeness

The members of the AfAS Executive Committee elected at this meeting are people of various expertise in academic research, teaching, public interactions and outreach. They are as diverse as one would expect from a continental association which as we believe truly representative of Africa in its diversity and human potential.

**President:** Jamal Mimouni (Algeria)

**Vice-President:** Lerothodi Leeuw (South Africa)

**General Secretary:** Sarah Abotsi-Masters (Ghana)

**Assistant General Secretary:** Charles Takalani (South Africa)

**Public Relations and Education Officer:** Olayinka Fagbemi (Nigeria)

**Early Career Representative:** Zara Randriamanakoto (Madagascar)

**Additional Member #1:** Palesa Nombula (South Africa)

**Additional Member #2:** Etsegenet Getachew (Ethiopia)

### The AfAS Executive Committee