PRESS RELEASE

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ICSU and WMO launch the largest polar research programme in 50 years

26 February, 2007 – International Polar Year (IPY) 2007-2008 officially gets underway on 1 March, 2007. IPY, which is a programme of the International Council for Science (ICSU) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), will be the largest internationally coordinated scientific research effort in 50 years.

During the course of IPY, thousands of scientists, from over 60 countries and a wide range of research disciplines, will carry out 220 science and outreach projects under six major themes:

- **Status**: to determine the present environmental status of the polar regions
- **Change**: to quantify and understand past and present environmental and social change in the polar regions, and to improve projections of future change
- **Global linkage**: to advance our understanding, on all scales, of the links and interactions between polar regions and the rest of the globe, and of the processes controlling these links
- **New frontiers**: to investigate the frontiers of science in the polar regions
- **Vantage point**: to use the unique vantage point of the polar regions and develop and enhance observatories from the interior of the Earth to the Sun and the cosmos beyond
- **Human dimension**: to investigate the cultural, historical, and social processes that shape the sustainability of circumpolar human societies and to identify their unique contributions to global cultural diversity and citizenship

The campaign also aims to educate and involve the public while helping to train the next generation of engineers, scientists and leaders.

Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization, Mr Michel Jarraud says: “IPY comes at a crossroads for the planet’s future; February’s first phase of the Fourth Assessment Report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has shown that these regions are highly vulnerable to rising temperatures.”

“However, meteorological and other regular environmental in-situ observation facilities at the poles are few and it is essential to install more and increase satellite coverage to gain a better overall picture of how rapidly these areas are changing, and of the global impact of these changes.”
Dr David Carlson, Director of the IPY International Programme Office says: "We face many challenges as we start: funding, data sharing, and, most importantly, the surprising and rapidly changing nature of the polar regions."

"But we have an enormous strength: international enthusiasm and cooperation, at a higher level and across a wider range of science than most of us will see at any other time in our careers. IPY will succeed because of this scientific urgency and energy."

Previous International Polar Years of 1882-83, 1932-33, and 1957-58 (also known as the International Geophysical Year), each produced major increases in our understanding of the Earth system.

IPY 2007-2008 will initiate a new era in polar science with a stronger emphasis on interdisciplinary research including physical, ecological and social sciences, and strong partnerships with indigenous communities and educators.

Prof. Thomas Rosswall, Executive Director of the International Council for Science, explains: "In comparison with previous Polar Years, we have planned a broader programme involving all the relevant disciplines from both natural and social sciences. The IPY is an excellent example of strengthening international science for the benefit of society – the mission of ICSU."

In order to ensure full and equal coverage of both the Arctic and the Antarctic, IPY will span two full annual cycles, from March 2007 to March 2009.

Many national and regional IPY launch events are being organized over the next few weeks. The official international launch ceremony will take place at 11:00am, 1 March, 2007 at the Palais de la Découverte, Paris, France. Media representatives are invited.

IPY Website including information on the international launch event: http://www.ipy.org/

For a special IPY Video News Release, media are requested to contact the WMO Communications Office: Tel: +41 22 730 83 14; E-mail: cpa@wmo.int


For further information on IPY:
Dr David Carlson, IPY International Programme Office Director.
Tel: +44 (0)77 15 37 17 59; E-mail: ipy.djc@gmail.com
Dr Rhian A Salmon, IPY Education and Outreach Coordinator.
Tel: +44 (0)77 11 18 15 09, E-mail: ipy.ras@gmail.com
Mr Mark Oliver, Press Officer, World Meteorological Organization.
Tel: +41 (0)22 730 84 17, E-mail: moliver@wmo.int