

Stephen Hawking, Nobel Laureates and NASA Administrator to visit South Africa in May

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Leaders in the world of scientific thought and research are gathering in Cape Town in support of efforts to "unlock and nurture scientific talent across Africa," says Professor Neil Toruk, founder and Chair of The Africa Institute for Mathematical Sciences (AIMS). "We are looking forward to welcoming some of the world's top scientists to Africa. Their presence will help encourage Africa's brightest mathematics and science graduates to enter programs like AIMS (African Institute of Mathematical Sciences), where they can grow into independent problem-solvers, creative thinkers, innovators and excellent teachers, not ivory tower academics."

World-renowned theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking from Cambridge University, physics Nobel laureates David Gross and George Smoot, and NASA Administrator Michael Griffin, are among an international group of physicists and mathematicians who will visit South Africa in May 2008. Dr. Jack Kaye, Associate Director for Research and Dr. Ming Ying Wei, Manager of Educational Programs, Earth Sciences Division of NASA, will also attend the GLOBE Student Learning Expedition taking place at the University of Cape Town from June 22 – 27.

Smoot and Griffin are scheduled to speak at the Muizenberg Pavilion, near AIMS on the evening of 11 May 2008, joining Stephen Hawking who will deliver his first-ever public lecture in Africa. "Hawking is thought of as the greatest mind in physics since Albert Einstein. With similar interests - discovering the deepest workings of the universe - he communicates mysterious matters not just to other physicists but also to the general public. We are honoured to host and listen to the most famous living scientist on the planet," says Professor Fritz Hayne, Director of the Institute.

These prominent scientists are coming to Cape Town to participate in two inauguration events on 12 and 13 May 2008. The first event will celebrate the opening of the AIMS Research Centre, an important extension to the already highly successful postgraduate training program in the mathematical sciences, now boasting an annual intake of about 50 students from all over Africa and a corps of local and international lecturers from many eminent institutions. The second event is the launch of the National Institute for Theoretical Physics (NITheP) which will take place at the new Wallenberg Research Centre of the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study (STIAS). The NITheP is being positioned as a national and African user facility for theoretical physics and will provide theoretical underpinning for current national programs including astrophysics, cosmology, nuclear and particle physics, quantum technologies, condensed matter physics and quantum optics.

The Minister of Education, Naledi Pando, will introduce the speakers on May 11. Science and Technology Minister Mr. Mosibudi Mangena, whose department has been central to the establishment and funding of two new research centers, will deliver the opening addresses on May 12 and 13. Mark Brettenny, Director of Globe in Africa, Alternate chair of the GAC (GLOBE Africa Consortium) and Co-Chair / host of the GLE will be representing GLOBE at the 11 May speech".

A month later, from 21-27 June, Cape Town will also host some of the world's youngest scientists at the 2008 GLOBE Student Learning Expedition (GLE). GLOBE (Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment) is the world's largest international science education program. Currently active in 110 countries including South Africa, GLOBE students study Earth system science in their own schools and communities and have opportunities to collaborate within the GLOBE network worldwide. The GLE is one such opportunity for students to establish friendships and to develop partnerships that will enhance their future GLOBE experiences. Teachers are provided with an opportunity to share innovative ideas and challenges, to attend professional development sessions, and to build connections for research efforts between schools. More than 300 students, teachers, and scientists will convene on the University of Cape Town campus, transforming it into a true global village.

Past GLEs have taken place in Croatia, in Finland and the U.S.A. Student speakers, cultural presentations, research presentations and field study days focused on the theme of the GLE, GLOBE Research for Sustainable Communities, will form a busy schedule for these middle and high school age students, but much of the real learning will take place in the interactions they will have with each other in the cultural and environmental landscape of their host country, South Africa.

In addition to NASA's Dr. Jack Kaye and Dr. Ming Ying Wei, among the many distinguished speakers at this truly international event will be Eugene Cussons, Managing Director of Chimpanzee Eden and Rescue Director of Jane Goodall Institute (JGI) in South Africa various other local and international dignitaries can be expected.

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