Welcome Note

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International Laser Ranging Service ILRS
Chairman of the Governing Board

Dear representatives of the various Spanish authorities,
dear colleagues of the Local Organizing Committee,
ladies and gentlemen,
dear friends.

First of all I would like to congratulate the San Fernando observatory for the 250th anniversary and I wish you all the best for the next 250 years.

The International Laser Ranging Service is very pleased to have been offered the opportunity to hold the 14th bi-annual Laser Ranging Workshop in this beautiful part of a beautiful country. Mike Pearlman, the director of the ILRS Central Bureau, will certainly take the opportunity to look back right to the very beginning of a successful story and to let the previous years pass before your eyes or rather ears. He is especially competent for such a review as one of the two colleagues who attended all 13 previous workshops so far!

Let me, instead, say a few words to the challenges our service faces at present and in the near future.

ILRS is one of four space geodetic services under the umbrella of the International Association of Geodesy.

The rocket-like raise and success of the International GPS Service brought and still brings a lot of pressure to the two older Services and techniques, the laser ranging and the very long baseline interferometry. More and more, however, the recognition surfaces that a combination of the various space techniques, by properly taking into account the individual strengths (and weaknesses of course), generates more scientific benefit than each individual one could ever do. This recognition can already be found with many scientists all around the world, and especially in the International Association of Geodesy with its new program, the Global Geodetic Observing System GGOS. Unfortunately we cannot say the same for those areas where many of us have to recruit their resources for the operation, the maintenance, and further development of our techniques and services.

The bulky and expensive part of all space geodetic services are their tracking networks: The 30 VLBI radio telescopes, the 40 Laser ranging stations, the 50 Doris stations and the two hundred GPS receivers. The only justification of their existence is the quality and quantity of their data and their usefulness for the scientific, technical, or even social applications. Unfortunately many organizations funding components of the tracking network are NOT in the same time on the receiving end of this data refinement system and have, therefore, difficulties in raising the necessary funds. The justification of the network is not the mere existence of the network. The justification must continuously be provided and fed back by the users of the data: Certainly an area of improvement

It is equally unfortunate and unsatisfying that many and important users of the network data do take the existence of the networks for granted. Space missions supported or even rescued by laser ranging usually do not include any costs for the generation of the ranging data into their budget, an issue we might have to address in the very next future.

The workshop here in San Fernando will mainly address other issues: Issues that are in the direct responsibility of our service and technique, namely the continuous effort to improve the quality and quantity of our data and of our own direct analysis products, and to also improve the efficient and timely operation of all components and the network as a whole. We will also have to address completely new issues, e.g., how we are going to track satellites with onboard equipment that might be damaged by our laser beams under certain conditions.

The large number of presentations on the agenda promises a very interesting and fruitful week here in San Fernando. I would like to thank the local organizing committee as well as the program committee for the numerous preparations of the previous months and weeks. I am sure they will lead to an equally successful workshop as all the previous ones .

Thank you very much.