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## 2016 Edinburgh Medal celebrates astronomy developments in low income countries

The 2016 Edinburgh Medal will be jointly awarded to **Kevin Govender** and the **International Astronomical Union (IAU)** on Wednesday 30 March by Edinburgh's Lord Provost Donald Wilson at the City Chambers as part of the 2016 **Edinburgh International Science Festival** to recognise their wide reaching contribution to science.

It is awarded jointly for the creation and practical establishment of the **Office of Astronomy for Development**, which integrates the pursuit of scientific knowledge with social development for and with those most in need. Under the pioneering stewardship of **Kevin Govender**, the **Office of Astronomy for Development**, hosted in South Africa in partnership with the National Research Foundation and the South African government, has successfully harnessed astronomy in the service of education and capacity building in the globally.

The Edinburgh Medal is a prestigious award given each year to men and women of science and technology whose professional achievements are judged to have made a significant contribution to the understanding and well-being of humanity.

**Edinburgh's Lord Provost Donald Wilson, who is President of the Edinburgh International Science Festival**, commented; *"The difference that Kevin Govender and the IAU have made in developing countries is astronomical. Govender has been leading the Office of Astronomy for Development since 2011 and has overseen the expansions from its roots in Cape Town, South Africa to be extended to a further nine regional offices in Armenia, China, Colombia, Ethiopia, Jordan, Nigeria, Portugal, Thailand and Zambia.*

*"The IAU strategy to use astronomy to stimulate global development is inspiring, it demonstrates how science, technology and culture impacts on our everyday lives and how we can use science to improve communities. I'm thankful to Kevin and IAU for creating opportunities that might lead us to healthier and wealthier futures. I look forward to creating a lasting tribute to their achievements on behalf of the Science Festival and the City of Edinburgh Council. Their names will forever be inscribed alongside other esteemed recipients of the medal, including Professor Higgs and Professor Sir Alec Jeffreys, on a dedicated honour board within the City Chambers."*

Within its 28 years, this is only the second time that The Edinburgh Medal has been jointly awarded to an individual and an organisation; in 2013 Professor Peter Higgs and CERN received the medal. Previous individual recipients of The Edinburgh Medal include Prof Abdus Salam (1989), Prof Heinz Wolff (1992), Prof Amartya Sen (1997), Sir David Attenborough (1998), Prof Jocelyn Bell Burnell (1999) and Prof Chris Rapley (2008).

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**Creative Director of Edinburgh International Science Festival, Amanda Tyndall** said; “The Edinburgh Medal is awarded to an individual or an organisation who have not only discovered great science but have contributed more broadly to society. It’s an unusual award that recognises two dimensions of the work – the scientific and the social consequences. I’ve followed the work of Govender and the IAU for many years, the positive impact in the schools, universities and communities where they operate is incredible and helping to build a better world”

2016 Edinburgh Medal co-recipient **Kevin Govender** commented; “Besides its technological, scientific and cultural contributions, astronomy fundamentally gives us the perspective we need to change the world, and it is amazing to see how this vision has rallied people and organisations from just about every continent. It has been, and continues to be, a journey driven by many with a shared passion for both science and society.”

At the City Chambers on Wednesday 30 March, **Kevin Govender** and **President of the IAU Silvia Torres Peimbert** will be presented with Edinburgh Medal and give the *Edinburgh Medal Address: Astronomy for a Better World*. The oration will be delivered by **Lord Martin Rees** and the vote of thanks by **Prof Monica O’Grady** as part of 2016 Edinburgh International Science Festival.

From the 28 March – 8 April 2016 the **National Library of Scotland** will host the free exhibition Celebrating Kevin Govender and the International Astronomical Union, a display which celebrates the vision behind their work.

## ENDS

### Notes to Editors

#### **Edinburgh International Science Festival ([www.sciencefestival.co.uk](http://www.sciencefestival.co.uk))**

Edinburgh International Science Festival, founded in 1989, is an educational charity that aims to inspire people of all ages and backgrounds to discover the world around them. The organisation is best known for organising Edinburgh’s annual Science Festival: the UK’s first public celebration of science and technology and still one of Europe’s largest. Alongside the annual Festival in Edinburgh, the organisation also has a strong focus on education. It’s Generation Science touring programme visits schools around Scotland throughout the year; in 2016 Generation Science is celebrating its 25th year on the road and to date the project has reached over a million pupils.

Edinburgh International Science Festival also operates a large-scale international programme of work. It regularly presents events overseas and is currently the Major Programming Partner of the annual Abu Dhabi Science Festival, helping to curate, produce and deliver the event.

### **Edinburgh Medal**

Made of Sterling silver, it is produced by capital firm Alexander Kirkwood & Son and features the original science festival logo - a juggler performing with different symbols of science in the air.

### **Kevin Govender**

Kevin began work at the OAD in 2011 as its first Director. During his previous position as the Manager of the Southern African Large Telescope’s Collateral Benefits Programme at the South African Astronomical Observatory he worked extensively, especially within the African continent, in the area of “astronomy for development”. He chaired the Developing Astronomy Globally Cornerstone Project of the International Year of Astronomy in 2009 and was involved in the development of the IAU Strategic Plan. Coming from an

experimental nuclear physics background and with experience from many community development initiatives in post-apartheid South Africa, Kevin was previously named one of the Mail & Guardian's Top 200 Young South Africans, and received the National Science and Technology Forum's Science Communicator award in 2011.

#### **IAU ([www.iau.org](http://www.iau.org))**

The IAU is the international astronomical organisation that brings together about 12 000 distinguished astronomers from around the world. Its mission is to promote and safeguard the science of astronomy in all its aspects through international cooperation. The IAU also serves as the internationally recognised authority for assigning designations to celestial bodies and the surface features on them. Founded in 1919, the IAU is the world's largest professional body for astronomers.

#### **OAD ([www.astro4dev.org](http://www.astro4dev.org))**

The IAU established the Office of Astronomy for Development (OAD) in partnership with the South African National Research Foundation (NRF), with support from the South African Department of Science and Technology. The OAD was officially opened by Minister Naledi Pandor on 16 April 2011 at the South African Astronomical Observatory (SAAO) in Cape Town, South Africa. It is tasked with the implementation of the IAU Strategic Plan including the establishment of regional offices and three astronomy-for-development "Task Forces": (i) Universities and Research; (ii) Children and Schools; and (iii) Public Outreach.

#### **Winners of Edinburgh Medal to date:**

1989 Professor Abdus Salam  
1990 Professor Stephen J Gould  
1991 Professor Jane Goodall  
1992 Professor Heinz Wolff  
1993 Professor Wangari Maathai  
1994 Professor Manuel Patarroyo  
1995 Sir John Crofton  
1996 Professor Richard Levins  
1997 Professor Amartya Sen  
1998 Sir David Attenborough  
1999 Professor Jocelyn Bell Burnell  
2000 Professor Lynn Margulis  
2001 Sir John Sulston  
2002 Lise Kingo  
2003 Professor Wang Sung  
2004 Professor Steven Rose  
2005 Professor Colin Blakemore  
2006 Professor James Lovelock  
2007 Dr Richard Horton  
2008 Professor Chris Rapley CBE  
2009 Professor John Beckwith  
2010 Professor Sir Alec Jeffreys  
2011 Professor Carl Djerassi  
2012 Dr James Hansen  
2013 Professor Peter Higgs/Cern  
2014 Prof Mary Abukutsa-Onyango  
2015 Mary Midgley