

**WMO STATEMENT AT THE OPENING OF *OUR POLAR HERITAGE* PHOTO EXHIBITION  
(Geneva, 24 February 2009)**

**Mr Sergei Ordzhonikidze, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva,  
Excellency, Ambassador Marius Grinius, Permanent Representative of Canada to the United  
Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

On behalf of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), it is a pleasure to welcome you to this exhibition celebrating the International Polar Year 2007-2008. I wish to express WMO's appreciation to Mr Ordzhonikidze for hosting this event at the Palais des Nations.

I would like to thank H.E. Ambassador Grinius for Canada's key contributions to the International Polar Year 2007-2008 and for the reception which will follow this ceremony.

Furthermore, I wish to thank polar photographer Christian Morel for his relentless efforts to create a photographic legacy of the International Polar Year and for sharing with all of us his exceptional images. Our recognition also goes to all partners who have contributed to materialize this exhibition, which during the next months will travel to reach as many spectators as possible.

Allow me to recall that WMO's predecessor, the International Meteorological Organization (IMO), undertook the first two internationally coordinated studies of the polar regions, during the periods 1882-1883 and 1932-1933. The early IPYs addressed polar research on a scale beyond the capabilities of any single nation and facilitated landmark scientific advances. After WMO assumed the responsibilities of the IMO to become the UN System's specialized agency in weather, climate and water, our organization joined forces with the International Council for Science (ICSU) and other partners to launch the 1957-1958 International Geophysical Year (IGY) and now this IPY.

The striking photographs on display today contribute in penetrating a spectacular exterior of snow, ice and mountains to allow us to better perceive the associated stories of epic exploration, discovery and human involvement in an evolving and often ruthless environment. The IPY 2007-2008 has facilitated vital advances in polar science and leaves in its wake a legacy of new or renewed observational systems, as well as a fresh generation of polar scientists.

The significance of the IPY effort will be further highlighted this year in the context of the Third World Climate Conference, which will take place in Geneva from 31 August to 4 September. The WCC-3 will build upon climate prediction and information to further enable decision-makers in managing the opportunities and the risks associated with climate extremes and climate change.

In this respect, the IPY 2007-2008 could hardly have been more opportune. Pressing questions arise today as to the role of greenhouse gases, aerosols and polar clouds, while unprecedented melting of land and sea ice during the last two Arctic summers has critical implications on biodiversity, trade, international security and the adaptation needs of Arctic communities.

These photographs will immortalize the essence of what the International Polar Year set out to accomplish in March 2007 and it is thus fitting that they also herald the end of the IPY observational period and our continuing commitment to study and understand the polar regions, for the benefit of humanity.

I therefore wish to thank you for joining us this evening to admire "*Our polar heritage*".