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France-United States space cooperation CALIPSO mission marks 10 years in orbit

CNES and its partners, NASA and participating laboratories celebrated yesterday the 10th anniversary of the CALIPSO mission, a marvellous symbol of the successful space cooperation between France and the United States. Ten years after launch, CALIPSO is still sounding the atmosphere, a key mission at a time when climate issues are an important focus of attention for the space sector.

Results from CALIPSO have been published in 1,650 papers in the most prestigious international scientific reviews, a rich harvest of data for the world's scientific community acquired from more than 5.7 billion laser remote-sensing measurements over a period of 10 years—a superb achievement for a mission originally planned to last three years. Besides all the superlatives and purely scientific aspects, CALIPSO is also, with the Jason missions, the flagship of the unparalleled and impressive cooperation between France and the United States, further demonstrated by an envisioned new extension of the mission to 2018-2019.

The two nations have much to celebrate in the field of space, but such symbolic missions are rare indeed. So it was that Michael Freilich, Director of NASA's Earth Science Division, Pascale Delecluse, Director of CNRS-INSU, the French national institute for universe sciences, and Hervé Le Treut, Director of the Institut Pierre-Simon Laplace (IPSL), joined CNES President Jean-Yves Le Gall at the Maison des Océans in Paris to celebrate the excellence of French-U.S. cooperation on CALIPSO, reflecting on the results it has achieved within the A-Train constellation and looking ahead to the EarthCARE and MESCAL programmes. From a broader perspective, climate research was at the centre of this gathering in the wake of the COP21 and the Paris Agreement adopted at the United Nations in New York on 22 April. All strongly agreed on the need to pursue efforts and continue working to enhance understanding of climate mechanisms, and to develop a new generation of satellites capable of collecting atmospheric data over the coming decades. In the short term, ESA's EarthCARE mission is scheduled to launch end 2018, but the scientific community is already looking further into the future, building on the heritage of joint work undertaken on CALIPSO.

In his speech opening the event, Jean-Yves Le Gall said: "Who would have thought 10 years ago that we would be here today with our friends from NASA to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the CALIPSO mission, initially planned to last three years? This surprise is emblematic of the efforts that France and the United States have pursued since the beginning of the space era, pushing the boundaries of space and achieving acclaim for what we have accomplished together. We are writing the next chapter in this story every day, focusing our attention on climate in the footsteps of the COP21 and the New Delhi Declaration. The onus is now on us to continue innovating with our U.S. partners and all other nations to curb global warming."

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