

Press Release

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30th World Astronaut Congress 20th anniversary of the Cité de l'espace Toulouse at the centre of the galaxy!

The 30th World Astronaut Congress is taking place at the Cité de l'espace in Toulouse this week from Monday 16 to Friday 20 October. CNES President Jean-Yves Le Gall, who has followed the flights of all of France's astronauts for more than 30 years, gave a speech at the opening of the event. Toulouse, Europe's space capital, was chosen to host this year's congress as the city concentrating the very best scientific, technological and industrial expertise in space, and as a symbol of European excellence. Jean-Yves Le Gall hailed the success of the Cité de l'espace that is also celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. CNES was closely involved in founding the space theme park that is doing such a great job bringing space culture to a wide audience and the agency's President stressed its role in stimulating the public's keen interest in French spaceflight missions.

Astronauts are a great source of national pride, reflecting their country's ambitions and symbolizing excellence and dedication. The presence in Toulouse this week of over 100 astronauts is an exceptional event highlighting France's eminent role in the international space arena and its commitment to human spaceflight. The congress also comes in the wake of Thomas Pesquet's recent return to Earth, after a mission that captivated young and old alike. The experiments he conducted aboard the International Space Station were in no small measure made possible by CNES's CADMOS unit, which is continuing its work to devise and perform new experiments for astronauts to advance scientific research in the years ahead.

The CNES team working on SuperCam, one of the instruments set to equip the Mars 2020 rover, is also in the spotlight at the congress. Thomas Pesquet presented the team with a Martian rock ejected from the planet's surface by a meteorite collision and discovered in Morocco. The idea is to put this rock back where it came from in a little over three years' time, an operation combining space exploration and robotics that will be calling on the expertise of astronauts and CNES. This much-travelled rock will thus serve as a calibration target for SuperCam in 2020.

Concluding his speech, Jean-Yves Le Gall said: "I would like to pay tribute to all of the astronauts who embark on the most amazing human and technological adventures in the name of science. We are proud to be marking this extraordinary moment here at the Cité de l'espace, which is celebrating its 20th anniversary. We are fortunate to have many new challenges to look forward to as we seek to invent the future of space, and the men and women capable of meeting those challenges are all here this week in Toulouse, the beating heart of France's and Europe's space programme."

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