

**Excerpt from the speech of the Netherlands Minister of Education, Culture and Science,  
Mrs. van de Hoeven on launching the UNAWE netwerk at the Lorentz Center Leiden,  
9th October 2006<sup>1</sup>**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Last summer, during the now already legendary warm month of July 2006, my husband and I were on holidays in France. On one of those lovely long evenings, close to midnight, we saw a shooting star, or I should say a "meteor". Of course we made a wish. You never know! I won't divulge what it was, except to tell you that on 22th November I will know whether it will happen. I also know how late - within an hour after the general election poll closes!

The meteor was one of the annual Perseid meteor shower, or so I was told. Just as with many other astronomical phenomena, this meteor shower is not only visible from France, but from the whole world. To me this is fascinating.

The bottom line is that it is "wonder" and "adventure" that is for me so appealing about astronomy and space travel. Wonder and adventure is also what make school children enthusiastic about science and technology. It is therefore very good that professionals from the space and astronomy world capitalise on this by stimulating educative projects, such as the "Delta Research Schools", "Missie naar Mars", "Maan ik kom eraan", "Kids in Space" and "Universe Awareness".

Space travel and astronomy offer an enormous number of ways for making science and technical studies in primary and secondary schools more attractive and appealing.

-----

Today we are launching the Universe Awareness programme. During this week's Lorentz Center workshop future activities of this project will be planned. I am delighted about this, especially because of the group that you want to target: economically disadvantaged children between 4 and 10 years of age, from developing countries, and also from Europe.

On one of my working visits to Indonesia I visited the Bosscha Observatory and was extremely impressed by it. The Observatory is partly supported by a grant from the Leids Kerkhoven Bosscha Funds. To help this observatory I made a small amount of funding available for the exchange of students and professors and for activities with children.

You wish to expose children from developing countries and Europe to different aspects of modern astronomy, with the beauty of the Universe and the night sky. This is a worldwide activity, in and around the school, in developing countries, but also in the Netherlands.

I expect a great deal from this programme. It can help broaden the minds of young children. It can also demonstrate the possibilities of modern technology. Furthermore, it will show the meaning of the heavens for the religion and tradition of each target group, something that I personally find very interesting. Finally, the programme will stimulate intercultural dialogue through broadening the general view of the world. I believe that this is an area where our

country should play a leadership role. Astronomy is a discipline in which the Netherlands is strong and we have with this project something to offer. I love this project.<sup>2</sup>

You have laid the necessary links: with the UNESCO schools, the so-called “Associated Schools Project” and the schools that are working on developing technical education in primary education. You are also involved in the network that is being set up of organisations and projects that are actively involved in space travel and astronomy education in the Netherlands. I applaud the forming of this network because through cooperation and synergy we can make the most progress and best serve the children in the class. for these reasons I wish to strongly support the initiation of the Network of Spacetravel and astronomy Education and the Universe awareness project. I therefore announce that I shall grant a subsidy of 200,000 Euro per year to both projects of which 125,000 Euro is specifically for the International Secretariat of the UNawe project and 75,000 for the national ESERO network

Ladies and Gentlemen, I shall now officially start the Universe Awareness project by pressing a button. this will send an e-mail to all participants in the project. I wish to add one personal comment, namely to wish you every success with your project.

<sup>1</sup>*Written version of the speech. The spoken version is the official one.*

<sup>2</sup>*Sentence in the spoken version.*