



Asociación Argentina de Astronomía
Paseo del Bosque s/n
La Plata, B1900FWA
Buenos Aires, Argentina

January 21st, 2024

Dear President of the IAU,
Dr. Debra Elmegreen

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to convey a financial concern that has arisen due to the ongoing inflationary pressures in our country. As you may already know, Argentina is experiencing a challenging economic (and unfortunately ideological) environment characterized by significant inflation, more than 200% in the last year, and a huge devaluation of Argentina's currency in the last months.

Our new president, Javier Milei, does not see science as 'necessary' and has expressed intentions to 'close/privatize' our National Council of Scientific and Technological Research (CONICET). This is the institution that holds all science branches, from basic science to applied science and includes technological developments. These notes, articulating the president's views on these matters, were published in Nature by an emeritus Professor and others before the presidential election. They can give you an idea of the situation we are currently facing:

<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-023-03228-7>

<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-023-03191-3>

<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-023-03480-x>

After his election, President Milei has revisited some of his initial proposals. The government argues that most of the public employees who work in science, researchers, laboratory or technicians (including the ones at astronomical sites), as well as those in charge of administration, in the country, are "useless" and, so, should be laid off; while those few who in fact do something "productive" should be able to find private funding for their projects.

His recent actions only indicate that he intends to abandon state support for science, health, and education, and leave natural resources to private discretion. Even some worker's rights are jeopardized, not to say, women's equality. Right now a huge modification of our legislation pushed by President Milei consists in leaving all the powers of the State to the executive. We will see how things evolve because strong discussions are going on at the Congress and days of protest are coming.

By mid-January, CONICET began to suspend administrative employee contracts, as well as other resolutions taken before the President's start in office. CONICET Board of Directors declared:

"Considering the situation as of January 2024, the Board of Directors decides to postpone the publication of the results of the call for Science & Tech Fellowships and Promotions until the final budget is configured, and entrusts the President of CONICET to arbitrate the means to carry out the procedures that allow obtaining the necessary adjustments to the budget."

This decision will be reviewed when more information is available, they said, but it has already caused a deep concern that overwhelms us.

The current situation of the scientific sector could worsen given that the majority of CONICET researchers are also professors (part-time) in STEM and STEM-related careers at universities. Therefore, dismantling CONICET would potentially eliminate educators with relevant skills. The prospects for public universities are not much better, the budget has been frozen at the same amount as last year.

I am reaching out to you to share this information, as we are extremely aware of our current outstanding debt and arrears to the IAU. Perhaps it is worth clarifying that, in Argentina, the IAU fee is not paid by the government, but by the astronomers themselves through their optional participation in our non-profit association, Asociación Argentina de Astronomía (AAA). In recent years we have accumulated savings in Argentine pesos, which due to local restrictions were, and still are, not possible to convert to foreign currency. By October 2023, when I started in office as President of AAA, these funds seemed adequate to cover at least one year of our debt, i.e. 2021 quota. The value of these savings has now depreciated significantly, decreasing to less than half its original worth. This, along with additional taxes on bank transfers, has compounded our financial challenges and created the need for extra cash reserves if we wish to make payments abroad.

In light of these complex conditions and the potential long-term implications on our financial stability, I will go straight to the point. I would like to ask you to consider making the exception of reducing our 2021 rate to that of a national member with category I. Such a generous reduction would greatly alleviate our immediate financial burden and provide us with the flexibility to partially address our debt in the near future. If the difficult times continue in Argentina, and given that almost all of us are state workers, perhaps we will be forced to stay in that category I. I mention this because our associates, who provide most of our income, are already starting to leave due to economic problems. Of course, and hoping that this shows our commitment with IAU, we accept that the Argentine vote in the assemblies be lowered to category I until we pay the next due as category II. As far as possible, we hope not to undermine the ongoing work of several of our most active Argentinean colleagues in the Union, who are doing large efforts to develop activities, keep relations with offices, lead

divisions, or simply participate. We believe IAU is meant as an institutional place of cooperation and solidarity, so I thank you in advance for your consideration.

With my kindest regards,

Mariana Orellana
President
Asociación Argentina de Astronomía

Cristina Mandrini
President
NAC Argentina