

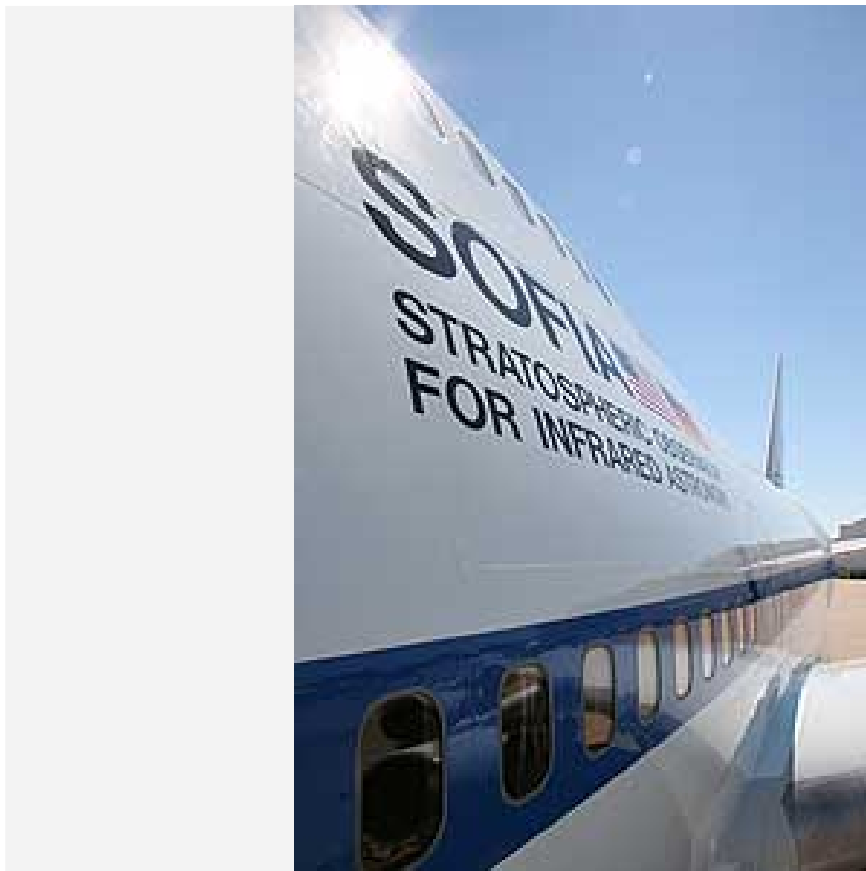
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**Flying observatory SOFIA back on course**

*30 January 2007*

**NASA and DLR extend their joint venture agreement for another ten years**



SOFIA, the Stratospheric Observatory for Infrared Astronomy

At the end of 1996, the American National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the German Aerospace Center (DLR) agreed to jointly develop and operate SOFIA, the **Stratospheric Observatory For Infrared Astronomy**. The airborne observatory, which is equipped with a high-tech telescope, operates at an altitude of approx. 14 000 metres and will study infrared astronomy. The first bilateral agreement (Memorandum of Understanding), that distributes tasks during the development and operating phases was valid for ten years and came to an end at the end of 2006. At the beginning of this year, the NASA Administrator, Dr Michael Griffin and the Chairman of the Executive Board of the German Aerospace Centre (DLR), Prof. Sigmar Wittig, agreed to continue their collaboration in a Memorandum of Understanding.

"I can now look forward to this unique German – American project continuing for the next ten years on a firm footing", said Wittig. Prof. Wolfram Ressel, Rector of the University of Stuttgart, is also very optimistic about the continuation of this collaboration. The project, with contributions from several

university institutes, Stuttgart Airport and companies, will also help reinforce Stuttgart's reputation as a research centre, he says.

### German telescope

The telescope, along with its mounting and reflecting panel, is the German contribution to the observatory. It has been developed and built on behalf of DLR led by two companies: MT Aerospace and Kayser-Threde. The "Clipper Lindbergh", which was once a Boeing 747 SP long-haul aircraft, was converted by L3 Communications Integrated Systems in Texas; the telescope was then installed by L3. The first test flights are in the preparation stage and the first scientific observational flights are planned for 2008.

### Operations centre at the University of Stuttgart



The German SOFIA Institute (DSI) was founded at the University of Stuttgart in November 2004 on behalf of DLR. DSI will coordinate SOFIA's scientific use of the data at the same time as providing the German contribution towards operation of the observatory in the USA. DSI will also perform public relations and training duties, in close collaboration with the DLR and the scientific community, concerning the scientific use of the data.

SOFIA is a joint project between the German Aerospace Center (DLR) and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). Further to an application from DLR, it is being supported by funds on a federal (BMW) and regional level (Baden-Württemberg) and from the University of Stuttgart. The scientific operations are being coordinated on the German side by the German SOFIA Institute (DSI) from the University of Stuttgart.

### Related Contacts

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