"In 2016, CNES will be a pivotal player shaping the future of space" Monday 4 January, CNES President Jean-Yves Le Gall delivered his New Year wishes to members of the French and international press in Paris.

This traditional gathering provided the opportunity to review the highlights of 2015, a stellar year for space in terms of technical prowess and policy decisions, and to unveil the new multi-year agreement setting CNES’s objectives and performance targets. This agreement has been dubbed ‘Innovation & Inspiration’, reflecting the two values that underpin everything the agency does.

Jean-Yves Le Gall underlined the extent to which the importance of space in tackling today’s challenges became plain for all to see in 2015, the clearest example being the historic success of the COP21 global climate conference, which firmly established the utility of satellites in combating climate change, as 26 out of the 50 essential climate variables can only be monitored from space. He also stressed CNES’s efforts to achieve consensus between the world’s space agencies, culminating in the Mexico Declaration and the go-ahead decisions for the MicroCarb and MERLIN satellites that will measure concentrations of atmospheric greenhouse gases.

Looking back at the events and missions that marked 2015, Jean-Yves Le Gall recalled the odyssey of Europe’s Rosetta mission and its star lander Philae controlled from the Science Operations and Navigation Centre (SONC) at CNES in Toulouse, which kept us on the edge of our seats with its data and communications, while the mission’s orbiter continued to beam back unprecedented pictures. He also touched on the planned mega-constellations and the commitment of the French government and CNES to devote more resources to the space industry, closer space surveillance and tracking and the agreement signed in June by France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom to step up detection and tracking of space objects, and the performance of teams at the Guiana Space Centre who conducted a record 12 launches in 2015 and extended Ariane 5’s run of straight successes to 69.

Jean-Yves Le Gall next turned his attention to the major missions planned for the years ahead, in space science with the four Mars exploration programs ExoMars, InSight, ExoMars 2018 and Mars 2020; in Earth observation with the upcoming launch of Jason-3 and the follow-up to the COP21 conference; in telecommunications with the arrival of the first Galileo services following the launch of four new satellites by Ariane 5; and in defense with the development of the THR-NG new-generation dual-use very-high resolution optical observation program. He also provided a precise status check on the development of Ariane 6 and Vega-C, and on the roadmap established in 2014 in Luxembourg looking ahead to the next ESA ministerial conference in Lucerne.

He then detailed the resources at CNES’s disposal and the hard work the agency is doing to make its internal organization more efficient and innovative, thus enabling France to stay ahead in space. CNES’s budget for 2016 is stable at more than €2.1 billion, reaffirming the importance the government attaches to the space sector and its faith in the agency. Indeed, France now devotes €37 per capita to its civil space budget, second only to the United States at €50 per capita.
But its internal organization is where CNES is really ringing in the changes in 2016. Innovation & Inspiration will be the two watchwords driving the agency’s efforts to make it even more agile and creative, with a new Directorate of Innovation, Applications and Sciences (DIA) to focus on disruptive technologies and new systems and projects, like for example electric propulsion and conceptual studies on reusable launchers. CNES’s 2,450 employees will be mobilizing all of their know-how and determination in 2016 to this end, to consolidate its areas of expertise and adapt to evolving needs at its four centres of excellence at Head Office and the Launch Vehicles Directorate (DLA) in Paris, at the Toulouse Space Centre and at the Guiana Space Centre.

During the press conference, Jean-Yves Le Gall notably stated: “Today, the space sector is undergoing major shifts across the globe. Cheaper access to space is enabling an ever-growing number of nations to develop space activities while new players from the Internet sphere are bringing new methods to the table that are changing the game in space. CNES is adapting and reorganizing to meet these new challenges, first by being responsive to the environment in which we operate and by tailoring our strategy accordingly. We have thus obtained the green light for Ariane 6 to extend the series’ 35-year track record of success and we are working with industry to fulfil the new demands of the satellite market. Second, by reshaping our programs and organization, for example through the multi-year agreement setting the agency’s objectives and performance targets for 2016-2020, which we have named ‘Innovation & Inspiration’ to reflect the two core values that underpin everything we do here at CNES. And third, by staying at the forefront of the international space arena: after the success of the Rosetta-Philae mission that captured the world’s attention in 2014, we brought our expertise and satellites to bear in 2015 as we played a key role in preparing for the COP21 climate conference and combating climate change. Throughout this year we shall be boosting our ability to innovate and consolidating our domains of excellence for the benefit of our dual-use and joint programs, making CNES more than ever a pivotal player shaping the future of space.”