



Jet Propulsion Laboratory
California Institute of Technology

CNES Pays Tribute to JPL Director Charles Elachi

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Charles Elachi, the iconic Director of NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) retired on June 30, 2016. To mark the occasion, members of the international space community gathered at JPL in Pasadena, California, to pay a warm tribute to its Director of 14 years as well as to the laboratory that he joined 45 years ago.

Born in Lebanon in 1947, Charles Elachi graduated from high school in France before going on to study science and receiving his engineering degree from the Grenoble Polytechnic Institute in 1968. He then opted to study for his Ph.D. at CalTech in Pasadena, where he discovered the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL), NASA's foremost planetary exploration centre. After receiving a Ph.D. in electrical sciences, he joined JPL in 1971 in order to pursue his research into planetary remote sensing. He went on to hold numerous positions, not least as Principal Investigator on a range of space missions, before becoming Director of JPL and its 5,000 employees.

CNES President Jean-Yves Le Gall was one of many leading figures from the US and international space community who attended an event to pay tribute to Charles Elachi and acknowledge his outstanding career. In France and within CNES, the name of Charles Elachi—a committed Francophile—will forever be linked to the Curiosity mission, whose 2012 Mars landing kept the whole world on tenterhooks. The mission was one of the finest symbols ever of French-US space cooperation, since its two key instruments, ChemCam and SAM, were both French and steered from FIMOC (French Instrument Mars Operations Centre) at the Toulouse Space Centre.

Commenting on the event, Jean-Yves Le Gall said: "It was with great pride that I took part in the tribute paid to Charles Elachi, along with the rest of the US and international space community. Charles Elachi's achievements inspire respect and crown a 45-year career dedicated to space research, which is nothing short of a record. For CNES, his name will forever be associated with Mars and Curiosity—an incredible feat and the perfect example of French-US space cooperation."