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THE PRINCESS ELISABETH: THE FIRST EVER "ZERO EMISSION" ANTARCTIC STATION

On the afternoon of September 5th, 2007, in the presence of His Royal Highness Prince Philippe of Belgium, the International Polar Foundation (IPF) unveiled to the world the first ever "zero emission" Antarctic research station, the Princess Elisabeth Station, at Tour & Taxis exhibition centre in Brussels, Belgium.

The first Belgian Antarctic station to be constructed in over 40 years, the station was pre-assembled in Tour & Taxis for two primary reasons: Firstly to allow the construction crew who will later rebuild it in Antarctica a trial run at constructing the station and to see if everything fits properly; secondly to give the general public the opportunity to see the station in person from the 6th to the 9th of September before it is shipped to its final destination at Utsteinen Nunatak in the Dronning Maud Land of Antarctica.

The Princess Elisabeth Station is unique because it is the first Antarctic research station to be designed to run entirely on renewable energy. The engineering team, coordinated by Johan Berte, used an evolving design instead of a fixed one, constantly re-adjusting the design according to the outcomes of energy efficiency simulations they ran. Using specialised building design and materials, a passive heating system, an energy control system, energy efficient appliances, and sound insulation techniques, engineers from the IPF and its technical partners have managed to take a pioneering step forward in the domain of sustainable development.

The station is also unique due to the fact that it is a joint public-private venture. Most Antarctic research stations are built by governments or polar secretariats with government money. The Princess Elisabeth is being designed and built by the Brussels-based International Polar Foundation (a private sector non-profit organisation) with assistance from its technical partners and the financial support of corporate sponsors and individual donors.

The Belgian Federal Science Policy (BELSPO) has been a key partner in the project as well. In 2006, BELSPO, along with the Belgian Federal Department of the Environment and the International Polar Foundation jointly submitted the Princess Elisabeth Station project for approval at the

Antarctic Treaty meeting in Edinburgh. Representatives from BELSPO have also conducted research during two of the Belgian Antarctic Research Expeditions (BELARE), accompanying the teams that have travelled to the Antarctic in order to find and prepare a site for the station. Once constructed, the Belgian state will fund the maintenance of the station and the scientific research expeditions going there.

The Princess Elisabeth will be managed by a Polar Secretariat made up of a director, five representatives from the private sector selected by the IPF, and five from various Belgian government ministries, including two from BELSPO, and one representative each from the Belgian Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Environment and Defence. BELSPO will elaborate the science programme and select the teams of scientists going to the station.

After the public viewing of the station finishes on September 9th, the Princess Elisabeth Station will begin to be dismantled and transported to the Belgian port of Antwerp, where the components will be loaded onto a transport ship (part of the Dronning Maud Land Shipping or DROMSHIP network) that will take the station along as well as part of the construction crew that will build it during the upcoming austral summer.

Once the ship arrives at the coast of Antarctica at the beginning of December, the segments of the Princess Elisabeth will be unloaded and transported over several weeks 190 km inland to a ridge 500 metres from Utsteinen nunatak in the Dronning Maud Land. There, the team will re-assemble the station in January and February of 2008.

After undergoing several checks in Belgium, the functional systems of the base (water treatment, control systems and ventilation systems) will be shipped to Antarctica and installed during the following austral summer 2008-09.

The first scientific research expedition at the base will be carried out by glaciologist Frank Pattyn of the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB) and begin in November 2008, even before the Princess Elisabeth Station is entirely operational, which is scheduled to be at the end of February 2009.



The projected cost of the entire Princess Elisabeth Station Project is 11.5 million Euros.

The General public is invited to come see the Princess Elisabeth Station between 10:00 AM and 6:00 PM from the 6th to the 9th of September. In addition to the station, there will be several exhibitions on the construction of the Princess Elisabeth Station, the Polar Regions and climate change. Most of the technical partners that have

contributed to the construction and design of the station will also be present to showcase their products and services.

Souvenirs will be available, including official 10 Euro silver collectors' coins minted by la Monnaie Royale of Belgium commemorating the Princess Elisabeth Station. The proceeds of the sales of the coin will go towards the International Polar Foundation and its fundraising efforts for the Princess Elisabeth Station project.

More information can be found at www.antarcticstation.org et www.polarfoundation.org

Press contacts:

Philippe Gosseries
philippe.gosseries@polarfoundation.org
+32 475 596 112

Joseph Ligouri Cheek
josef.cheek@polarfoundation.org
+32 486 56 75 74

Lise Johnson
lise.johnson@polarfoundation.org
+32 474 656 883