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Since the beginning of mankind, people of all conditions and cultures have been moved while looking at the skies on a clear night, contemplating the brilliance of thousands of stars in a seemingly infinite firmament. In the face of so much greatness, we human beings have realised how insignificant we are. The Earth is merely a fragile planet in a small solar system in one of the thousands of galaxies that make up the vastness of the universe.

This transcendent cultural dimension that underlies the observation of the night sky was the reason why one of the initiatives that came out of the 1992 Rio Conference was the proclamation of the need to defend “the integral and interdependent nature of the Earth”, including the dimension of the night skies and the quality of the atmosphere. And the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of future generations establishes that people of future generations are entitled to an undamaged and unpolluted earth, which assumes the right to be able to contemplate a clear night sky.

With the La Palma Declaration and the presentation of this publication, both of which are the results of the “International Conference in Defence of the Quality of the Night Sky and the Right to Observe the Stars” that was held on the island of La Palma, in the Canary Islands, on the 19th and 20th of April 2007, where the conditions for observing the stars remain extraordinary, I would like to take this opportunity to remind citizens of their right to contemplate a clean and clear night sky; a sky that is free of artificial invasions of light. Observing the Universe is, and always has been, an essential incitement that has guided mankind, determined courses, cultures and beliefs and which has enabled us to understand the laws of physics. An endless list of implications for mankind of a legacy that must remain unaltered for future generations.

Of all the initiatives that have emerged from this International Conference to protect the night skies and improve the quality of life of all living creatures, there is clearly an urgent need to forge alliances among all the stakeholders involved. In this sense, I would like to take this opportunity to present the offer of the Ministry of the Environment and my own personal willingness to develop forums and to establish the necessary instruments that will enable us to reach these goals that, at the same time, will propitiate a more responsible management of energy resources. In fact, the Air Quality Bill currently

before Parliament, already includes a specific reference to light pollution; and to creating a Spanish Network of Cities for Climate, driven by the Ministry of the Environment, to create concrete demands based on municipal by-laws to reduce energy consumption in public lighting, which will also mean a reduction in this kind of pollution that is gradually being perceived and rejected by a majority of our society.