

## UN 'to appoint space ambassador to greet alien visitors'

A space ambassador could be appointed by the United Nations to act as the first point of contact for aliens trying to communicate with Earth.

By [Heidi Blake](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/heidi-blake/) (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/heidi-blake/>)

Published: 11:30AM BST 26 Sep 2010

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Mazlan Othman, a Malaysian astrophysicist, is set to be tasked with co-ordinating humanity's response if and when extraterrestrials make contact.

Aliens who landed on earth and asked: "Take me to your leader" would be directed to Mrs Othman.

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She will set out the details of her proposed new role at a Royal Society conference in Buckinghamshire next week.

The 58-year-old is expected to tell delegates that the proposal has been prompted by the recent discovery of hundreds of planets orbiting other stars, which is thought to make the discovery of extraterrestrial life more probable than ever before.

Mrs Othman is currently head of the UN's little known Office for Outer Space Affairs (Unoosa).

In a recent talk to fellow scientists, she said: “The continued search for extraterrestrial communication, by several entities, sustains the hope that some day human kind will received signals from extraterrestrials.

“When we do, we should have in place a coordinated response that takes into account all the sensitivities related to the subject. The UN is a ready-made mechanism for such coordination.”

Professor Richard Crowther, an expert in space law at the UK space agency who leads delegations to the UN, said: “Othman is absolutely the nearest thing we have to a ‘take me to your leader’ person”.

The plan to make Unoosa the co-ordinating body for dealing with alien encounters will be debated by UN scientific advisory committees and should eventually reach the body’s general assembly.

Opinion is divided about how future extraterrestrial visitors should be greeted. Under the Outer Space Treaty on 1967, which Unoosa oversees, UN members agreed to protect Earth against contamination by alien species by “sterilising” them.

Mrs Othman is understood to support a more tolerant approach.

But Professor Stephen Hawking has warned that alien interlopers should be treated with caution.

He said: “I imagine they might exist in massive ships, having used up all the resources from their home planet. The outcome for us would be much as when Christopher Columbus first landed in America, which didn’t turn out very well for the Native Americans.”

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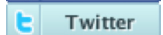
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