

UAE announces pan-Arab body for space programme

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The United Arab Emirates has announced its first astronaut will blast off to the International Space Station in September 2019

Eleven Arab states including Saudi Arabia, Algeria and Morocco on Tuesday signed on to the first regional team to cooperate on a space

programme, the UAE said.

"Today at the Global Space Congress in Abu Dhabi, we attended the signing of a charter to establish the first Arab body for space cooperation, bringing together 11 Arab states," said Dubai ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum in comments carried by the government media office.

The pan-Arab team's first project is "a satellite that Arab scientists will work on from here in the UAE", he said.

Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashed, the UAE's vice president and prime minister, vowed in 2017 to send four Emirati astronauts to the International Space Station by 2022.

The UAE announced last month that its first astronaut will blast off on a mission to the station on September 25.

The oil-rich Gulf state has two astronauts in training as it looks to get an ambitious space programme aimed at exploring Mars off the ground.

The astronaut programme would make the UAE one of only a handful of states in the Middle East to have sent a person into space, as it looks to make good on a pledge to become a global leader in [space exploration](#).

The first Arab in outer space was Saudi Arabia's Sultan bin Salman Al-Saud, who flew on a US shuttle mission in 1985.

Two years later, Syrian air force pilot Muhammed Faris spent a week aboard the Soviet Union's Mir space station.

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