

Korea's first astronaut transfers to space station

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An image of the Soyuz spacecraft, carrying Korea's first astronaut Yi So-yeon, being docked with the International Space Station is seen in the monitor screen at the control station in Moscow, Russia on Thursday (April 10)



Korea's first astronaut has transferred safely to the International Space Station (ISS) following a successful docking in earth's orbit, a state-run aerospace institute said Friday (April 11).

The Korea Aerospace Research Institute (KARI) said hatches between the Soyuz spacecraft and the ISS were opened at 15:40 Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) to allow Yi So-yeon to cross over from the space station.

It said Yi moved into the multinational space station along with the commander of the Soyuz spacecraft Sergey Volkov and flight engineer Oleg Kononenko and was welcomed by the three crew members.

Soyuz docked successfully at 12:57 GMT with the next three hours being used to firmly secure the spacecraft to the ISS and stabilize atmospheric pressure.

Korea's first astronaut, who looked excited, then talked to the head of KARI, Paik Hong-yul, via a communications link at the mission control center (MCC) in Moscow.

The 29-year-old bio systems engineer said that she will do her best to fulfill her mission during her nine-day stay at the space station and meet the expectations of all Koreans.



(back row center) and Flight Engineer Yuri Malenchenko (back row, right) after the Soyuz TMA-12 spacecraft docked at the ISS.

Guests and officials look at screens in the Space Mission Control Centre in Korolyov, outside Moscow, Thursday (April 10), showing a press conference of Korean astronaut Yi So-yeon (bottom), Flight Engineer Russian Oleg Kononenko (middle row, left) and Commander Russian Sergei Volkov (middle row, right) of the 17th International Space Station crew, astronaut Garrett Reisman (back row, left), ISS Commander Peggy Whitson

"I still cannot believe I am in space, but I plan to do my utmost to carry out my

assignments," Yi said. She added that she hoped a time will come when all Koreans can visit space.

The Daejeon-based aerospace institute, meanwhile, said South Korea's first astronaut will immediately commence three experiments assigned to her on the ISS including the observation of fruitflies and the growing of microbes. She is expected to complete 18 experiments before her return trip, planned for April 19.

The aerospace institute, meanwhile, said 155 other people -- including five tourists -- have previously visited the space station, which began to be assembled in space from 1998.

Astronauts have been occupying the orbiting station since November 2000.

The ISS is a joint project between the United States, Russia, Japan, Canada and eleven European countries, with final construction to be completed in 2010.

Yi, a KARI researcher, made history by becoming the first Korea to reach orbit on Tuesday, following a successful launch from the Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan.

She is the 49th woman to reach space, and the second Asian woman to make a space flight after a Japanese woman astronaut made two trips in the 1990s.

source: www.korea.net