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Iridium Announces Successful First Launch of Iridium NEXT Satellites

Iridium NEXT Constellation Refresh Begins — First Ten Satellites Delivered to Low-Earth Orbit

MCLEAN, Va., Jan. 14, 2017 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- Iridium Communications Inc. (NASDAQ:IRDM) announced today the successful launch of its first ten Iridium NEXT satellites. The satellites were delivered into low-Earth orbit approximately one hour after the SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket lifted off from Vandenberg Air Force Base in California at 9:54:39 a.m. PST. Iridium NEXT is the company's next-generation satellite constellation, replacing and enhancing its existing network of low-Earth orbit satellites spanning the entire globe — the largest commercial satellite constellation in space.

This is the start of a series of Iridium NEXT launches scheduled over the next 18 months, and marks the beginning of one of the biggest "tech refreshes" in history, completely replacing the only satellite constellation providing 100-percent truly global communications coverage. Once fully deployed, Iridium NEXT will enable a new broadband multi-service capability called Iridium CertusSM, while providing the technical flexibility to support innovative new services and technologies from Iridium's extensive partner network. Among those technologies is a unique hosted payload from Iridium's partner Aireon, which will provide a real-time global aircraft surveillance service, extending aircraft visibility across the planet.

The first ten Iridium NEXT satellites were delivered to a 625 kilometer (km) temporary parking orbit where they will be tested and exercised by Iridium over the coming weeks. Upon meeting testing and validation requirements, the satellites will then be moved into their 780km operational orbit and begin providing service to Iridium's customers. One-by-one, the new satellites will be positioned near a current generation satellite, each moving at approximately 17,000 miles per hour as testing begins. Iridium's unique inter-satellite communication links from nearby satellites will be repositioned to point to the new Iridium NEXT satellite as it prepares to take over service. Existing satellites will eventually be de-boosted and de-orbited.

"Today Iridium launches a new era in the history of our company and a new era in space as we start to deliver the next-generation of satellite communications," said Matt Desch, chief executive officer of Iridium. "We have been working endless hours for the last eight years to get to this day, and to finally be here with ten Iridium NEXT satellites successfully launched into low-Earth orbit is a fulfilling moment. We are incredibly thankful for all of the hard work from our team, as well as our partners, to help us achieve this milestone."

Both Thales Alenia Space, System Prime Contractor for the program, and their subcontractor for production, Orbital ATK, have been integral in the development of the Iridium NEXT program, from the design and manufacturing of the Iridium NEXT satellite vehicles to managing an 18-station, state-of-the-art assembly line production system.

"Leading a worldwide team to manufacture, assemble, test and prepare each satellite for this moment has been incredibly exciting," said Bertrand Maureau, executive vice president of telecommunications at Thales Alenia Space. "We are very proud to have conducted such a unique program, in terms of scale and complexity as well as to have successfully completed the end-to-end whole constellation on-ground validation. The system is fully tested, and the compatibility of Iridium NEXT with the Block-1 operating satellites has been perfectly demonstrated. It has truly been an honor, and we are looking forward to completing the rest of the Iridium NEXT constellation through 2017 and early 2018."

"We are proud to be a part of this revolutionary satellite program," said Frank Culbertson, president of Orbital ATK's Space Systems Group. "Seeing these first ten satellites launch successfully into space is the result of a unique assembly-line process at our satellite manufacturing facility that represents a remarkable achievement. We look forward to seeing the innovative solutions these satellites, which are great examples of leading-edge technology and manufacturability, will enable."

In addition to partnering with Thales Alenia Space as System Prime Contractor, Iridium has partnered with SpaceX for the launch of 70 Iridium NEXT satellites on its Falcon 9 rocket.

"We are very proud to be chosen as the launch provider for the entire Iridium NEXT program and are excited about today's successful first launch," said Gwynne Shotwell, President of SpaceX. "Iridium was one of SpaceX's first customers, and working alongside them to deliver one of the largest aerospace projects underway is an exciting moment for us at SpaceX."

Iridium and SpaceX are partnered for a series of seven launches, deploying ten Iridium NEXT satellites at a time. The next major milestone will be the completion of on-orbit testing of these satellites, to validate performance requirements are met. The second Iridium NEXT launch will be scheduled after this testing is completed, in April. The entire Iridium NEXT network is scheduled to be completed by mid-2018. For more information about Iridium NEXT, please visit www.iridium.com.

About Iridium Communications Inc.

Iridium[®] is the only mobile voice and data satellite communications network that spans the entire globe. Iridium enables connections between people, organizations and assets to and from anywhere, in real time. Together with its ecosystem of partner companies, Iridium delivers an innovative and rich portfolio of reliable solutions for markets that require truly global communications. The company has a major development program underway for its next-generation network — Iridium NEXT. Iridium Communications Inc. is headquartered in McLean, Va., U.S.A., and its common stock trades on the NASDAQ Global Select Market under the ticker symbol IRDM. For more information about Iridium products, services and partner solutions, visit www.iridium.com.

Forward Looking Statements

Statements in this press release that are not purely historical facts may constitute forward-looking statements as defined in the Private Securities Litigation Reform Act of 1995. The Company has based these statements on its current expectations and the information currently available to us. Forward-looking statements in this presentation include statements regarding the timing for deployment, development and capabilities of the Iridium NEXT constellation and services to be offered over the constellation, including Iridium Certus and AireonSM. Forward-looking statements can be identified by the words "anticipates," "may," "can," "believes," "expects," "projects," "intends," "likely," "will," "to be" and other expressions that are predictions or indicate future events, trends or prospects. These forward-looking statements involve known and unknown risks, uncertainties and other factors that may cause the actual results, performance or achievements of Iridium to differ materially from any future results, performance or achievements expressed or implied by such forward-looking statements. These risks and uncertainties include, but are not limited to, uncertainties regarding potential delays in the Iridium NEXT deployment, the development and functionality of Iridium NEXT and related services, and the company's ability to maintain the health, capacity and content of its satellite constellation, as well as general industry and economic conditions, and competitive, legal, governmental and technological factors. Other factors that could cause actual results to differ materially from those indicated by the forward-looking statements include those factors listed under the caption "Risk Factors" in the Company's Form 10-K for the year ended December 31, 2015, filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission (the "SEC") on February 25, 2016, as well as other filings Iridium makes with the SEC from time to time. There is no assurance that Iridium's expectations will be realized. If one or more of these risks or uncertainties materialize, or if Iridium's underlying assumptions prove incorrect, actual results may vary materially from those expected, estimated or projected. Iridium's forward-looking statements speak only as of the date of this press release, and Iridium undertakes no obligation to update forward-looking statements.

Press Contact :

Diane Hockenberry
Iridium Communications Inc.
+1 (703) 287-7421
Diane.hockenberry@iridium.com