First Iridium NEXT Satellites Declared Ready for Shipment and Launch Date Announced

MCLEAN, Va., June 14, 2016 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- Iridium Communications Inc. (Nasdaq:IRDM) today announced that its first Iridium NEXT satellites have completed assembly and testing, and are now prepared for shipment to the launch site at Vandenberg Air Force Base in California. The shipment of these satellites represents a significant milestone toward the first launch of the Iridium NEXT constellation, which the company officially announced as targeted for September 12, 2016.

"This is a really exciting milestone. After more than seven years of effort, the first of our next-generation satellites are finally ready for space," said Matt Desch, chief executive officer, Iridium. "It has been fantastic to witness our satellites evolve from manufacturing designs to fully functioning vehicles, and we congratulate everyone involved in making this goal possible. This program replaces the largest commercial satellite constellation in space with state-of-the-art technology and new capabilities, allowing Iridium to support the connectivity needs of today, as well as those yet to be imagined."

Assembly, integration and testing of the satellites are performed by Thales Alenia Space and their subcontractor, Orbital ATK, at the Orbital ATK manufacturing facility in Gilbert, Ariz. The production process incorporates a unique, assembly line system consisting of 18 different work stations ranging from panel integration and payload testing to full satellite integration, solar array installations and alignment checks. Each satellite features more than 5,000 individual parts assembled, culminating in one hundred thousand hours of workmanship by hundreds of engineers. A total of 81 satellites are scheduled to roll off of this assembly line, with 66 serving as the operational satellites to replace the existing Iridium® network, and the remainder serving as ground and on-orbit spares.

Following assembly and integration, the first satellites underwent a series of tests to ensure the vehicles met design specifications, as well as production tests to verify the quality of the manufacturing process. Some of those tests included vibration and acoustic testing, which simulated the movement and sound pressures experienced during the launch, while thermal vacuum tests created the temperature extremes the satellites will face while in orbit. These tests allowed the engineers to confirm that the satellites would withstand the launch and operate successfully when deployed.

"The scale and complexity of the Iridium NEXT constellation is unprecedented in the satellite community outside of Iridium, requiring that the engineers balance delivering high-quality satellites designed for high-rate manufacturing, with a unique fully processed payload while maintaining an efficient schedule," said Bertrand Maureau, executive vice president of telecommunication at Thales Alenia Space. "We're thrilled to ship the first batch of Iridium NEXT satellites, as they represent the culmination of the team consortium work including worldwide partners and all the main Thales Alenia Space entities."

Along with measuring the quality of the satellite production, the testing phases helped validate that the assembly line is fully qualified to move to high-rate production. During the last three months, the number of assembly, integration and testing engineers working on Iridium NEXT has doubled at Orbital ATK's facility. With the vast resources and aerospace engineering talent in the Phoenix area, the team plans on adding another 30 engineers as production increases to complete more than five satellites per month.

"The Iridium NEXT production process features a unique assembly-line approach inspired by the production of Iridium's initial constellation which launched over 19 years ago," said Frank Culbertson, president of Orbital ATK's Space Systems Group. "While certain stations require more hours of efforts than others, each represents a critical step toward delivering a fully functioning Iridium NEXT satellite. Now that we have standardized the entire process, we are excited to ramp up the production rate to meet Iridium's needs and support the successful completion of a truly transformative program."

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The first two completed Iridium NEXT satellites are being shipped to Vandenberg Air Force Base for processing by Iridium's launch partner, SpaceX. As the remaining eight first-launch satellites are completed, they will also be shipped two at a time to the launch site. While the satellites will be ready by August, the earliest launch date available to Iridium from SpaceX and Vandenberg Air Force Base is September 12th. During processing, Orbital ATK is responsible for fueling the satellites, while also performing software validation and testing to ensure the satellites integrate properly with the SpaceX Falcon 9 rockets. The Iridium NEXT satellites represent SpaceX's heaviest payload to date.

All Iridium NEXT satellites are scheduled for launch by late 2017. Starting in 2018, the Iridium NEXT constellation will enable Aireon's satellite-based system to provide global aircraft surveillance in real time. Iridium and SpaceX have partnered for a series of seven launches, with ten Iridium NEXT satellites deployed at a time. For more information on Iridium NEXT, go to 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.

About Thales Alenia Space

Thales Alenia Space, a joint venture between Thales (67%) and Finmeccanica (33%), is a key European player in space telecommunications, navigation, Earth observation, exploration and orbital infrastructures. Thales Alenia Space and Telespazio form the two parent companies' "Space Alliance", which offers a complete range of services and solutions. Because of its unrivaled expertise in dual (civil/military) missions, constellations, flexible payloads, altimetry, meteorology and high-resolution optical and radar instruments, Thales Alenia Space is the natural partner to countries that want to expand their space program. The company posted consolidated revenues of 2.1 billion euros in 2015, and has 7,500 employees in eight countries. www.thalesaleniaspace.com

About Orbital ATK

Orbital ATK is a global leader in aerospace and defense technologies. The company designs, builds and delivers space, defense and aviation systems for customers around the world, both as a prime contractor and merchant supplier. Its main products include launch vehicles and related propulsion systems; missile products, subsystems and defense electronics; precision weapons, armament systems and ammunition; satellites and associated space components and services; and advanced aerospace structures. Headquartered in Dulles, Virginia, Orbital ATK employs approximately 12,000 people in 18 states across the U.S. and in several international locations. For more information, visit www.orbitalatk.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 development, launch and capabilities of the Iridium NEXT constellation. Forward-looking statements can be identified by the words "anticipates," "may," "can," "believes," "expects," "projects," "intends," "likely," "will," "to be" and other expressions that

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 development, launch and functionality of Iridium NEXT, potential delays in the Iridium NEXT deployment, 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.

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