



Professor Alon Chen
PRESIDENT

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Dear friends,

Every year, we light the Hanukah candles and remember the story of overcoming an enemy, and turning darkness into light. This year, the holiday holds more meaning than ever in Israel. These are difficult days, and so in the spirit of hope and progress I wish you a Happy Hanukah. And to those who celebrate Christmas: Merry Christmas! Happy New Year 2024 to all.

Because of the war, we did not hold the 75th Annual General Meeting of the International Board and were not able to mark the changing of the guard at the helm of the Board in a festive way surrounded by friends from all over the world. Therefore, I want to take this opportunity to deeply thank **Cathy Beck**, the outgoing Chair of the International Board, for her dedicated service as the head of our governing body. The Institute is profoundly lucky to have Cathy as a dear friend and leader, whose family's legacy with the Weizmann Institute over decades is also exceptional. I look forward to working with Cathy as an involved member, a friend, and a Life Member of the Board for years to come.

I want to welcome and thank **Bob Drake** for taking on the role of Chair of the International Board. Bob served as Vice Chair of the Board for the past six years, and prior to that as Vice Chair of the Executive Board. The Weizmann Institute has benefitted from Bob's advice and guidance, as well as a special devotion rooted in a deep family legacy with the Institute. I look forward to working even more closely with Bob in the years to come.

The professional management of the Institute will also undergo a change, on January 1, when **Prof. Alon Harmelin**, Vice President for Administration and Finance, will step down from that role after four years of outstanding service. I want to thank Alon for his dedication and hard work in this important realm, which is pertinent to each and every one of us on campus, and for his friendship and personal touch. **Alon Weingarten**, Head of the Construction and Engineering Division, who in that role successfully oversaw major building and planning projects over many years, will begin in his new role as Vice President for Administration. Also joining the management team is **Tamir Kadishi**, in an expanded role as Chief Financial Officer. I wish them both success in their new positions.

Despite the war, our scientific research is moving ahead to the greatest extent possible. We are pleased that international students and postdoctoral fellows have started returning to

Israel and that the start of the academic year at the **Feinberg Graduate School** is now set for December 11. We look forward to everyone returning. The influx is already having a positive impact on our labs, which greatly depend on this incredible talent to propel our research forward.

At the same time, we are learning to live side by side with the challenge and anguish of the war and the loss of life, and are buoyed by the perseverance and the morale of our troops in the Israel Defense Forces. Among the grassroots volunteer efforts of our community members during wartime is one spearheaded by Weizmann scientists that now encompasses Israeli academics around the world. The [group of 80-plus academics](#) in the sciences and humanities is focused on advocating for understanding of the Hamas terror attack and the ongoing war in Gaza, through writing petitions and open letters to academic associations and publications, and responses to several boycott attempts of Israeli academia. This is a commendable effort.

Along similar lines, I and the management team sent strongly worded letters to the presidents of Harvard, MIT, and the University of Pennsylvania yesterday, following testimony they gave in the U.S. Congress on December 5. When asked by a member of Congress whether calls for the genocide of Jews is against their respective university codes of conduct, all three said the answer depended on the context. In the letters (see attached), we expressed distress at the presidents' failure to unequivocally denounce calls for genocide, and we appealed to them to take a clear moral stand against antisemitism and anti-Israel sentiment on their campuses.

The Institute has funded a range of initiatives for the war effort, among them psychological counseling for anyone in our community; support for international students and postdocs who have incurred extra costs because of the war; and Davidson Institute science programming for displaced families. We have received generous funding from our worldwide donor community for many of these initiatives, through the President's Discretionary Fund. Thank you to all those who have given.

Maintaining a strong connection with our global community—scientific colleagues, alumni, and donors—at this time has been particularly important. To that end, we are holding a series of Zoom conversations with our scientists for our supporters and friends. In November, we held sessions on trauma and PTSD; Israeli academia during wartime; and Davidson Institute efforts in offering scientific activities for families from the north and south of the country who were displaced from their homes on October 7. Our next global Zoom meeting will take place on December 19. I will participate in this one, to talk about stress and resilience, together with my colleague **Prof. Orit Nuttman-Shwartz**, Founder of the School of Social Work at Sapir

College who also promoted the establishment of the trauma and resilience center at this school. You can register [here](#).

In lighting the Hanukah candles this year, we can think about how science has the ability to light the way forward, opening the way for progress in so many directions. For this reason, it is important for the international community of scientists to recognize excellence among peers, and also for Weizmann to award prizes that come with funding, so as to further the most promising areas and scientists.

At the end of November, **Prof. Emeritus Reshef Tenne**, of the Department of Molecular Chemistry and Materials Science, received the prestigious **Von Hippel Award**, the highest honor given by the Materials Research Society. The award recognizes Reshef for his research on nanotube- and fullerene-like structures from inorganic layered compounds, which dramatically advance the field of nanomaterials, with implications for everyday life.

We typically bestow the **Helen and Martin Kimmel Award for Innovative Investigation** and the **André Deloro for Scientific Excellence** at the Annual General Meeting of our International Board. But the winners still won of course—and I would like to congratulate them. The 2023 Kimmel Award is going to **Prof. Shalev Itzkovitz** of the Department of Molecular Cell Biology for his research involving the mapping of cell populations within complex tissues, and the impact of tissue structure on physiological function. This work has enabled him and his lab team to identify previously unrecognized cell types and demonstrate how inter-cellular communication plays a key role in health and disease. And the 2023 Deloro Prize is going to **Prof. Itay Halevy** of the Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences, for his research on the evolving chemical composition of our planet's oceans and atmosphere and its influence on the global climate. He and his lab have also developed powerful techniques for tracing this evolutionary dynamic through the geological record.

Dr. Alexander Poddubny of the Department of Physics of Complex Systems, who was hired as a senior scientist last year, has received the 2023 **Sir Charles Clore Prize for Outstanding Senior Scientist**. Alexander studies atom-photon interactions, which has major implications for the rapidly expanding field of quantum computing.

I wish them all success in their research in the years to come.

Among the business-as-usual aspects of life on campus despite the war is the arrival of outstanding new scientists. **Dr. Nadav Ehrenfeld** of the Department of Science Teaching arrived in September, and his focus is the teaching and learning of math as well as professional

development for math teachers. On January 1, **Dr. Mark Sheinin** will join the Department of Computer Science and Applied Mathematics. His research goal is to invent computational imaging systems that enable computer vision capabilities beyond the capabilities of human vision and perception. I want to wish a hearty welcome to Nadav and Mark.

And now on to some exciting research news. **Prof. Kobi Abramson** and his group from the Department of Immunology and Biological Regeneration revealed a new autoimmune disorder in children that affects the development of tooth enamel, the hardest substance in our body protecting our teeth. The disorder is common among patients with the rare genetic syndrome called APS-1, but also among children with celiac disease. Understanding this disorder may help celiac patients as well as many others who suffer from impaired tooth enamel development due to unknown causes. The new finding is expected to enable early detection of the disease, and pave the way to prevention.

A joint study by Nobel laureate **Prof. Ada Yonath**, of the Department of Chemical and Structural Biology, and **Prof. Shulamit Michaeli** from Bar-Ilan University, presents a precise way to attack the trypanosome parasite that causes the disease known as sleeping sickness and which is transmitted by the tsetse fly. The new approach attacks the parasite through its ribosome and prevents it from producing essential proteins. The findings are a basis for the potential development of a cure for sleeping sickness, which causes 40,000 deaths in Africa annually, as well as for the development of drugs against related parasites, including leishmaniasis.

I'd like to end by circling to where we started: the promise of light. A new study in the lab of **Prof. Dan Yakir**, in the Department of Earth and Planetary Science, explored the question of whether planting more forests or erecting more photovoltaic fields (solar panels) would better reduce carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and thus mitigate the effects of climate change. Both also increase global heat load because they make the land surface darker, which absorbs heat, so factors that offset this absorption had to be taken into account. The Yakir lab found that in arid areas, solar panels are 50 times more effective than planting forests in terms of the potential for mitigating climate change, while in humid areas forestation becomes the more effective approach with increasing humidity, and also provides ecological benefits such as maintain biodiversity.

With all best wishes for quieter days, and happy holidays to all,



Prof. Alon Chen