



Professor Alon Chen

PRESIDENT

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Dear friends,

Happy Hanukah and Happy New Year 2026! Merry Christmas to those who celebrate. Since my last letter, so much has happened in Israel and here on campus. There is a ceasefire, all the living hostages have come home, and we await the return of the last deceased hostage still in captivity in Gaza. Despite the sorrow of the past two-plus years of war, national healing is beginning.

At Weizmann, the sounds of rebuilding and construction are audible throughout campus and serve as a powerful reminder of our collective will to return to normal and continue to do world-class science. Only a few months after the Iranian missile strikes, all the lab groups that lost their labs have been relocated and are largely back on track. I invite you to watch two videos I showed at my annual presentation to the International Board, in which we followed seven scientists over the course of three months after the attacks: [first describing loss and initial recovery efforts](#), and to close out my talk, a [brief check-in with them a few months later](#). We continue to receive generous donations to our Weizmann Emergency and Recovery Fund and I am pleased to announce an extraordinary new gift for the fund from our longtime philanthropic partners **The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust**.

One important “healing moment” was, aptly, the formal launch of our medical school on October 23. The **Miriam and Aaron Gutwirth Medical School** will offer MD/PhD degrees in an intensive program lasting more than seven years.

In an important reminder of the value of science in bridge-building and foreign relations, in October we also celebrated the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of diplomatic relations between Israel and Germany, which began with scientific collaborations between the Weizmann Institute and the Max Planck Society. The strong turnout at the event was testament to how deeply the scientific and diplomatic relationship is woven into the fabric of Israeli and German institutions. Among the many distinguished guests from Germany were **Prof. Dr. Otmar Wiestler**, President of the Helmholtz Association, and **Prof. Dr. Walter Rosenthal**, President of HRK, the German Rector’s Conference. The event was a special opportunity to thank our German friends for their exceptional solidarity and multiple visits to Israel after October 7.

Before I move on to other updates, I am saddened to inform you about the passing last week of our dear friend **Miriam (Buba) Stillmann** of Mexico, widow of the late **Luis Stillmann** who was a longtime International Board member. A survivor of Auschwitz, Buba depicted her tragic experiences in the Holocaust through her artwork in her later years. She and Luis were Weizmann friends whose memories will live on among all those who had the pleasure of knowing them.

Many of you are already familiar with the Leiden University ranking, and Weizmann has been in the top 10 for several years running. The 2025 survey ranked the Institute number six—our highest ranking since the survey’s inception 15 years ago. Weizmann is also the highest-ranking non-US institution. In the biomedical and health sciences category and also in the life and earth

sciences category, we were ranked number five. This is a tremendous achievement because Leiden's analysis is a measure of the quality and impact of research, by assessing citations while mitigating for the size of an institution and avoiding subjective surveys. While we don't pursue science for the accolades, this achievement—which is truly a reflection of how Weizmann brings knowledge and solutions to the world—should not go unnoticed by the world, especially on the backdrop of anti-Israel and antisemitic sentiment we are grappling with today.

I was deeply moved by the large attendance, both from Israel and overseas, at the 77<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting of the International Board—a clear sign, I believe, of the eagerness of our global community to come to Israel following two difficult years of war, to show solidarity, and to learn and experience first-hand how the Institute has persevered and what it has achieved despite the challenges. The Weizmann community was eager to welcome our guests and express gratitude for the solidarity we have felt from all corners of the globe since October 7.

We announced our *Empower Tomorrow* campaign for the future of Weizmann science, following its launch at the Global Gathering in Chicago in May. The 10-year campaign (2020-2030) has a goal of \$2.25 billion USD, and we have raised about 70 percent to date. All donations received in this decade are counted toward the campaign, the most ambitious in the Institute's history.

A theme running through the Board was the importance of investing in the next generation of scientists. We celebrated the grand opening of the **Pennie and Gary Abramson Family International Residence**, a beautiful and vibrant new home for students and postdocs funded by our American friends. Of course, education begins long before a student steps onto campus. For that reason, we continue to develop plans around science literacy and education for schoolchildren, and to that end we also revealed plans for a new building for the **Davidson Institute of Science Education**, funded by the **William Davidson Foundation**, enabling an expansion of the Davidson campus and the creation of a center of excellence for educational programming.

In October, we held a cornerstone-laying ceremony for the new neuroscience building, in the presence of the **Azrieli Foundation**. The **Azrieli Institute for Brain and Neural Sciences** will be housed in the **Brazilian Friends Building**. That entire area of campus is abuzz with new planning and construction. The expected growth in activity there prompted a need for a new campus gate for vehicle and foot traffic, to be named for **Harvey and Dr. Ellen Knell** of the US: the **Knell Family Gate**.

We bestowed the PhD *honoris causa* on seven extraordinary individuals. As I noted that evening, we now find ourselves at a turning point after tremendous challenges. It is precisely at such moments that we seek light and optimism, which is exactly what this ceremony is all about. This year's recipients are: **Dr. Angela Merkel**, former Federal Chancellor of Germany, who was the keynote speaker; **Dita (Yehudit) Bronicki** of Israel; **Prof. Patrick Cramer** of Germany; **Karen Davidson** of the US; **Dr. Eugene Koonin** of the US; **Maurice Lévy** of France; and **Ilana Ronat-Mantoux** of Israel.

On November 13, we bestowed the prestigious Weizmann Award upon **Bruno Mariani**, a Brazilian businessman whose company, Symbiosis, is restoring the vast Atlantic Forest on the coast of Brazil. His impressive reforestation approach is based on robust scientific research and replanting native species. Bruno established a unique business model that enables environmental sustainability. The Award is intended to reflect the values of **Dr. Chaim Weizmann**, who believed that scientific research and higher education are essential foundations for a thriving

society. He also felt strongly that a lush, natural environment would provide a peaceful oasis for the best minds to do their best work. In this way, Mr. Mariani's values truly align with ours.

Scientific prizes are not only important signals of excellence, but also help promote engagement in science and serve as an inspiration for others. This is precisely what we are aiming to do with our recent establishment of the **Michael Sela Prize for Biomedical Research**, an annual international prize whose value we hope reverberates across the scientific world. The inaugural prize, funded by Israeli supporters **Avraham and Michal Kadar** through the **Kadar Foundation**, will be bestowed on **Profs. Francis Collins, Lee Hood, and Eric Lander**, key architects of the Human Genome Project who made transformative contributions to genomics, DNA sequencing, and precision medicine. The Sela Prize also is a moving way to memorialize our dear colleague, the late **Institute Professor Michael Sela**, the renowned immunologist and Weizmann President. I look forward to the first ceremony and symposium, in May 2026.

I would like to welcome **Dr. Elik Chapnik** as the new CEO of Yeda. Elik replaces **Dr. Opher Shapira**, who stepped down from the role earlier this year after five successful years. Elik previously served as Vice President of Business Development at Yeda and held senior roles in the pharma industry, including at Quark and Teva. Deeply familiar with Weizmann and its mission, having received his PhD in molecular genetics at the Institute, Elik's broad scientific and industry experience positions him ideally to lead Yeda in its next chapter of growth and impact. I wish Elik the best of luck in his new role.

Another pillar of campus, **Yad Chaim Weizmann**, which includes the Weizmann Archives and the Weizmann House, has had a change of guard. I want to thank **Edly Dollar** for his years of leadership as chair, and warmly welcome **Prof. Jehuda Reinharz** into that role. Jehuda, our former International Board chair, is an historian who has dedicated much of his life to researching and writing about Dr. Chaim Weizmann. He has already infused a great deal of energy and creativity into the role to ensure this precious resource will flourish and contribute to Israeli society and beyond in the years to come. I look forward to working with Jehuda.

I would also like to express heartfelt thanks to our dear friend **Stephen Chipkin**, who recently stepped down as Chair of Weizmann Australia, and to welcome **Sam Weiss** as the new chair. In Chile, a new society of friends has been established, with **Ariela Agosin** as President. In Belgium, **Chris Hendboeg** has stepped down after years of active leadership as head of the Belgian Society. I warmly welcome into that position **Marc Melviez**. I look forward to working with all of these new lay leaders to advance the Weizmann Institute's goals around the world.

I'm excited to tell you about three newly hired scientists who have joined the Institute in the last several months. **Prof. Ehud (Udi) Hrushovski**, a leading figure in geometric model theory and its applications, is the newest addition to the Department of Mathematics. Ehud has held appointments at the University of Oxford, Princeton, and MIT. His work has transformed the interaction between mathematical logic and diverse fields of mathematics, including additive combinatorics and algebraic geometry.

**Dr. Gil Schwartz** is the newest faculty-track member of the Department of Science Teaching, following a postdoc at the University of Michigan and a Senior Intern position at Weizmann as part of the Institute's Bridge Program. Gil studies mathematically responsive teaching—the ability of classroom instructors to notice and respond productively to students' ideas, and use those ideas for teaching mathematical content. She is developing AI-driven avatar-based digital simulations that allow teachers to practice responsiveness, supporting deeper insight into students' mathematical reasoning.

**Dr. Tom Manovitz** joined the Department of Physics of Complex Systems after a postdoctoral fellowship at Harvard University. His research focuses on using atom arrays to study quantum phases and phase transitions, as well as on developing new hardware and protocols for quantum computing that is reliable and scalable. At the International Board meeting, he was awarded the **Sir Charles Clore Prize for Outstanding Scientist**, where he spoke about his decision to return to the Institute, where he received his PhD, in the wake of the October 7 attacks.

Our scientific output continues to impress, and is especially remarkable given the challenges of the last six months. In one remarkable international recognition, **Prof. Yifat Merbl** of the Department of Systems Immunology [was named one of “Nature’s 10”](#)—a year-end ranking by the prestigious journal of the “ten people who helped shape science in 2025”. She was included in this group for finding a facet of the immune system in the proteasome, known as the cellular recycling bin, showing that pieces of proteins that were broken down may directly kill bacteria. It’s a finding that may be critical in the hunt for new antibiotics. Her discovery was published in the spring, and her lab in the Wolfson Building was badly damaged in the missile strikes; she’s up and running again as you can see from the short movies referenced above.

The lab of **Prof. Schraga Schwartz** in the Department of Molecular Genetics has published a study in *Cell* demonstrating that chemical modifications within ribosomal RNA, which have long been regarded as uniform across species and static under different environmental conditions, are in fact dynamic and environmentally responsive. Focusing on hyperthermophilic organisms that thrive in volcanic environments, particularly *Pyrococcus furiosus* (“furious fireball”), his team discovered that these so-called “extremophile” organisms actively modify their rRNA in response to growth temperature—and that the higher the organism’s natural growth temperature, the more extensive the RNA modifications become. Then, in collaboration with **Prof. Moran Shalev-Benami** of the Department of Chemical and Structural Biology, the two groups studied how these chemical changes can alter the structure of the ribosome itself. This refined view of RNA chemistry and ribosome biology has broad implications for RNA-based technologies and therapeutics, including mRNA vaccines, RNA editing, and emerging gene-modulation platforms.

Another study, published by **Dr. Yael Kiro** from the Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences, showed that the hidden water flows between the ocean and coastal aquifers can have a powerful effect on the ocean’s chemistry. Her findings reveal an entire ecological system beneath the shoreline that few scientists knew existed, and which plays a role in the health of our oceans and groundwater resources. This discovery holds implications for climate change because oceans absorb massive quantities of CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere. Yael’s lab in the **Sussman Family Building for Environmental Sciences** was destroyed in the missile strikes as a result of the shockwaves, and it goes without saying that this area of research must continue to thrive.

I hope that the speedy recovery efforts and the Weizmann spirit will ensure that our scientific productivity will continue to soar. With all best wishes for a happy holiday season and a healthy and peaceful New Year.

Sincerely,



Prof. Alon Chen