

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **TWAS to convene first all-virtual General Conference**

*The Academy's General Conference will feature a lecture by a Nobel Prize winner, a ministerial session, presentations by high-level researchers, symposia on key issues of our time and award ceremonies.*

The World Academy of Sciences (UNESCO-TWAS) will convene its Fifteenth General Conference online from 1–4 November. The event is expected to draw an international audience of researchers and policy experts from both developing and developed regions, and will include remarks from some of the world's leading figures in science policy and science advice.

This year's conference was originally planned to take place in person in Jeddah, the second-largest city in Saudi Arabia. To respect the precautions necessary during the COVID-19 pandemic, however, it was decided to hold it online. The Conference will open with on a high note with a lecture on chemistry by Nobel laureate Jean-Marie Lehn. The following days will feature statements from important figures in science policy, such as Eric Lander, U.S. President's Science Advisor and Director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy; Marcos Pontes, Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation of Brazil; Bonginkosi Emmanuel "Blade" Nzimande, Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology of South Africa; and Audrey Azoulay, UNESCO Director-General.

This year's conference is being organized by the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) in collaboration with the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB)—both TWAS key partners based in Saudi Arabia.

Jeddah-based KAUST played a critical role in coordinating the conference and setting its programme, in very close connection with TWAS team in Trieste, Italy. The university was originally planned to provide a physical setting for the event, and has instead assumed the role of a virtual host, providing the infrastructure and technical support for the meeting. To help accomplish this, KAUST contracted Streamy, a virtual event service provider based in India. KAUST faculty is also anticipated to be present at the conference, offering the opportunity to engage with the great national and disciplinary diversity of the Academy's scientific community.

IsDB, also based in Jeddah, has been a programmatic partner for TWAS since 2019. IsDB provides support and funding for TWAS grant and fellowship programmes with a focus on building capacity for high-priority scientific goals in IsDB least developed member countries.

The event will begin on 1 November with a two-hour General Meeting of TWAS Fellows and Young Affiliates to discuss Academy matters. It will be followed by the General Conference, which will feature award ceremonies, presentations by TWAS medallists and TWAS-Lenovo Science Award winners, a ministerial session featuring prominent government figures in the

arena of science policy, and symposia on advancing frontier science, technology and innovation in developing countries, COVID-19 and post-COVID connectivity.

The Opening Ceremony on 1 November will include remarks by prominent figures, including Tony F. Chan, President of the KAUST; Munir M. Eldesouki, Assistant Minister at the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology of Saudi Arabia and Acting President of the King Abdul-Aziz City for Science and Technology; Audrey Azoulay, UNESCO Director-General; Anja Karliczek, Federal Minister of Education and Research of Germany; Muhammad Sulaiman Al Jasser, President of IsDB; Marina Sereni, Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy; Kerstin Jonsson Cissé, Head of Unit for Research Cooperation of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency; and Ylann Schemm, Director of the Elsevier Foundation and Chair of the Research4Life Executive Council of the Netherlands.

The opening day's events will be capped with a high-level keynote lecture, "Steps Towards Life: Chemistry!", delivered by Nobel Laureate Jean-Marie Lehn of the Institute of Supramolecular Science and Engineering of the University of Strasbourg, Institute for Advanced Study, France. Lehn was awarded the Nobel Prize in chemistry in 1987, jointly with two other colleagues.

The ministerial session will take place on Tuesday, 2 November, and will tackle the theme of "Financing frontier science, technology and innovation for the SDGs". It will feature remarks from prominent figures in science policy, government and international policymaking. These include:

- Shamila Nair-Bedoulee, Assistant Director-General for Natural Science, on behalf of UNESCO Director-General
- Khaled Atef Abdel Ghaffar, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research of Egypt
- Cheikh Oumar Anne, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation of Senegal
- Eric Lander, US President's Science Advisor and Director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, USA
- Bonginkosi Emmanuel "Blade" Nzimande, Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology of South Africa
- Nyan Gadsby-Dolly, Minister of Education of Trinidad and Tobago
- Munir Eldesouki, Assistant Minister at the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology of Saudi Arabia, and the Acting President of the King Abdul-Aziz City for Science and Technology
- Marcos Pontes, Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation of Brazil;
- Rémi Quirion, Chief Science Advisor of Québec, Canada;
- Marco Giungi, Minister Plenipotentiary of Italy, on behalf of Maria Cristina Messa, Minister of University and Research
- Valentine Uwamariya, Minister of Education of Rwanda and
- Ibrokhim Abdurakhmonov, Minister of Innovative Development of Uzbekistan.

The ministerial session will be followed by presentations from 2020 TWAS-Lenovo Award co-winners Li Jiayang and Mariangela Hungria. Tuesday afternoon and the following days will also each feature a symposium. The first will be on “Advancing frontier science, technology and innovation for the SDGs in developing countries”. The second, on Wednesday, 3 November, will be about “The world facing COVID-19”, and the third, on Thursday, 4 November, on “Digital Inclusion: Challenges and opportunities for connecting the unconnected in the post-COVID era”.

The events of 3 November will include presentations by three TWAS Medal winners, who will be announced at the meeting. It will also feature a virtual poster session through the interactive platform supporting the conference provided through KAUST.

The conference will come to a close on 4 November with the induction of TWAS Members elected in 2019, 2020 and 2021, and the introduction of the new TWAS Young Affiliates appointed in those same years. The closing ceremony will feature TWAS Secretary-General presenting the Conference Declaration, which will outline the Academy's path ahead in light of the results of the dialogues and exchanges of the three previous days. The final segment of the day—and of the entire Conference—includes closing speeches from Eldesouki; Chan; the Chief Adviser for Science, Technology and Innovation to the President of IsDB, Hayat Sindi; and TWAS President Mohamed Hassan.

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