



AN INTERVIEW WITH: Prof. Alex Keynan

Professor Alex Keynan, currently Senior Advisor to the President of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, has occupied many senior posts in the Israeli scientific community, and is a respected observer of the U.S. and Israeli scientific scene. The activities of the Israel NSF are further described in its Annual Report, complementary copies of which are available from the AFBRI or from the Israel Academy.

Forum :

What is the most important recent trend in the national support of Israeli basic research?

KEYNAN: *The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities' Master Plan for the Advancement of Basic Research in Israel (1987) documented an emerging crisis in Israeli basic research, the severely underfinanced foundation for Israel's rapid advances in applied research and high-tech industry. The Israeli Government, through the Planning and Budgeting Committee (VATAT) of the Council for Higher Education, and the international private donor community both responded enthusiastically to this call. The Israel National Science Foundation (Israel NSF) founded in 1992), now has a budget of about \$23 million a year and is still growing.*

Forum :

What role did the private donor community play?

KEYNAN: *Their role was catalytic and crucial. The Charles H. Revson Foundation (USA) started this revolution by committing \$5 million of its own funds to establish an Endowment Fund for Basic Research, to be matched 3:1 by other private donors. Several other private foundations, including the Wolfson Family Charitable Trust (U.K.), the Dorot Foundation (USA), the S.R. and Helen Scheuer Family Foundation (USA), the Recanati Foundation (Israel), and the Braun-Roger-Siegl Foundation (Sweden), have since established their own, highly successful, research grants programs under the general framework and administration of the Israel NSF.*

Forum :

In what new directions is the Foundation moving Israeli science?

KEYNAN: *The Israel NSF currently supports over 570 active research projects in the Exact Sciences, Life Sciences, Social Sciences and Humanities, based on a rigorous external peer review. This is a fine way to strengthen Israeli science where it is already strong. On the other hand, Israel also needs a proactive mechanism for strengthening fields which, while important abroad, are underdeveloped in Israel. The Israel Academy and the Israel NSF have been cooperating on identifying and filling such gaps in Israel's research fabric on an ad hoc basis. One recent example, was their promoting Israel's participation in the International Human Genome Project. They are now trying to set up a new national program to do this on an ongoing basis, and are seeking help in doing so from the international philanthropic community.*

Forum :

What other needs do you see at the national level?

KEYNAN: *Israeli science is highly decentralized. There are no large government sponsored research institutes, as in the U.S. or Europe. Instead 80% of all Israeli basic research is spread among individual, grant-seeking scientists in Israel's universities. No national body systematically monitors and analyzes Israel's basic research needs, investment and performance as a whole and there is no organized system for long-range policymaking or coordination at the national level. Israel increasingly needs a national mechanism to do all this, and to fill critical gaps as they are uncovered.*

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