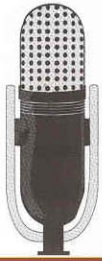


ISRAEL'S ENVIRONMENT: SINKING but SAVABLE



AN INTERVIEW WITH: **Professor Ilan Chet**

Prof. Ilan Chet, Vice President for Research of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, is himself a distinguished environmental researcher, well known for his research on biological control and waste conversion. A member of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Prof. Chet was Chairman of the Academy's Advisory Committee on Environmental Research, whose recent report is discussed below.

Forum

What is the current state of Israel's environment?

CHET: *The entire Eastern Mediterranean basin is becoming increasingly affected by crowding, pollution and development. Not only is Israel's environment endangered by these and other factors, but its expertise in the environmental sciences, which is essential to solving these problems, is inadequate to the task. Indeed, our group found that the environmental sciences in Israel are, on the whole, in a state of lingering decline.*

Forum

What should be done?

CHET: *The Israel Academy could play an important role in reversing this trend. In our view, such initiatives should focus on interdisciplinary research on local problems in scientific areas in which Israel has, or could have, a competitive advantage. Global problems, such as global warming, holes in the ozone layer and so on, must temporarily give way to problems that are caused, and can be solved, largely here in Israel.*

Forum

How?

CHET: *We recommend sending three to six outstanding young postdoctoral students to the best places available abroad to study such issues in depth. The Israel Academy would help administer and fund the program, and pay for the first three years' academic salary of returning trainees (as in the Alon Program). Hopefully, the Israel Science Foundation will also give such returning scholars special priority. We must also invite more world-class experts here to Israel, for seminars, workshops, consultations and reviews. Our Committee would be glad to help in selection, monitoring, review and guidance.*

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What new structures and initiatives would be needed?

CHET: *First, Israel needs a National Analytic Center to provide central, advanced analytical services and instrumentation to all Israeli researchers in this field. Second, we need a National Environmental Science Information Center to make our data more generally available and to integrate us into the larger international network of information systems. Most important, we need to invest more in our young people, who represent the future of this vital but comparatively neglected field.*

Forum

What areas come to mind?

CHET: *We selected three research areas for priority action: Water, Environmental Monitoring and Solid Wastes. For example, Israel could be a leader in developing innovative detectors and long-range environmental surveillance systems. It similarly has good prospects for success in developing advanced solid-waste composting/recycling/disposal procedures. We do not have to wait for our landfills to explode.*