

The "New" ISRAEL SCIENCE FOUNDATION



AN INTERVIEW WITH: Professor Paul Singer

Prof. Paul Singer, the Chairman of the newly independent Israel Science Foundation (ISF), is one of Israel's most respected high energy physicists. He is Charles Wolfson Professor of Physics at the Technion, where he has also served as Senior Vice President (1990-94). The author of over 80 scientific articles, he is a frequent visiting scientist at the European Center for Nuclear Research (CERN) and many prominent universities. He is a former member of Israel's Council for Higher Education.

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What is new about the ISF?

SINGER: *Growth and independence. Back in the 1970s, the Israeli Government began providing limited support for a Basic Research Fund (BRF) administered by the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities. Starting in 1990 the Government, in response to a matching initiative started by the C. H. Revson Foundation, began making major contributions through the Planning and Budgeting Committee (VATAT) of the Council for Higher Education. In 1992 the BRF reconstituted itself as the Israel Science Foundation (ISF). This year the Foundation has registered itself as a fully independent, non-profit organization, responsible only to its own Council and Board.*

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What does the ISF's growth mean in practical terms?

SINGER: *First, the ISF is now, by far, the largest organization of its kind in Israel. This provides a central address and helps coordinate policy. Second, the increased funds have helped the ISF reach two of its previous long-term goals: increasing the acceptance rate and annual budgets of scientist-submitted projects to more realistic levels. Third, the new funds have allowed the ISF to start completely new programs, such as its Centers of Excellence Program, which concentrates on specific areas of Israeli strength and funds them at levels (typically \$300,000 a year) sufficient to make them competitive internationally.*

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How does the ISF relate to the Israel Academy?

SINGER: *While independent, the ISF retains close ties with its former parent body. In fact, the ISF recently moved its offices to a new building adjoining the Academy (as has VATAT). For now, the Academy still provides administrative services, which are reimbursed. Under the ISF's guidelines, the President of the Academy is the Chairman of the ISF Council, and the ISF Council and Board contain many Academy members and representatives. In a sense, we have the best of both worlds.*

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What new programs are in the pipeline?

SINGER: *After lengthy deliberation, the ISF is trying to help Israeli researchers participate in "Big Science" projects, ultra-large, long-term projects involving many countries. We have also initiated a series of Israeli workshops to present ISF results in selected areas to the Israeli and international scientific communities. Finally, although not new, the rapid rise in the cost of state-of-the-art scientific equipment will require more attention. This year ISF equipment grants exceeded \$2 million and needs continue to climb.*

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Will the ISF's growth continue?

SINGER: *The ISF budget **must** continue to increase, because the needs and opportunities of Israel's scientific community continue to increase. In recognition of this fact, the VATAT has committed itself to gradually increasing its contribution from \$24 million to \$36 million over the next four years. We are also seeking additional funds from the international philanthropic community, especially catalytic funds for specific new programs and initiatives.*