

News Release

For immediate release

Stephen Hawking to donate DNA

Jerusalem, December 13, 2006 – Prof. Stephen Hawking will donate DNA samples to the Human Genome Project in the hope that the data will help scientists identify the causes of Lou Gehrig's disease.

The incurable neurological disease, also known as amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), has afflicted Hawking for 43 years, since he was a graduate student at Cambridge. The cause of ALS, which causes eventual paralysis and death, is not known, but doctors believe there is a genetic component.

The renowned scientist - reportedly the longest ALS survivor in the world - has been offered implantation of electrodes in his brain, a procedure that has been of help to some Parkinson's patients in Israel and abroad, but he turned this down, saying he did not want to undergo brain surgery. Most victims of the disease die within a few years of diagnosis.

The 64-year-old Hawking, currently nearing the end of an eight-day visit to Israel and the Palestinian Authority, met Israeli physicists at the Centre for Excellence at Neveh Shalom before visiting Tel Aviv University on Tuesday. On Wednesday, he will deliver a lecture at Birzeit University in Ramallah; on Thursday, he will speak on "The Origin of the Universe" before 1,000 invitees at the Hebrew University's Mt. Scopus campus.

On Monday, he was the guest at an intimate dinner at Jerusalem's King David Hotel of the Israel Academy of Sciences and the Arts, headed by Prof. Menachem Ya'ari. He was toasted by British Ambassador Tom Phillips and Ya'ari, who "celebrated the triumph and exhilaration of science and of a human spirit over adversity."

Phillips, who arrived here in August, said he had so far met two kinds of people - those who haven't read Hawking's books on cosmology and physics and those who have read them but understood only some of the ideas. He was sure that Academy of Science members had read them and understood them. Phillips said that he asked Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, when he received Hawking in his office on Sunday, whether he had read the brilliant physicist's *A Brief History of Time*, Olmert assured him that he had.

Hawking said, "I am happy to be back in Israel again. I have been here three times before, the last in 1990... I was sad to see how the [security] wall separates [Israelis and Palestinians]. There is a great difference between universities on this side of the wall and those on the other side. But it is good to hear what you are doing in cooperation with Palestinian scientists."

For more information, or for press contact with students, faculty or spokespersons from HU, please speak in the first instance to Jason Caplin, Communications Manager, on +44 (0)20 7691 1471 or email jason.caplin@bfhu.org.



About the Hebrew University

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Established in 1926, The British Friends of the Hebrew University is the oldest established Jewish charity in support of higher education. The charity works to promote and enhance the reputation of the Hebrew University, ensure that underprivileged students are given the opportunity to complete their studies, and help HU to maintain its standard of excellence and worldwide reputation for research.

BFHU acts as the UK's gateway to Hebrew University research, expertise and faculty, and provides financial and pastoral support for prospective and current students at HU, as well as supporting visiting and sabbatical Hebrew University lecturers during their time in the UK.