

News Release

For immediate release

Hebrew University scientists working with Jordanian colleagues

‘Beam of Light’ is ray of hope for Israeli-Jordanian cooperation

Jerusalem, November 8, 2007 – An Israeli-Jordanian-U.S. cooperative project aimed at measuring air quality in the area between the neighbouring southern cities of Aqaba in Jordan and Eilat in Israel has been launched by scientists from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem together with scientists from the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Administration (ASEZA) and the Desert Research Institute of Reno, Nevada, in the US.

The one-month, intensive, transboundary regional air quality research study began earlier this month, with the Israeli team operating a mobile laboratory located north of Eilat, and the Jordanian researchers performing continuous measurements of air quality in Aqaba.

As part of the experiment, the Hebrew University team shines a powerful light projected from the Israeli side to the Jordanian side, the returning rays of which are then submitted to spectral analysis. This analysis enables the group to determine the composition of the air over the Red Sea that lies between the two measuring sites. The scientists have nicknamed the study “Beam of Light”.

According to Hebrew University Prof. Menachem Luria, the head of the Israeli team, the overall aim of the project -- which is supported with American funds through the US AID MERC (Middle East Regional Cooperative) framework -- is to develop cooperative efforts to improve air quality in the region and reduce transboundary pollution transport. This can be achieved through joint scientific efforts and the generation of public awareness, he said.

Dr. Bilal Al Bashir, deputy chief commissioner for the environment of the Jordanian ASEZA, said that good air quality is an essential factor for the continued success of the tourism-driven economic basis of the region. All parties agree that the outcome of this study will serve as a basis for government officials to address air quality issues as a central part of the planning process in this rapidly developing area.

The current intensive study will be followed by a similar program across the northern Jordan Valley next year involving additional scientists from Israel, Jordan and the US. The second phase will focus on developing a better understanding of the transboundary transport of air pollutants as predicted by model simulation in a previous MERC funded study by Erez Weinroth as part of his Ph.D. dissertation at the Hebrew University.

Based on the success to-date in bringing together scientists from both sides of the Jordan River to address these mutual environmental issues, Prof. Alan Gertler of the Desert Research Institute in the US, who helped bring the parties together and develop the program, has been impressed by the cooperative spirit of the team and believes it will serve as a model for future regional studies.

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

With 24,000 full-time students, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem is Israel's pre-eminent institute of higher education. Its faculty members pursue projects that are both essential to Israel's future and the benefit of humanity. It is a centre of international repute, with formal and informal ties extending to and from the worldwide scientific and academic community. Students come from all over Israel and across the Middle East to study in an atmosphere of academic and research excellence.

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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.