

Swiss Universities to Organize Major International Symposium

World Knowledge Dialogue to be held on 14-16 September 2006 at Crans-Montana, Switzerland, aims to bridge gap between natural sciences and humanities

Geneva/Bern, Switzerland – 23 February 2006 – An international symposium that will address the impact and meaning of major scientific discoveries will take place on 14-16 September 2006 in Crans-Montana, Switzerland. The World Knowledge Dialogue is an initiative launched by Prof. André Hurst, Rector of the University of Geneva, and Prof. Francis Waldvogel, President Emeritus of the Swiss Polytechnical Institutes, in response to the growing divide between the cultures of the natural sciences and the humanities. Endorsed by the rectors and presidents of all Swiss universities, the Swiss Confederation and leading figures from Swiss academia, the symposium, to be held every second year, will host 250-300 invited participants, including top university officials, opinion leaders and decision makers in science, science policy and economics from around the world.

The symposium will feature scientists who have made major discoveries that have led to paradigm shifts, and who will explain the essential features of their discovery and its impact on the world. Academic figures from the “other culture” will then offer their own views of the same discovery and its importance and consequences for society. Time for discussion will allow the audience to participate in creating new modes of collaboration. The following are key scientific themes that illustrate the benefits to be gained from this convergent approach and which will be the focus of the symposium in Crans-Montana:

- **Neurosciences (keynote lectures)**

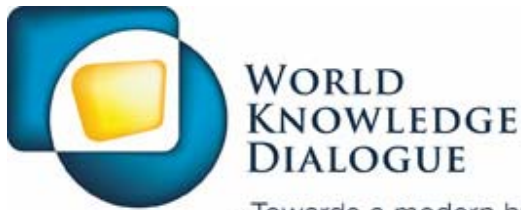
One of the great scientific and philosophical questions of our time is the relationship between brain dynamics and consciousness. Nobel laureate Gerald Edelman of the Neurosciences Institute and the Scripps Research Institute will give a keynote lecture on this subject. A second keynote lecture, to be presented by Jean-Pierre Changeux of the Pasteur Institute and Collège de France, will focus on the physiology of truth and human diversity.

- **Complex systems (scientific session)**

The study of the dynamic behavior of complex systems can help explain how “big pictures” emerge from a sea of data. Different aspects of complexity will be addressed by experts from the fields of biology (Geoffrey West, Santa Fe Institute), climatology (John Schellnhuber, Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research) and philosophy (Ian Hacking, University of Toronto and Collège de France).

- **Migration of modern man (scientific session)**

The multidisciplinary approach to elucidating the course of human migration and understanding how we arrived where we are today will be exposed by experts in



paleontology (Ofer Bar-Yosef, Harvard University), linguistics (Bernard Victorri, CNRS) and genetics (Svante Pääbo, Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology).

The symposium counts leading academic and political figures on its scientific and supervisory boards, including: Pascal Couchepin, Head of the Swiss Department of Home Affairs; Prof. Peter Gruss, President of the Max-Planck-Gesellschaft; Prof. Phillip Clay, Chancellor of MIT; Prof. Werner Arber, University of Basel, Nobel Laureate; and Prof. Bertil Anderson, Chief Executive of the European Science Foundation.

Prof. André Hurst, Rector of the University of Geneva and President of the World Knowledge Dialogue Foundation, commented: "The scientific and humanistic cultures observe the same world using complementary tools, but a dialogue between the two cultures has been difficult for historical and practical reasons. With, on the one hand, the advancement of scientific knowledge under continued threat from political and ideological movements, and on the other hand, science and technology playing an increasingly large role in shaping our environment, the need for a dialogue is greater than ever."

Prof. Francis Waldvogel, President Emeritus of the Swiss Polytechnical Institutes and Program Director of the World Knowledge Dialogue, added: "This initiative, which is being strongly supported by the Swiss Confederation and financed by several Swiss foundations and universities, fits well with Switzerland's long humanistic tradition and the excellent international reputation of our academic system. Our goal with this symposium is to serve the international community by setting up pathways for a better cross-fertilization of the natural and human/social sciences."

Further information is available at www.wkdialoque.org

Media enquiries:

Francis WALDVOGEL : francisw@bvb-cie.ch - 079 / 402 35 32

André HURST : andre.hurst@lettres.unige.ch - 079 / 602 96 13