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PRESS RELEASE

Nobel Prize winning scientist is new President of ICSU

Rome, Italy – Professor Yuan Tseh Lee, a Nobel Prize-winning chemist from China: Taipei, today became the new President of the International Council for Science (ICSU) at the conclusion of the organization's 30th General Assembly. A world leader in the field of chemical dynamics, Lee had been elected by representatives from ICSU's 114 National Members and 29 International Scientific Unions at the previous General Assembly in Maputo, Mozambique in October 2008. He takes over from Prof. Catherine Bréchignac, Permanent Secretary of the French national *Académie des Sciences*.

Prof. Lee was born and educated in Taiwan, before moving to the US where he obtained a PhD in chemistry from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1965. In the years that followed, his career flourished, both as a creative researcher and an inspiring teacher. In 1986, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in recognition of his seminal contribution to the development of reaction dynamics – a new field of research in chemistry at the time. His use of crossed molecular beams allowed the study of complex reaction mechanisms beyond the capability of previous methods. Lee returned home in 1994, taking up the position as President of the Academy of Sciences located in Taipei. Under his 12-year leadership the institution was transformed into a world class research centre, attracting scholars and creative young scientists from around the world.

His achievements have been recognized with many awards in addition to the Nobel Prize, among which have been the US National Medal of Science, the Faraday Medal and Prize of the UK Royal Chemical Society, and most recently the Ettore Majorana–Erice Science for Peace Prize. He is a fellow of numerous learned societies, including the US National Academy of Sciences, the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and the Academy of Sciences for the Developing World (TWAS). He has received honorary doctorates from over 35 universities worldwide.

Prof. Lee has been involved with ICSU for well over 15 years and served on its Standing Committee on Freedom in the Conduct of Science from 1996 to 2005.

In his inaugural speech to the assembled membership of ICSU, he underscored the challenges facing society – and science – in the coming decades. "If we are to avoid catastrophe and ensure humanity's continuation on this planet, the keyword for the next few decades will be transformation," he said. "That is, we must begin to transform our global society into a truly sustainable civilization." For Lee, part of that transformation must be scientific and technological. While science and technology have boosted economic growth, facilitated industrial production, and improved almost every aspect of life, Lee admits they have also led unwittingly to an array of health and environmental problems. He urges a radical and urgent rethink on how science is planned and carried out in the future, and is a strong supporter of the new integrated research of the type put forward by the Earth System Sustainability Initiative rolled out in Rome.

Lee also called for greater resources to be devoted to science. "In the past", said Lee "many excellent ideas were abandoned because there was no funding. This is really heartbreaking. If there is a worthy idea, we must do all we can to find the resources." He adds "Just imagine what we could do if just 1% of the estimated US\$1 trillion spent by governments on defence every year could be devoted to global sustainability research. After all, the greatest threats to security today no longer come from across borders, but are caused by humanity on humanity itself." He is keen to see ICSU more proactive in finding the means to further new initiatives.

In the face of today's challenges, the new President of ICSU is clearly determined that the world of science should work together, and do so quickly. "Our primary theme for the coming years must be 'Action – and solutions – now!'" he stresses.

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Media enquiries

Howard Moore, ICSU email: howard.moore@icsu.org tel: +33 6 42 79 37 71.

About ICSU

Founded in 1931, ICSU is a non-governmental organization with a global membership of national scientific bodies (120 Members, representing 140 countries) and International Scientific Unions (30 Members). The Council's activities focus on three areas: planning and coordinating research; science for policy; and strengthening the Universality of Science. ICSU is frequently called upon to speak on behalf of the global scientific community and to act as an advisor in matters ranging from the environment to conduct in science. www.icsu.org