

Speech given by Mr. Dan David on the occasion of the signing ceremony of the agreement between the Dan David Foundation and the Ministry of Culture and Communication of France, in Paris, on Friday, February 24th, 2006

The agreement that has just been signed between the Ministry of Culture and Communication of France and the Dan David Foundation gives me a great deal of personal satisfaction, for more than one reason.

During my childhood my father brought me up in the francophone culture which has remained a part of me till this day. He would perhaps have been disappointed by the fact that last year, I did not last for more than two days on the France 3 quiz show held by Julien Lepers « Questions pour un Champion ». On the other hand, I am certain that he would have been particularly pleased to see us gathered here together this morning for the beginning of this collaboration between the Dan David Foundation, the University of Tel Aviv and France.

This year, 2006, we are going to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the Dan David Prize at Tel Aviv University. The four previous years have all been occasions for magnificent Award Ceremonies. Imagine, that in 2002, the first year of the Prize, two of the Dan David Prize Laureates received the Nobel Prize six months after receiving our Prize.

The second year, Professor Michel Brunet from the University of Poitiers, a renowned Paleontologist who discovered the famous skull of Tumaï, received the Prize for the Past Time Dimension. I still have in mind the moment when, on the stage of the Tel Aviv University's concert hall, Professor Brunet, holding up this skull in his hand, told us : "Here you are, the oldest Hominid, our ancestor, seven million years old " or, to paraphrase a great Frenchman, whom I have always admired and a copy of whose mortuary mask I have in my office; "from the top of this hand, 70,000 centuries are contemplating you ".

Today represents a new and important phase for the Dan David Prize; the uniting of the efforts of the most important university of Israel, of the height of intellectual endeavour with that of French culture and tradition, will create a marvellous symbiosis.

We have signed this contract for ten years. I honestly think that this symbiosis will continue for much longer than the ten years forecasted in our letter of agreement, and, in the same spirit of the agreement, will continue to grow and to bring its contribution to the recognition of knowledge and scientific research, for centuries to come.

Finally, I wish to express my warmest appreciation to the Minister Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres, who, from the very first moment, understood the full potential of this Prize.

I wish to extend my thanks to his counsellor, Mr. Jean d'Haussonville, always ready to be of assistance, and to Mr. Jean-François Hebert, President of the City of Sciences and Industry museum, which today is classified as the fourth most visited museum of France. I take the occasion to congratulate all of you for your enthusiastic efforts. I also wish to thank Mr. Mortier, Director of the Paris National Opera, one of the most famous Operas in the world, as well as its staff, who has at every opportunity made its important contribution to the realisation of this project.

I wish to end my speech by expressing my profound gratitude to all those who have been associated with the Dan David Prize for many years: our President Itamar Rabinovich, our Director Smadar Fisher, our Scientific Adviser Prof. Isaac Witz and my colleagues on the Board of the Prize, who have supported all of us in this new joint enterprise with France.