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Unités de Recherche Associées au CNRS CNRS Associated Research Units



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LAUNCHING OF THE ASSOCIATED RESEARCH UNITS PROGRAM

I join president Dorman in welcoming you all today at this very special occasion which represents a turning point in the history of the CNRS through the launching of 3 Associated Research Units. Allow me to give you a brief description of the three Associated Research Units and of the process which led to their establishment.

In 2006, the new National Science and Technology Policy was launched by the CNRS under the auspices of H. E. Prime Minister Fouad Siniora and UNESCO Director-General Mr. Koichiro Matsura.

One of the recommendations of STIP, in the absence of sufficient financial resources available to the CNRS, was the creation of centers of excellence according to priorities defined by the Policy. These ARUs were designed to

associate CNRS financial and human resources with leading universities in specific research domains.

This program represents an ideal way to move forward by encouraging and supporting the capabilities of academic research institutions in the country.

The ARU program entails supporting an integrated research project revolving around a specific research axis with a research team of at least 2-3 principal investigators from more than one university. ARUs are created annually following a call for proposals and a competitive selection process based on the outstanding scientific performance of the members of the team within the past five years, the expected outcome, the ability of researchers to attract foreign funding and support as well as their readiness to host M. Sc. and Ph. D. students in addition to Post-doctoral fellows within the ARU. It is worth mentioning at this point that the CNRS annual contribution can reach US\$50000 per annum for a period of 3 years.

When we first thought of this program, we did not expect to receive a large number of proposals, given the innovative approach adopted by the CNRS. Surprisingly enough, our first ARU call for proposals attracted 10 projects from several renowned universities in Lebanon of which the CNRS has, at this early stage, agreed to adopt and finance three ARUs.

The first unit aims at researching the quality of air in Lebanon and is implemented in cooperation with the American University of Beirut and Université Saint Joseph, while the second addresses the "**Quality and Management of Water Resources in Lebanon**" in cooperation with the American University of Beirut and the Lebanese American University, and the third addresses mal-nutrition and obesity in Lebanon in cooperation with the American University of Beirut, Université Saint Joseph (USJ) and Université Saint-Esprit, Kaslik, (USEK).

The main goal of the first ARU is, in its first phase, to monitor the quality of air and determine the percentage and nature of poisonous gases within the region of Greater Beirut and list the problems which have to be solved in order to improve the quality of air. Seven researchers are involved in this ARU: two from AUB (Dr. Najat Saliba and Dr. Alan Shehadeh) as well as Dr. Wehbé Farah, Dr. Maher Abboud, Dr. Jocelyne Gerard, Dr. Nada Saliba and Dr. Rita Zaarour from USJ. The CNRS will support this unit with 50,000 US Dollars per annum for a period of three years.

As for the second ARU, its objective is to improve **the quality of water and ensure a sustainable management of Lebanon's water resources**. Three researchers from AUB (Dr. May Jurdi, Dr. May Massoud, Dr. Sami Ramia) as well as Dr. Samira Korfali from LAU are involved in this unit. Its primary objective is to improve the public health of urban populations by protecting them from water pollution. In addition it will address the problem of contaminants and their origin. The CNRS contribution will amount to 40,000 US Dollars annually for a period of three years.

The objective of the third ARU is to enhance **the nutritional well-being and health of children and adults in Lebanon**. The main investigator from AUB is Dean Nahla Hwalla, in partnership with Dr. Dolla Sarkis from USJ and Dr. Ziad Harb from USEK are involved in this unit. The unit primary objectives are to determine the prevalence of mal-nutrition in children, adults and elderly in Lebanon, and to determine factors leading to obesity. The CNRS will support this unit with 50,000 US Dollars annually for a period of three years.

We are gathered today, to sign the agreement with the American University of Beirut. Similar ceremonies will be held later this week at the premises of the other three concerned universities. Research in the three units will start on February 1, 2009.

Finally I would like to thank all those who made this Program materialize by their efforts and commitment. The process was long and tedious but the result is worth it. My gratitude as well to President Dorman for his continuous interest in our programs and his great welcoming today.

Mouïñ Hamzé

Secretary General

CNRS, Lebanon