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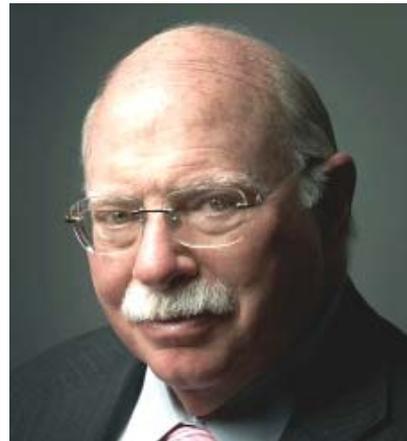
Contact: George Hunka
Communications Manager
212.742.9070 ext. 117
ghunka@aftau.org

Sarah Lubelski
Communications Liaison
011.972.54.308.8441
saralo@tauex.tau.ac.il

Steinhardt Collections Open a Dialogue on the "Future of Physical Anthropology in Israel"

**A permanent home for the unrivalled Tel Aviv University collections
will revitalize an endangered field, say scientists**

Tel Aviv — *Michael Steinhardt*, the legendary hedge fund founder and philanthropist, and a council of scientists, public personalities, and architects, gathered last month to discuss the progress of the **Steinhardt National Collections of Natural History**, which will become Israel's first national natural history institution. The new building will be open to the public as a center for learning and research and provide a much-needed home for **Tel Aviv University's** extensive natural history collections.



Yael Dayan, former Member of the Israeli Knesset, Chair of the Tel Aviv Yaffo City Council, and daughter of celebrated Israeli politician Moshe Dayan, was on hand to welcome participants and chair the meeting. "If we were coming to a parking lot before, now we are coming to a dig," she said, noting the building's progress. "And after we go as deep as necessary, we will start climbing." The skeleton of the building is set to be completed in 18 months.

The institution is already at the forefront of a national discussion on strategies to preserve the field of physical anthropology in Israel — a crucial but endangered field of science. In addition to housing millions of specimens as a record of biodiversity in Israel and the region, the Steinhardt National Collections of Natural History will be a research portal for the life sciences, medicine, and the humanities.

Putting human evolution at the forefront

The main objective of the meeting was to discuss the status of physical anthropology in Israel, including the current dangers, the obstacles to its development, and the hopes for its future. According to **Prof.**

Israel Hershkovitz, head of the **Dan David Laboratory for the Search and Study of Modern Humans** at the **Sackler Faculty of Medicine** and the curator of the physical anthropology collection, the outlook is bleak. Giving a detailed description of the state of the field, he noted that scientists will continue to lose invaluable specimens if human remains are not protected as antiquities.

In the quest to understand the origin of modern humans, Israel is one of the most important regions in the world. Crucial data about world-historical events is embedded within the remains found in Israeli archaeological sites — but there are currently many obstacles preventing the intensive study of human remains. TAU's anthropological collection is unrivalled worldwide and includes significant specimens, among which are of the largest collection of the last hunter gatherers in the eastern Mediterranean, the earliest modern humans outside of Africa, the sole evidence of crucifixion, and the largest collection of eastern Neanderthals. But the collection has been drastically reduced in the last years.

Human remains are the sole physical evidence for many dimensions of past human life, including physical appearance, health status, family structure, kinship, diet, and violent encounters. "It's time that the human collections have a permanent house. This is our last chance," said Prof. Hershkovitz in an impassioned appeal at the meeting. "The new building for the Steinhardt National Collections of Natural History represents a future for physical anthropology in Israel."

For future generations of scientists

Tel Aviv University, which operates one of the last active laboratories for physical anthropology in the country, has the opportunity to be an agent for change through the vision and generous support of Michael Steinhardt for the National Collections. The building will not only protect the collection of human remains, but provide a fertile training ground for the next generation of scientists to study and develop the field.

Participants agreed to produce a collective statement regarding the importance of physical anthropology in Israel and encourage positions for researchers in academic institutions across the country, noting that it was time to take a stand to preserve the field of study and its natural collections.

American Friends of Tel Aviv University (www.aftau.org) supports Israel's leading, most comprehensive and most sought-after center of higher learning. Independently ranked 94th among the world's top universities for the impact of its research, TAU's innovations and discoveries are cited more often by the global scientific community than all but 10 other universities.

Internationally recognized for the scope and groundbreaking nature of its research and scholarship, Tel Aviv University consistently produces work with profound implications for the future.