

# L'ORÉAL

## Five Outstanding Women Scientists Receive L'Oréal-Unesco Awards For Women In Science 2007

Paris, 22 February – Five prominent women scientists, one from each continent, today received the 9th L'ORÉAL-UNESCO Awards for Women in Science. The distinctions were presented at UNESCO Headquarters by Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO, and Lindsay Owen Jones, Chairman of L'ORÉAL.

The laureates, all physicists or chemists, are:

**Pr. Ameenah GURIB-FAKIM (Mauritius), Laureate for Africa.** Professor of Organic Chemistry and Pro-Vice-Chancellor, University of Mauritius, “For her exploration and analysis of plants from Mauritius and their bio-medical applications.” Analysis of the antibacterial and antifungal properties of plants from Mauritius is paving the way for their use as safe and effective alternatives to commercial medicines, including potential diabetes therapies. Professor Gurib-Fakim created the first-ever full inventory of the medicinal and aromatic plants on Mauritius and neighboring island Rodriguez. [www.uom.ac.mu/](http://www.uom.ac.mu/)

**Pr. Ligia GARGALLO (Chili), Laureate for Latin America.** Professor, Department of Physical Chemistry, Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, Santiago, “For her contributions to understanding solution properties of polymers”. Data published as a result of Professor Gargallo’s studies helps drug designers visualize how new compounds will interact with enzymes in the body and opens the door to the rational design of synthetic enzymes. [www.uc.cl/quimica/html/academicos/lg.htm](http://www.uc.cl/quimica/html/academicos/lg.htm)

**Pr. Mildred DRESSELHAUS (USA), Laureate for North America.** Institute Professor of Electrical Engineering and Physics, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Cambridge, Massachusetts, “For her research on solid state materials, including conceptualizing the creation of carbon nanotubes.” Due to their small size, high strength and electrical conductivity, carbon nanotubes are ideal for new materials used in objects such as lightweight bicycles and flat-panel screens. [http://web.mit.edu/physics/facultyandstaff/faculty/millie\\_dresselhaus.html](http://web.mit.edu/physics/facultyandstaff/faculty/millie_dresselhaus.html)

**Pr. Margaret BRIMBLE (New Zealand), Laureate for Asia-Pacific.** Chair of Organic and Medicinal Chemistry, University of Auckland, Auckland, “For her contribution to the synthesis of complex natural products, especially shellfish toxins.” Professor Brimble has focused on the synthesis of shellfish toxins that are useful for the design and development of drugs for clinical conditions including Alzheimer’s, epilepsy, hypertension, stroke, and cancer. <http://www.che.auckland.ac.nz/staffsites/BrimbleM/index.html>

**Pr. Tatiana BIRSHTEIN (Russia), Laureate for Europe.** Professor, Institute of Macromolecular Compounds, Russian Academy of Sciences, St Petersburg, “For her contribution to the

understanding of the shapes, sizes and motions of large molecules.” Professor Birshtein's work has shed new light on the self-organizing properties of many remarkable polymeric systems essential to plastics used in soft-drink bottles, plastic bags and other familiar materials such as nylon, rayon, Styrofoam, Plexiglas and Teflon. <http://www.macro.ru/Birshtein/grants.html>

The 2007 Laureates, who each received US\$100,000, were selected after deliberation by the L'ORÉAL-UNESCO Awards International Jury in the Material Sciences, presided by Pierre-Gilles de Gennes, Nobel Prize in Physics, in the presence of Professor Christian de Duve, Nobel Prize in Medicine and Founding President of the Awards.

“The L'ORÉAL-UNESCO partnership is exemplary because of the vision of science it aims to promote in order to safeguard the future of the planet,” declared UNESCO's Director-General. “It is exemplary in the way it conceptualizes the role to be played in this formidable task by organizations such as ours.”

For the Chairman of L'ORÉAL, “Our partnership grows from day to day because it is based on strong convictions: the world needs science and science needs women, but women also need support, encouragement and recognition to lead successful scientific careers.”

Women are too often ignored and discriminated against in the scientific arena. They represent a mere 27% of researchers worldwide, with glaring disparities from one continent to another: 46% in South America, 29% in Africa, 15% in Asia, according to a UNESCO study conducted in 2006 (<http://www.uis.unesco.org>). The European Commission has revealed that in Europe, 32% of state laboratory employees and only 18% of private laboratory staff are female. As for the OECD, it notes a sharp decline in the number of students in sciences and technology, particularly marked among girls, notably in the United States, Canada and France.

The result of a unique partnership, the L'ORÉAL-UNESCO Awards aim to recognize the contributions of outstanding women researchers to scientific progress and encourage the participation of women in scientific research. The laureates serve as role models for future generations, encouraging young women around the world to follow in their footsteps. To date, 47 women originating from 24 countries have received these distinctions.

In all, more than 350 women researchers worldwide have benefited from the program “For Women in Science”. Created by L'ORÉAL and UNESCO in 1998, the pioneering program has launched multiple projects designed to support the efforts of women in science, encourage scientific progress and promote the development of societies on a global scale. Besides the Awards, 15 UNESCO-L'ORÉAL International Fellowships are given annually to post-doctoral students. The 2007 Fellowships were presented on 21 February at UNESCO. In addition, since 2001, more than 200 doctoral students have received L'ORÉAL National Fellowships, supported by the UNESCO National Commissions.

Strengthened by its success, the L'ORÉAL-UNESCO partnership continues to expand in order to fight discrimination and stimulate young people's interest in scientific vocations. This year, it will support new activities, initiated by laureates and Awards jury members, to raise science awareness among young people in schools and universities.

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Note: For access to photos of 2007 Laureates free for use by the media:

www.fwis-pictures.com

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