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Primo Levi Award 2025 for Jean-Marie Lehn

GDCh-Öffentlichkeitsarbeit
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On December 3rd, at the Sala Zuccari of the Italian Senate in Roma, Nobel Laureate Professor Jean-Marie Lehn will be honored with the Primo Levi Award 2025. The award, jointly presented by the Italian Chemical Society (Società Chimica Italiana, SCI), the German Chemical Society (Gesellschaft Deutscher Chemiker, GDCh), and the Centro Internazionale di Studi Primo Levi, recognizes the profound contributions of Prof. Lehn as an advocate of the transnational nature of science. His dedication has been instrumental in advancing pan-European scientific cooperation within the chemistry community. Prof. Lehn played an outstanding role in overcoming historical and political divisions, thereby fostering a cohesive and unified spirit across the continent.

This year, the Italian Chemical Society (Società Chimica Italiana, SCI), the German Chemical Society (Gesellschaft Deutscher Chemiker, GDCh), and the Centro Internazionale di Studi Primo Levi are honoring Prof. Jean-Marie Lehn with the Primo Levi Award in recognition of his remarkable impact as an ambassador of science dedicated to uniting people through scientific excellence, international cooperation, and the ethical advancement of knowledge. His legacy encompasses groundbreaking scientific discoveries and a profound commitment to fostering unity, understanding, and cooperation across borders.

Prof. Jean-Marie Lehn consistently demonstrated the power of science as a pivotal force in promoting European scientific cohesion and transnational cooperation in the post–Cold War era. He played a crucial role in overcoming historical divisions contributing significantly to harmonize chemical research and education across the continent. Without his initiative, the joint European

publishing endeavour known as Chemistry Europe — launched with the first common publication, Chemistry: A European Journal — might never have come into existence.

In addition, through his leadership role at the International Organization for Chemical Sciences in Development (IOCD), Professor Lehn has significantly advanced the chemical sciences for sustainable development, particularly in developing countries. His core belief, namely that “Science is a vector of peace, development, and progress. It is universal. It should be shared universally” perfectly aligns with the ethical legacy of Primo Levi and underscores Professor Lehn’s commitment to human values and scientific integrity that make him so deserving of this prestigious award.

Primo Levi's enduring philosophy, which emphasizes the crucial link between scientific facts and human values, finds a powerful parallel in Professor Lehn's dedicated pursuit of ethical responsibility in science. Professor Lehn's excellence in fostering international cooperation, interdisciplinary dialogue, and ethical research demonstrates a profound commitment to human rights and scientific integrity, undoubtedly meriting him this prestigious recognition.

Born in 1939 in Rosheim, Alsace region, Professor Jean-Marie Lehn is a pioneer of supramolecular chemistry. Together with Donald J. Cram and Charles Pedersen, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1987 for the “development and use of molecules with a structure-specific effect of high selectivity”. Professor Lehn’s ground-breaking research has redefined the understanding of molecular recognition and self-organization, leading to the development of supramolecular chemistry as a field of immense scientific and technological significance. His discoveries have paved the way for new approaches in drug design, materials science, and nanotechnology, demonstrating the power of chemistry to address global challenges in health, sustainability, and advanced materials. Besides the Nobel Prize and among many other honors, Prof. Jean-Marie Lehn has received the Karl Ziegler Prize from the GDCh in 1989 and the Giulio Natta Gold Medal from the SCI in 2003.

The Primo Levi Award, established in 2017 by the GDCh, SCI, and Centro Internazionale di Studi Primo Levi, commemorates Italian chemist and writer Primo Levi. The award celebrates outstanding chemists and related scientists who are recognized for their research excellence, as well as their significant contributions to humanity, upholding human rights, and raising awareness about science's vital role in achieving just, inclusive, and sustainable global progression.

Primo Levi (1919-1987), the son of a Jewish family, successfully studied chemistry despite the Italian racial laws prohibited Jews from attending state universities at the time. In 1943, he joined the Resistenza, the Italian resistance movement. He was captured that same year and deported to Auschwitz in 1944, where he was forced to work in the Buna chemical plant. Seriously ill, he survived and returned to Torino after his liberation in 1945 where he worked for almost thirty years in the

chemical industry. The war years left an indelible mark on him, shaping his life's trajectory. In 1947, he published his seminal work, "Se questo è un uomo" ("If This Is A Man"), processing his harrowing experiences in Auschwitz. Until his death, he devoted himself to bearing witness to the Holocaust and preserving its memory, while also championing human rights and the vital connection between chemistry and society.

The German Chemical Society (Gesellschaft Deutscher Chemiker, GDCh) has approximately 28,000 members and is one of the largest chemical scientific societies worldwide. It promotes scientific research and teaching as well as the exchange and dissemination of new scientific knowledge. The German Chemical Society supports the creation of networks, the trans-disciplinary and international collaboration and continuous education and training in schools, universities and professional environment.