August 22, 2013

President of Russia
Vladimir V. Putin
23, Ilyinka Street
Moscow, 103132
Russia

Dear Vladimir Vladimirovich,

It has come to our attention that the Russian Duma may enact legislation transforming the structure of scientific research and technology in Russia, abandoning the time-honored Russian model in favor of a Western one. We understand it is proposed to transfer all responsibility for research and development from the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS) to the universities. We are concerned about this proposal for four reasons: first, because it is not clear that the Western model is better for Russia; second, because sudden, radical change may devastate the Russian scientific community before the establishment of a new order; third, because any change should involve the scientists themselves, who best know what changes are needed, and who will be supportive if they are part of the process; and fourth, because science is international, and Russian scientists are very important members of the broader scientific community to which we all belong.

Since its creation by Peter the Great in 1724, the RAS has risen to world-class status in research and development. The exploration of space and the semiconductor revolution were among important firsts due to research at the RAS. Eighteen Nobel laureates have been associated with the RAS. Until the drastic curtailment of funding twenty years ago, many of the research institutions of the RAS were competitive with those in the West. The RAS can still serve as a basis for research and development in Russia, together with the universities, as they strengthen their research activities.

By tradition, teaching in Russia has been the province of the universities. There are, nevertheless, important exceptions, such as the St. Petersburg Academic University, which engages members of the RAS in instruction at secondary school and undergraduate levels. All institutions must continually reform to remain current, and among the reforms that might be considered in Russia would be enlarging the contribution of the RAS to education in the universities, while at the same time increasing support for research in the universities (for example, Moscow State University, the Moscow Physical and Technical Institute, and Novosibirsk State University). We wish to emphasize, however, the importance of gradual reform. Each change must add value to the system without harming it. Only incremental change is likely to be beneficial.

We hope you will consider these concerns and take action to save Russian science rather than risk destroying it. The future of the Russian Federation and of people everywhere depend on your decision.

Most respectfully,

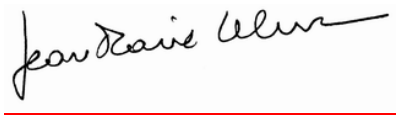
Aaron Ciechanover (Nobel Prize, Chemistry 2004; Israel)

Alan Heeger (Nobel Prize, Chemistry, 2000; USA)

Sheldon Lee Glashow (Nobel Prize, Physics, 1979; USA)

David Gross (Nobel Prize, Physics, 2004; USA)

Roger Kornberg (Nobel Prize, Chemistry, 2006; USA)



Jean-Marie Lehn (Nobel Prize, Chemistry, 1987; France)

Richard Roberts (Nobel Prize, Medicine, 1993; USA)