

TO THE PRESIDENT OF ARGENTINA MAURICIO MACRI AND THE ARGENTINE AUTHORITIES IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

After 12 years of continuous growth and expansion (2003-2015) the science and technology system of Argentina is collapsing due to budget cuts, personnel reductions, breach of assumed commitments in research grants, international cooperation and serious restrictions imposed by the current government. These policies, which include abandoning of the much-needed plans for infrastructure improvement and new constructions, not only affect the National Research Council (CONICET) and the National Agency for the Promotion of Science and Technology (ANPCYT), but also the National Universities.

CONICET is on the verge of paralysis. The survival of this organism founded half a century ago by Nobel laureate Bernardo Houssay and that employs ten thousand investigators, a similar number of PhD and postdoctoral fellows and nearly three thousand technicians is at great risk.

The meager budgets received by the more than 250 research institutes distributed all over the country, are now insufficient to pay service bills, guarantee cleaning and safety of facilities or to repair and maintain basic scientific equipment.

It should also be noticed that more than a 4-fold devaluation of the Argentine currency (from 9 pesos per US\$ in December 2015 to near 40 pesos per US\$ today) has greatly hindered the purchase power of the research grants, set in pesos, which dramatically affects experimental and field-research groups in which imported reagents and equipment are crucial.

In only two years of the new government, the salaries of the researchers and scholars became the lowest of the geographical region. With monthly stipends lower than 24 thousand pesos for postdoctoral fellows (US\$ 600), barely higher salaries for young researchers and with a de-hierarchized scale for more senior researchers, a new exodus of highly trained scientists is foreseen. This is also stimulated by the sharp reduction in the yearly number of vacancies available in the CONICET for new young investigators that in 2016 dropped abruptly from 900 to 450.

To complete this dark panorama, the Ministry of Science has been recently degraded to a secretary of the Ministry of Education. This political decision, with a great negative symbolic burden, reveals how little the current administration cares about science and technology.

Argentine scientists have raised a flag in defense of science and technology in the country. The budget decrease for the sector, driven by the adjustment policies imposed by a recent agreement between your government and the International Monetary Fund, will mark further setbacks that will have a direct impact on society.

We urge the government of Argentina to revert these policies to preserve a scientific and technological system that has been a leader in Latin America and to prevent an imminent exodus of scientists. It would seem obvious to explain the importance of scientific and technological research for any country and how technological dependence produces economic, political and cultural dependence. The State is the driving force necessary to support and develop large-scale public projects aimed at solving strategic, social and economic needs.

If urgent measures are not taken, the deterioration will cause the dissolution of research groups, the paralysis of very valuable instruments and the exodus of scientists, thus squandering the investment that Argentina has made over many years.