**Israel’s Technion making its mark in the U.S.**

*In an interview with JointMedia News Service, Dr. Peretz Lavie, the president of Israel’s premier engineering and technical university, discussed the intense history of his university’s developing partnership with Cornell University and the City of New York.*

By Maxine Dovere/JointMedia News Service

NEW YORK— Under Dr. Peretz Lavie’s watch, the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology has invested in more than just science.

In an effort to increase the school’s number of Arab-Israeli students, Technion’s Landa Equal Opportunities Project provides services like health programs and academic preparation for Arab students in the Upper Galilee, dramatically decreasing their dropout rate. Arabs, who constitute 20 percent of Israel’s population, now also represent 20 percent of the student body on the Technion campus.

“When I read the proclamations calling the Technion an ‘apartheid university,’ I don’t know whether to laugh or to cry,’” Lavie, the university’s president since October 2009, said in an interview with JointMedia News Service.

Lavie was in New York to discuss the city’s ongoing partnership with Technion and Cornell University. New York announced the partnership last December, with the goal of creating an unmatched engineering campus on Roosevelt Island, which lies between Manhattan and Queens along the East River.

New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg said the campus is expected to generate $23 billion in economic activity, enhance job creation in the city, and generate 600 companies expected to provide 30,000 jobs over the next three decades. “Thanks to this outstanding partnership and groundbreaking proposal from Cornell and the Technion,” he said last December. “New York City’s goal of becoming the global leader in technological innovation is now within sight.”

Officially called “Cornell New York Tech, Home of the Technion-Cornell Institute of Innovation,” the massive academic project is affectionately known simply as “the Island.” The institute will be looking for students with entrepreneurial spirit, ready to experiment and to drive the economy, according to Lavie. London, Amsterdam and several U.S. cities have already asked the Technion to act as a consultant for similar efforts.

Lavie told JointMedia News Service that Technion’s strategic goal is “to be among the ten leading technical universities in the world, joining such schools as MIT, Cal Tech, Stanford, and Georgia Tech in the United States, and the leading universities in Europe, Asia and India.”

“I truly believe globalization is very important for high academic education to attract the best faculty and students and stay at the top of your field,” he said.

Lavie looks at science as “a most effective bridge, perhaps a means of overcoming political differences.”

“Science is a language shared even by enemies, he said. “It can bridge the gaps and help in the political conflict.” He noted that, “Some of the most successful collaboration between Palestinians and Israelis is in the field of science.”

Asked about the parameters of the Cornell-Technion partnership, Lavie stressed that a “precondition for participation” was that Israel could not take funds from its own budget for investment in New York. The Technion will not invest its own money in Roosevelt Island, but will take part in joint fundraising. Individual donors—some who have made contributions to both universities—will be approached. Combining foundation grants, economic development money and private contributions, Lavie said he is “sure we will be able to complete funding by 2017,” when the first two major buildings on the campus are slated to be ready.

“We have a fantastic partner in Cornell and its leadership,” Lavie said. “Cornell has taken the project with open heart and sees us as equal partners. We will collaborate in a way that is rare in an academic institute.”

True to his vision of science as a bridge builder, Lavie looks at “the Island” development as a “long bridge connecting Haifa and Manhattan, opening a window to the entire world.” He envisions PhD students spending a year in Haifa during the course of their studies. Israeli companies, many of which have research facilities within 10 minutes of the Haifa campus, will have a connection to Manhattan to develop joint research projects, while burgeoning Israeli scientists will have a way to return to Israel.

In a bit of academic jousting, Prof. Menachim Ben-Sasson—president of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem—shed light on the significance of the Technion Cornell partnership.

“I hate to say it, but your achievement is not a Technion achievement, but a national achievement, recognition of the top quality in Israeli education,” Ben-Sasson told Lavie.