

PRESS RELEASE

**Susan M. Gasser to receive the 2012 FEBS/EMBO Women in Science Award**

*Swiss biologist recognized for her research on chromatin biology and epigenetics*

**Heidelberg, 15 February 2012** – The European Molecular Biology Organization (EMBO) and the Federation of European Biochemical Societies (FEBS) announce Susan M. Gasser, director of the Friedrich Miescher Institute for Biomedical Research in Basel, Switzerland, as the winner of the 2012 FEBS/EMBO Women in Science Award. Professor Gasser has been recognized for her outstanding scientific research on genome stability and epigenetics and her commitment to mentoring women pursuing a career in science.

The FEBS/EMBO Women in Science Award rewards the exceptional achievements of a female researcher in molecular biology over the previous five years. Winners of the award are role models who inspire future generations of women in science.

The Gasser laboratory studies two research topics of central importance to human health and disease: the maintenance of genome stability through DNA repair, and the role of epigenetic inheritance during tissue differentiation. Susan and her colleagues have examined how the experience of the cell and the environment impacts the epigenetic code in different organisms. The Swiss scientist has authored more than 200 scientific articles and reviews over the last thirty years. The implications of her research are far-reaching for human disease, notably cancer. “Susan Gasser is not only a first-rate scientist, but is also playing an important role as one of the most dynamic and successful female scientific leaders in Europe and, indeed, anywhere,” stated Gottfried Schatz, Professor Emeritus of Biochemistry at the University of Basel.

“This is indeed a great honor, since being recognized as a top scientist seems harder for a woman than for a man,” said the award winner upon hearing of her distinction. “My own success, in any case, reflects that of my team, which works well balancing individual goals with those of the group as a whole. This coordination is a talent women scientists often have.”

Mentoring female scientists was a role that she assumed early on in her career. Susan supported mentoring programmes at the University of Geneva, Switzerland, and the Swiss National Science Foundation. Career and family matters in academic institutions and industry were a frequent topic of her lectures. She has also trained many female scientists in her own laboratory with the result that many of them now run their own labs, and others are in leading positions in industry. “I am very proud of having trained a lot of very successful scientists,” said the award winner.

“She clearly represents a role model for female scientists in Europe and beyond,” commented Erich Nigg, Director of the Biozentrum, University of Basel, who has followed Susan’s scientific career for the past 25 years.

The 2012 FEBS/EMBO Women in Science Award of 10,000 euros will be presented to Susan M. Gasser on 7 September at the 37th FEBS Congress in Sevilla, Spain, where she will present a plenary lecture.

Nominations for the 2013 FEBS/EMBO Women in Science Award close on 15 October 2012. For more information, please visit: <http://www.embo.org/policy-and-society/women-in-science/women-in-science-award.html> or <http://www.febs.org/women-award>.

#### Biosketch

Susan Gasser studied biology at the University of Chicago and completed her PhD at the University of Basel, developing an assay for the import of mitochondrial proteins with Gottfried Schatz. During her postdoctoral studies she examined questions of metaphase chromosome structure and higher-order organization of DNA in *Drosophila* nuclei.

Between 1986 and 2001, she led a research group at the Swiss Institute for Experimental Cancer Research in Epalinges, Switzerland, focusing on the functional implications of chromosomal organization in *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*. In 2001, she assumed the position of professor at the Department of Molecular Biology at the University of Geneva, Switzerland. Since December 2004, she is Director of the Friedrich Miescher Institute (FMI) for Biomedical Research in Basel and Professor of Molecular Biology at the University of Basel.

Professor Gasser has served nine years as a member of the Swiss National Science Foundation Council, she was Vice-chair and Chair (as of 2003) of the EMBO Council, and currently sits on numerous editorial boards, review committees and advisory boards. She has been awarded several prizes, including the National Latsis Prize, the INSERM International Prize 2011 Miescher Prize and the Medal of Honor from the Charles University in Prague.

#### About EMBO

EMBO stands for excellence in the life sciences. We enable the best science by supporting talented researchers, stimulating scientific exchange and advancing policies for a world-class European research environment.

EMBO is an organization of 1500 leading life scientist members that fosters new generations of

researchers to produce world-class scientific results. EMBO helps young scientists to advance their research, promote their international reputations and ensure their mobility. Courses, workshops, conferences and scientific journals disseminate the latest research and offer training in cutting-edge techniques to maintain high standards of excellence in research practice. EMBO helps to shape science and research policy by seeking input and feedback from our community and by following closely the trends in science in Europe. For more information: [www.embo.org](http://www.embo.org)

### **About FEBS**

The Federation of European Biochemical Societies (FEBS) is a leading European organization of the life sciences. Its constituent societies, whose membership exceeds 40,000 in Europe and adjoining countries, extend from Ireland and Iceland in the west, to Armenia in the east.

FEBS promotes research and the teaching of biochemistry, molecular cell biology and molecular biophysics, by supporting an annual congress, a rich program of advanced practical and theoretical courses, workshops and special lectures. These activities are complemented by an extensive fellowships program, enabling mobility of young and senior scientists across the European continent.

FEBS has pioneered the creation of scientific publication forums for European life scientists by its three leading journals, *FEBS Journal*, *FEBS Letters* and *Molecular Oncology*.

Being concerned about Europe's scientific future, FEBS has been involved in the establishment of the European Life Science Forum (ELSF) and the Initiative for Science in Europe (ISE), both active in developing new channels and means for advancing science.

For more information: <http://www.febs.org/>