

**Official Press-Release of Viktor Ambartsumian International Prize Steering Committee, 16.07.2010, Yerevan, Armenia**

**Viktor Ambartsumian International Prize 2010** goes to famous Swiss astrophysicist **Prof. Michel Mayor** and two of his team members

Viktor Ambartsumian International Prize has been established by the President of Armenia in 2009 and at present is one of the important awards in astronomy/astrophysics and related sciences. It is being awarded to outstanding scientists from any country and nationality having significant contribution in science. The Prize totals USD 500,000 and will be awarded once every two years, starting with 2010.

The deadline for nominations was March 18, and the International Steering Committee chaired by the President of the Armenian National Academy of Sciences *Prof. Radik Martirosyan* received nominations from national academies of sciences, universities, observatories, and Nobel Prize winners for 14 outstanding scientists and teams from different countries. After a thorough study of the nominated works, as well as independent referees' reports, the Committee had several discussions and finally *Prof. Michel Mayor* and his team nominated by the Swiss Academy of Sciences were selected as winners.

Michel Mayor, professor at the Geneva University, is the co-discoverer of the first extrasolar planet orbiting a solar-type star. He is the principal investigator of an important survey carried in the southern hemisphere to search and characterize exoplanets. Still going on at La Silla Observatory (ESO, Chile) this survey has allowed the discovery of several planets with mass as small as a few Earth masses.

Michel Mayor and his team members, nominated by the Swiss Academy of Sciences, have done outstanding contributions in the domain of planetary systems and their host stars. Despite the large number of discovered extrasolar planets, the formation of planetary systems is still far to be understood. The amazing diversity of these systems is challenging. On the last ten years, Mayor and his international team including members of the Astrophysical Institute of Canary Islands, IAC, (Garik Israelian) and Centro de Astrofísica da Universidade do Porto, CAUP, (Nuno Santos), have characterized the physical and chemical properties of stars with extrasolar planets. Small anomalies of spectra of stars hosting planets contribute to our understanding of the complexity of planetary formation mechanisms. The results obtained by that team had a strong impact on planet formation models.

*References:* Mayor et al. 2009, *Astronomy & Astrophysics* 507, 487; Israelian et al. 2009, *Nature* 462,189; Santos et al. 2004, *Astronomy & Astrophysics* 415, 1153.

*The winners of Viktor Ambartsumian International Prize 2010 were announced at the press-conference held at the Armenian National Academy of Sciences on Friday, July 16. The official award ceremony will take place on September 18 in Yerevan.*