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## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **10<sup>th</sup> Conference of Italian Researchers in the World**

HOUSTON — On December 6, 2014 the 10<sup>th</sup> Conference of Italian Researchers in the World will take place in Houston at the auditorium of the Consulate General of Italy. It is organized by the Committee for Italians Abroad (COM.IT.ES) of the district of Houston, that includes Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma and Texas, in collaboration with the Tricolor Committee for Italians in the World (CTIM) and with the patronage of the Consulate General of Italy in Houston. The event celebrates an important anniversary that will see the participation of authorities in the fields of Medicine, Biomedical Sciences, Physics, Engineering, Aerospace, Geology, Energy and Humanities, linked to Italy through their nationality, sector of interest, or active relationships with Italian public and private organizations.

Once more, the initiative is driven by the intent to bring citizens closer to science and fill the gap between scientific and humanistic cultures. «The Conference of Italian Researchers in the World,» states Andrea Duchini, Director of the Scientific Organizing Committee, “will be open to the entire community, scientific or lay, and will serve to draw attention to the strong contribution of Italian research in the world. Scientists are a category seldom in the spotlight, despite they work tirelessly on a daily basis to improve the quality of life of all of us. I believe their efforts should be highlighted.”

One of the conference’s flagships will be the collaboration between the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston (UTMB Health) and the University of Palermo, Italy that led to the establishment of the **International Research Doctorate Program in Biomedicine and Neurosciences**, operative at both institutions. During this program, graduate students will spend 18 months in each university and upon completion, will obtain both the Italian Dottore di Ricerca (DdR) title, as well as the American Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) qualification. Graduate students currently enrolled in this new program are conducting research on pancreatic regenerative medicine with a focus on pancreatic islet-mediated diabetic therapy, on liver cancer pathogenesis with the aim of identifying novel therapies, and on the role of heat shock proteins in the development of Alzheimer’s disease.

The doctoral program received much international attention, both in Texas – during the previous editions of the Conference of Italian Researchers in the World that took place in Houston – and in Italy where it was one of the very few doctoral programs selected to participate at the “InterDoc2014 International, Intersectorial and Interdisciplinary: the Triple ‘i’ Approach to Doctoral Training” international conference that will be held in Padua in November 2014.

As specified by the program Chairs Felicia Farina (Palermo) and Giulio Tagliatela (Galveston), as well as by Francesco Cappello (Palermo) and Luca Cicalese (Galveston), in charge of the international agreement between the two institutions, future developments of the program include expanding research efforts also in the fields of bioengineering, biomaterials and nanotechnologies, with the goal of developing new therapeutic devices aimed at improving human health and quality of life.

To address these issues, Italian and Texan biomedical and bioengineering experts will participate in organizational meetings that will take place in December 2014 in Galveston and in March 2015 in Palermo, with the goal of initiating new joint research efforts as soon as possible.

Representative of the many collaborative efforts between Italy and the USA that involve our compatriots and their enterprises, will be the oral presentation of Brando Ballerini, President of Drillmec Inc., a company of the Trevi group. He will explain the role that his engineers had in the **rescue of the Costa Concordia**. A salvage operation never attempted before, made feasible through a partnership of American and Italian enterprises, among which the Trevi group, that using the most sophisticated technologies and an innovative project, were able to satisfactorily complete the endeavor in less than two years with a total cost of 1.5 billion dollars. Thanks to the highly qualified professionals, the operation was completed very successfully giving back an undamaged seabed, without accidents of any sort, to Giglio island.

We will also learn about research on invisibility with Andrea Alù, a young Roman physicist of the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering of The University of Texas at Austin, who created an **invisibility cloak** that can hide three-dimensional objects, an active invisibility system based on an innovative method able to theoretically hide objects at a frequency range orders of magnitude broader than any available passive cloaking technology.

During the conference there will also be a live connection with the **Pyramid International Laboratory/Observatory**, located at over 16.500 ft above sea level at the base of the Nepali side of **Mount Everest**, a world renowned gem of the Italian National Research Council, for high altitude scientific research.

This year, the conference will also highlight **humanitarian missions and health care campaigns** thanks to the presence of Rino Martinez, for years involved with his non-profit organization “Ali per Volare” in protecting the Pygmies, ancient tribe of the Congo Rainforest, at risk of extinction. For many years his missions have been aimed at vaccinating and curing tens of thousands of children, women and elderly people, otherwise destined to die. In October, Martinez launched his “Umanità dove sei - l’Africa di Rino

Martinez" Mondadori Tour – that will end in Milan on November 28, just a few days before his stop in Houston. In addition to presenting his humanitarian activities to the local community, the singer-songwriter from Palermo hopes to go back to Italy with a letter of intent to establish an epidemiology data center for pathologies which are prevalent in the Congo rainforest, in order to facilitate their study and cure.

Among the high level participants that will contribute to the conference, are also the **sicilian astronaut Luca Parmitano**, the **neapolitan oncologist Antonio Giordano, Renato Giordano**, a key engineer involved in the development of the Global Positioning System (GPS), and the **emilian archeologist and writer Valerio Massimo Manfredi**. The latter will award the “Scrivere la Nuova Europa: Editoria Italiana Autori e Lettori nell’Era Digitale” Literary Prize to the best essays written by middle school and high school students. Once again, the prize is sponsored by the COM.IT.ES and coordinated by Marina Mocchi, in charge of the Cultural Office of the Consulate General of Italy in Houston.

«This extraordinary celebration of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the conference,» concludes Vincenzo Arcobelli, President of the COM.IT.ES, «is significant, also because it represents the tenacity of the entire organizing committee that from October 9, 2005, date in which the first conference was inaugurated in Dallas as Columbus Day festivities were about to begin, to the present day, has catalyzed important bilateral initiatives through this platform and its high level participants. We want to celebrate and honor our countrymen and women who distinguished themselves in their fields, giving a significant contribution to cultural, scientific and economic growth to accelerate progress in the USA and in the world. It will be a moment of great “Italianness”, in which we hope many will participate.»