Distinguished Governor of the province of Córdova;
Distinguished Rector of the National University of Cordoba **Professor Jhon Boretto;**
Honorable President Emeritus, and the founder of the World Cultural Council, **Dr Rafael Valero**;
Honorable President of the World Cultural Council, **Professor Omar M. Yaghi**;
Your excellency, Ambassador of Greece;
fellow award winners, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

I am extremely honored and proud, full of gratitude and humility, to be the recipient of this prestigious award. It is truly wonderful to have one's work recognized in such an important way – so thank you.

This recognition is the outcome of three decades of hard work, perseverance and unwavering dedication. It is a tribute not only to myself but also to the work of the mentors, collaborators and team members that have been instrumental to my scientific trajectory.

Throughout these years we pioneered the development of computer assisted, virtual anthropology methods, thus greatly expanding what we can learn from the fossil and archaeological record. We shed light on the African origin our species, *Homo sapiens,* at 300 thousand years before present - much older than previously hypothesized. We discovered our species' earliest known migration out of Africa more than 200 thousand years ago, and in the process, we fundamentally changed our understanding of human population movements and interactions in the Pleistocene. Through our systematic and interdisciplinary fieldwork, we showed how specific areas acted as refuges for entire ecosystems and for the hominins that depended on them during the Ice Ages. We detailed the environmental and climatic conditions that prevailed there and the adaptations of Pleistocene humans - among them the earliest wooden tools in the world and some of the earliest bone implements known in Europe.

The award is also a recognition for my field of Paleoanthropology. At a time when the relevance of basic, curiosity-driven research is questioned all over the world, this award highlights the importance of our work for society. Human evolutionary studies provide answers to fundamental questions about ourselves and about the shared journey of humanity: who we are, where do we come from, how did we get here? Looking to our past offers us much-needed perspective for our existence today and delivers invaluable insights and lessons for the future from the challenges that our ancestors faced in the past.

This award, and the achievements that it recognizes, would not have been possible without contributions from many people and institutions. I would like to thank all my collaborators, past and present; the University of Tübingen and Senckenberg Research Institution, which have been my scientific home for nearly twenty years; the European Research Council, German Research Foundation, City University of New York, American Museum of Natural History, Max Planck Society, University of Bergen, National Geographic Society and the Leakey, Wenner-Gren, Onassis, Niarchos and Carl Friedrich von Siemens Foundations for supporting me at different times of my life and my career; and finally, thank you to my family, Elias, Maria and Ariadne, for accepting me as I am and supporting me without question.

Thank you.