

PRESS RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL Thursday, 4 May 2023, 17h30 CEST

CONTACT:

info@alba.network

ALBA-FKNE DIVERSITY PRIZE 2023 ANNOUNCED AT THE FENS REGIONAL MEETING 2023

Arish Mudra Rakshasa-Loots (India/UK) has been awarded the ALBA-FKNE Diversity Prize 2023 for his contribution to advancing diversity and inclusion in brain research. This year's prize highlights a Europe-based student or researcher (who is not a group leader) who has made outstanding contributions to promoting diversity in brain sciences. A partnership and joint recognition by the ALBA Network and the FENS-Kavli Network of Excellence (FKNE), this prize is supported by the Federation of European Neuroscience Societies (FENS). The winner will be announced on Thursday 4th May 2023 at 5 pm CEST at a dedicated awarding ceremony at the FENS Regional Meeting 2023, and on ALBA and FENS social media channels.

Dr Laura Andrae (King's College London, UK), Chair of the ALBA network, said: "The idea behind this prize is not just to recognise the incredible contributions to improving diversity by a single individual, but also to help inspire the entire community and remind us of how change is possible by all our actions." "We strive toward diversity in neuroscience to allow the world to benefit from everyone's talents and ideas, regardless of their background or identity, and to allow everyone the opportunity to participate in the exciting process of understanding how the brain works", added Dr Andrew Lin (University of Sheffield, UK), FENS-Kavli Scholar and chair of the ALBA-FKNE Diversity Prize Selection Committee. "Arish is a highly committed and outspoken individual who has worked toward reducing HIV-related healthcare inequities through his doctoral research, with meaningful and quantifiable outcomes across multiple countries. He is more than deserving of the award and will be an excellent role model for our community."

Arish Mudra Rakshasa-Loots, a PhD researcher at the University of Edinburgh, UK, received the award and a €2,000 prize for a wide variety of impactful research, advocacy, and mentoring efforts. For his doctoral research, he investigates the neurobiological mechanisms underlying the contribution of neuroinflammation to high rates of depression amongst people living with HIV. He led the design of a demographic questionnaire which offered participants diverse and culturally sensitive options in isiXhosa to self-report their sexual orientation and gender identity, making a strong case for the increased inclusion of gender and ethnic diversity in participant cohorts. As a recipient of the prestigious Thomas J. Watson Fellowship, he has also engaged in grassroots HIV activism and public health outreach activities in different parts of the world. He led the production of the first open-access isiXhosa-language version of the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9), expanding its use as a culturally specific tool for clinicians serving South African Xhosa speakers to screen for depressive symptoms. He is also committed to giving back and empowering others, particularly South Asian students, to pursue a research career and to openly embrace their intersectional identities. He contributes to building science capacity in his hometown in India by organising research skills training programmes for high school students and offers free mentorship

support for Project EduAccess, a non-profit initiative that aims to improve access to higher education in the UK for learners from marginalised communities in South Asia. “Integrating equity & inclusion advocacy in my research is more than a checkbox activity for me. It is the Sisyphean task of overcoming systematic barriers to professional development that lie ahead of me, while devising useful ways to dismantle those barriers for others to come. As a queer brown immigrant from the Global South, I am committed to creating a more inclusive culture for our researchers and research participants alike. This recognition enables me to remind other multiply-minoritised and early career researchers: you are not only welcome in neuroscience, but your lived experience and perspectives are essential to progressing this field forward.”, reaffirmed Arish.

The Selection Committee was overwhelmed by the variety and quality of applications received, and applauds the incredible efforts made by all the nominees: “With equity and diversity becoming more recognised as important priorities in the neuroscience community, we look forward to future awards recognising the wide range of initiatives being undertaken to improve all aspects of diversity in neuroscience.”

The ALBA-FKNE Diversity Prize, awarded for the first time in 2020, will be celebrated every year at the FENS Forums of Neuroscience and FENS Regional Meetings.

###

The [ALBA Network](#) aims to promote equity and diversity in the brain sciences. The goal of ALBA is to establish a global network to share best practices and provide better visibility, networking and mentoring opportunities to scientists from underrepresented groups in brain research.

The [FENS-Kavli Network of Excellence \(FKNE\)](#) is a self-organised and multidisciplinary network comprising 30 outstanding early- to mid-career independent European neuroscientists. Inaugurated in 2014 by FENS and The Kavli Foundation, FKNE aims to improve neuroscience research in Europe and beyond through scientific exchange, providing opportunities for young scientists and facilitating dialogue between scientists, policymakers, and society.

The [Federation of European Neuroscience Societies](#) is the main organisation for neuroscience in Europe. FENS mission is to advance research and education in neuroscience within and outside Europe, to facilitate interaction and coordination between its members. It currently represents 44 European national and single discipline neuroscience societies, with 22,000 member scientists from 33 European countries.

The [FENS Regional Meeting](#) is dedicated to supporting member societies in promoting excellence in research, with a European regional focus. FRMs aim to strengthen neuroscience in all European countries, promote scientific exchange within and across European regions and secure representation and access to the FRM programme for underrepresented scientists and topics. In 2023, the FENS Regional Meeting will be organized by the Portuguese Society for Neuroscience and will take place on 3-5 May 2023 in Algarve, Portugal.