**The iconic human ancestor *Australopithecus* afarensis "Lucy", together with "Selam" will visit Prague in August! The National Museum and the Ministry of Tourism of Ethiopia will present to the public some of the most valuable and ancient paleoanthropological exhibits in the world**

Press Release on the loan of Lucy to the National Museum

Prague, 4 February 2025

**One of the most valuable and ancient paleoanthropological exhibits in the world will be on display in the opening hall of Human Origins and Fossils of the new exhibition People in the Historical Building of the National Museum from 25 August this year. The 3.2-million-year-old fossil of Australopithecus afarensis, on loan from the National Museum of Ethiopia in Addis Ababa, will be on display for 60 days. In Europe, the original skeletal remains of one of humankind’s earliest ancestors will be on display for the first time in history. Prague will also welcome Selam, the fossil of a small child of the same species as Lucy but roughly 100,000 years older, discovered in the same location 25 years later. Both exhibits represent priceless items of Ethiopia's national cultural heritage, and their loan was made possible through an agreement between both countries, with the support of the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic and the Ministry of Tourism of Ethiopia.**

*"I am delighted that during my visit to Ethiopia in the autumn of 2023 we managed to arrange for the Lucy and Selam fossils to be exhibited in Prague. This is a truly unique event, as the original fossil will be on public display in Europe for the first time ever. I would like to thank Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Minister Selamawit Kassa for lending us the most valuable exhibits of Ethiopia's national cultural heritage to the Czech Republic. I really appreciate it,"* says Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala.

This unique archaeological discovery, made more than 50 years ago by paleoanthropologist Donald Johanson of the Cleveland Museum of Natural History and his student Tom Gray in Ethiopia's Afar Triangle near the village of Hadar, caused a huge sensation in 1974. Even today, it remains one of the oldest known hominin fossils, potentially a direct ancestor of the genus Homo. Lucy received her name from the Beatles' song Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds, which the expedition team played repeatedly on the evening of the discovery. In Ethiopia, she is also known as Dinkinesh, meaning "you are beautiful" in Amharic.

Lucy belonged to an extinct hominin species, a branch of the hominid family that lived between 3.8 and 2.9 million years ago in what is now Ethiopia, an area that was crucial to human evolution. Scientists determined her age based on the volcanic rock layer in which the fossil was found. Lucy was about 106 centimetres tall, weighed 28 kg, and, when her bones were assembled (47 bones, about 40% of the skeleton), resembled a chimpanzee. Her small brain and upper body structure were similar to those of chimpanzees and other apes. However, the bones of her pelvis and legs were already functionally similar to those of the genus Homo, clearly indicating that Lucy belonged to the lineage of modern human ancestors who already walked upright. Her sex was determined based on the structure of her pelvic bones. Additional evidence confirmed that Lucy had already reached adulthood, despite being only 15 to 16 years old, as early hominins matured more quickly than modern humans.

Thanks to her excellent preservation, it was possible for the first time to reconstruct the overall appearance and lifestyle of Australopithecines with considerable accuracy. None of the later paleoanthropological discoveries have garnered as much public interest or had such a profound impact on our understanding of evolution. Ethiopia will also lend the skeletal remains of Australopithecus afarensis known as Selam to the National Museum in Prague. Selam is an exceptionally well-preserved fossil of a young child, estimated to be between 3.3 and 3.2 million years old. It was discovered in 2000 near Lucy's find site, approximately ten kilometres from Hadar in Dikika, and is roughly 100,000 years older than Lucy.

*"I am extremely pleased that we managed to secure such an extraordinary loan, which truly does not happen every day. Lucy and Selam are unique testaments to our civilization and history in every possible dimension. I would like to express my gratitude to my Ethiopian colleagues and to the National Museum, which has long been dedicated to making our history accessible to the public. Commemorating history is one of the key responsibilities of the Ministry of Culture and any democratic government. We will have the opportunity to admire these precious items of Ethiopia's national cultural heritage for 60 days,"* says Martin Baxa, Minister of Culture of the Czech Republic.

*"Welcoming Lucy and Selam is the dream of every museum in the world, and the National Museum is now bringing that dream to life. These priceless exhibits give us a unique insight into the past and deepen our understanding of humanity’s roots. I greatly appreciate the trust and generosity of the Ethiopian side. The opportunity to exhibit these unique items in hall of Human Origins and Fossils in the Czech Republic is both a great honour and a significant responsibility for us. It is also evidence that the National Museum stands among the world's leading museum institutions,"* says Michal Lukeš, Director General of the National Museum.

The National Museum's new permanent exhibition, People, will be among the world’s most significant exhibitions dedicated to humanity. It will provide the most comprehensive presentation of anthropology, prehistory, and material culture in the Czech Republic. The closely interlinked sections Man and His Ancestors and The Story of Prehistoric History will seamlessly integrate anthropological, archaeological, and cultural perspectives. The hyper-realistic models, including a lifelike reconstruction of Lucy, crafted specifically for the National Museum by renowned French sculptor Élisabeth Daynès—whose works can be admired in museums worldwide—are expected to be a major attraction for visitors. The exhibition’s distinctive architectural design was created by architect Petr Janda, while the project’s contractor is Nüssli. Insurance for both exhibits will be provided by the Uniqa insurance company.

The loan of these two exceptional fossils marks the first step in mutual cooperation of museums in both countries. The National Museum will also contribute to the modernization and development of museums in Ethiopia.

**Mgr. Kristina Kvapilová**

*Vedoucí Oddělení vnějších vztahů*

NÁRODNÍ MUZEUM

T: +420 224 497 250

M: +420 731 514 077

E: [kristina.kvapilova@nm.cz](mailto:kristina.kvapilova@nm.cz)