

To whom it may concerns

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## **Recommendation Letter for Margo Diricks for the Gertrud Meissner Award 2025**

Dear Steering committee,

It is with great pleasure that I recommend Dr. ir. Margo Diricks for the prestigious Gertrud Meissner Award, in recognition of her exceptional contributions to the field of mycobacterial research.

Margo joined the research group, Molecular and Experimental Mycobacteriology, led by Prof. Stefan Niemann in 2020 as a postdoctoral researcher. Since then, she has initiated and significantly advanced all projects related to non-tuberculous mycobacteria (NTM) within the group. One of her most significant accomplishments is the development of a customized bioinformatics pipeline for the genomic analysis of NTM, which facilitates rapid taxonomic classification, prediction of antimicrobial resistance and plasmid presence, as well as a core genome multi-locus sequence typing (cgMLST) scheme for transmission and outbreak analysis of *Mycobacterium abscessus*, which is meanwhile used by researchers across the globe. These tools have proven invaluable for both research and clinical collaborations.

Her high level of motivation, interdisciplinary expertise, and strong collaborative spirit have allowed her to contribute to 11 peer-reviewed publications and two book chapters on mycobacteria over the past five years. Impressively, she is (shared) first or last author on five of these publications, including papers in high-impact journals such as Nature Communications and Genome Medicine. Her most recent publication, "Genomic insights into the plasmidome of non-tuberculous mycobacteria," showcases her ability to identify underexplored areas of mycobacterial research and deliver comprehensive, innovative analyses. Through this work, she gained hands-on experience with genomic data of virtually all currently known NTM species—over 200 in total.

Margo's deep scientific curiosity and growing expertise in NTMs have also led to her involvement in routine outbreak investigations, in close collaboration with the National Reference Center for Mycobacteria at the Research Center Borstel. In addition, Margo plays a vital role in capacity-building initiatives. She is currently involved in PANgenS, a large EDCTP-funded project comprising 12 African partners and 4 European institutes, where she contributes to training initiatives aimed at strengthening Africa's capacity in genomic epidemiology, especially for tuberculosis and NTM. Within this project, her ability to communicate complex bioinformatics concepts is instrumental in supporting local researchers.

Her communication skills and engaging presentation style have also been widely recognized: in 2023, she received two “Best Talk” awards—one at the National Microbiology Congress in Belgrade, Serbia, and the other at the Annual Meeting of the European Society of Mycobacteriology in Tirana, Albania. In addition, her publication on the *M. abscessus* cgMLST scheme was recognized as the Best Paper of the Month by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Hygiene und Mikrobiologie (DGHM).

In every aspect of her work, Dr. Diricks exemplifies the qualities that the Gertrud Meissner Award seeks to honor: scientific excellence, innovation, and meaningful contributions to global mycobacterial research. I fully support her nomination and have no doubt that she has a bright future ahead—not only as a pioneering researcher but also as an inspiring mentor and leader in the field.

Sincerely,



Matthias Merker