Honorary Doctorate for two Chemistry Professors

The University of Ruwenzori in the Congo has awarded the professors Gerhard Bringmann (Würzburg) and Virima Mudogo (Kinshasa) the honorary doctorate. By this, the two scientists are honored for their search for new agents against tropical infectious diseases, but also for the initiation of the excellence scholarship system BEBUC.

The distinctions were awarded in a solemn ceremony opening the academic year 2012/2013 at the State University of Ruwenzori (Université Officielle de Ruwenzori, UOR) in the town of Butembo in the East of the Democratic Republic of the Congo last Friday. There the two professors presented their fields of research.

Agents against Malaria

Gerhard Bringmann described the thrilling search for novel agents against tropical infectious diseases, exemplarily for antimalarial compounds. In doing so, he presented the work of his group and the research network SFB 630 („Agents against Infectious Diseases“) in Würzburg, of which he is the coordinator.

Bringmann explained to the non-expert audience how one can isolate novel natural products from plants and assign their chemical structures. Some of these compounds, which he, in part together with Mudogo, discovered in tropical lianas, show promising activities. As an example, some of them can be used to cure malaria – as proven so far in animal experiments.

Agents against Sickle-Cell Anemia

Then Virima Mudogo reported on his search for new agents against sickle-cell anemia. This severe inherited disease is characterized by the sickle-type form of the red blood cells, not round as usual.

This disease has a special relationship to malaria, since it can ("fortune in misfortune!") protect against the infection by malaria parasites. Exactly this advantage, however, on the long term, leads to "misfortune in fortune": The sickle-cell anemia spreads where this protection brings about an advantage, namely in regions where malaria is a deadly threat - thus again in the tropics.

Information on the New Honorary Doctors

In the field of tropical diseases Bringmann and Mudogo have been working together for 20 years. Bringmann has been a full professor of organic chemistry (natural products chemistry) at the University of Würzburg since 1987. He received numerous awards and distinctions for his work, among them an honorary professorship at the famous Peking University in Beijing in China, and the honorary doctorates of the University of Kinshasa (UNIKIN) and the Catholic University of Graben (UCG), both in the Congo.
Virima Mudogo was born in the province of North-Kivu in the East of the Congo. He studied chemistry, initially in Kinshasa, then in Würzburg, where he did his PhD, supported by a scholarship of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) in 1988. Since the end of 1988 he has been a professor at the Faculty of Sciences of UNIKIN and, since 2004, a full professor. From 2005 to 2009 he was the Vice-Recteur of this largest university in the country.

The BEBUC Scholarship System

During the ceremony in Butembo, Bringmann presented the future goals and visions of BEBUC, in which UOR is participating. This scholarship program for excellent Congolese pupils, students, and young scientists was jointly initiated by Bringmann and Mudogo. For this work they have recently been awarded, likewise together, the Civic Medal of Merit First Class (in Gold) of the Congolese People.

In the laudatory speech for the two honorary doctors Prof. Dr. Vikandy Mambo, the Rector of the UOR, emphasized the importance of the scholarship system for the reconstruction of the Congo, taking up Bringmann’s motto "Bila elimu hakuna maendeleo na amani" (that is Swahili and means “Without education no welfare and peace”).

The Lord Mayor of Butembo, Sikuly Uvasaka Makala, agreed with these ideas and applied for membership of his city in the NGO Förderverein Uni Kinshasa, which organizes the scholarship system BEBUC. Thus Butembo is the first city to become an institutional member of this organization.

The decoration of this successful pair of scientists is the very first award of the doctor honoris causa by the UOR. This institution was founded in 2000, initially as an interdisciplinary center and was then, in 2002, turned into a university. It shall help to improve the educational situation in the East of the Congo.

Contact

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