



Press Release

University of Karachi dedicates research center to Tübingen professor

**Biochemist Wolfgang Voelter honored for scientific and financial
development aid - impetus for improved higher education in
Pakistan today**

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The University of Karachi has dedicated its new chemical research center to University of Tübingen's Professor Wolfgang Voelter. The Professor Wolfgang Voelter Laboratories Complex was officially opened by Ina Lepel, Germany's ambassador to Pakistan, today at a ceremony attended by 600 distinguished guests. The University of Karachi said in a statement that the Laboratories Complex was a tribute to the tremendous services Professor Voelter has rendered to Biochemistry in Pakistan.

Professor Voelter has been working with Pakistani researchers for some forty years. In 1976, he obtained sponsorship from the federal German aid agency and other donors for the construction and equipping of a research institute - then costing six million Deutschmarks - at the University of Karachi. His efforts included writing a 700-page report explaining the project's value to the sponsors. Today, several hundred researchers work on natural product chemistry in that building, known as the Husein Ebrahim Jamal Research Institute of Chemistry.

Professor Voelter led an untiring effort to provide both scientific and financial assistance to enable his research projects to go ahead with international working groups in their home countries. Valuable research in these groups included the identification of new biodegradable pesticides and alkaloids from plants, and toxins from scorpions and snakes.

Along with making joint scientific discoveries, Voelter says it was very important to him to improve working conditions in the countries involved and to make it more attractive for local scientists to remain and work in their home countries. "This is something Western democracies have largely failed at," says Voelter. Over the course of his long career, Professor Voelter arranged academic exchanges between his native Germany and many other countries, including China, Turkey, Jordan, Greece, Chile, South Africa and Bulgaria.

But his closest and most productive international partnership was with his Pakistani colleagues, Professor Salimuzaman Siddiqui and Professor Atta-ur-Rahman. Together, the three men acquired successive grants and sponsorships which they used to create research institutes “literally from nothing,” says Voelter, looking back.

The director of the institute, Professor Atta-ur-Rahman, later became Pakistan’s Minister of Science - largely due to the outstanding reputation of his institute. While in government, he invested strongly in the development of higher education in the country. At the 2015 presentation of the Tübingen University Prize to Professor Voelter, Professor Atta-ur-Rahman said that the Tübingen biochemist had provided important impetus in the early stages of that development of Pakistan’s higher education sector.

Wolfgang Voelter (born 1936 in Ludwigsburg) studied Chemistry and Medicine at the University of Tübingen and completed his doctorate here. After further medical studies at the University of Erlangen, he conducted research at Stanford University, California, and at the Kaiser Foundation Research Institute in San Francisco, before returning to Tübingen, where he completed his habilitation. From 1973, he was Professor of Physical Biochemistry, director of the Chemical Central Institute and Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Chemistry and Pharmacy.

Professor Voelter has spent many decades isolating natural chemical agents from tropical and subtropical flora and fauna - with the aim of finding medical applications for them. He has received the Sebastian Kneipp Award for the structural identification of natural chemical agents, the Erich Krieg Award for metabolism studies of drugs, and the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science Award. Professor Voelter has been honored in Pakistan, too - including receiving Honorary Doctorates from the Universities of Karachi and Hamdard, the Pakistan President Gold Medal, and in 1995, Pakistan’s greatest honor, the Sitara Award.



The Prof. Wolfgang Voelter Laboratories Complex at the University of Karachi, Pakistan
Photos: University of Karachi



Professor Wolfgang Voelter (left) and University of Tübinge President, Professor Bernd Engler, at the University Prize presentation.

Photo: Friedhelm Albrecht / University of Tübingen

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