

## **Professor Berhanu Abegaz**

Professor Berhanu Abegaz was born in Ethiopia. He completed his secondary education at Woizero Siheen Comprehensive Secondary School, Wollo, Dessie in 1963 and then entered Haile Selassie I University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. He received his Bachelor of Science in chemistry in 1968 from Haile Selassie University, Addis Ababa. Thereafter, he was awarded an African Graduate Fellowship Project (AFGRAD) scholarship and joined the Graduate Program in Chemistry at the University of Vermont, USA. He was awarded a PhD in 1973 for his dissertation entitled "Photochemistry of Polymethylene-ketene Dimers and Polyspirocyclobutanones". He did postdoctoral studies at the University of Ibadan (Nigeria), Florida State University (USA), Kings College (UK), and the University of Bochum and Humboldt University (Germany).

Dr Abegaz joined the Department of Chemistry of Addis Ababa University in 1973 as Lecturer. From 1973 to 1994, he progressed to the rank of Associate Professor III. In 1994 he was appointed Professor in the Department of Chemistry at the University of Botswana. Since 1973 he has also been a Rockefeller Fellow and Visiting Research Associate, University of Ibadan (Nigeria), a Visiting Assistant Professor of Chemistry, Boston University (USA), and a Senior Fulbright Research Scholar, Florida State University (USA). After graduate school Dr Abegaz turned his research attention to the chemistry of natural products. This work has led to approximately 185 publications and numerous invited lectures at major universities and international meetings. He has made substantial contributions to three areas of natural product research, including the isolation and characterisation of novel secondary metabolites from plants traded in markets in Africa.

To date, over 140 homoisoflavonoids are known. About 40 of these were characterised by Professor Abegaz from various species of the Hyacinthaceae. The first PhD degrees in any subject awarded from Addis Ababa University and the University of Botswana were PhD degrees in chemistry awarded in 1989 and 1999 respectively to students mentored by Professor Abegaz.

A number of Chemistry Departments at other African universities have followed his example and are now also awarding PhD degrees. In addition to his contributions to the science of natural products, the scientific enterprise in Ethiopia and throughout Africa has benefited from Professor Abegaz's efforts and enthusiasm. He was one of the 40 founders of the Chemical Society of Ethiopia in 1983 and served as the Society's first president from 1983 to 1987. He was also founding editor of the Bulletin of the Chemical Society of Ethiopia.

He is an elected fellow of The World Academy of Sciences, African Academy of Sciences and of the Ethiopian Academy of Sciences. He founded and coordinated the Network for Analytical and Biological Services for Africa. He has served on several international committees and boards such as International OCD Foundation, International Council for Science, International Foundation for Science Board of Trustees, The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Science Board, as a member of the Advisory Board of several international Journals, and the African Union High Level Panel on Emerging Technologies. For his contribution to the advancement of science in developing countries, he has also received awards of merit, such as the Pierre Crabe Award, the CNR Rao Award, the IFS-DANIDA award, and the Chemical Society Award of Merit.

Since 2002, he has been a provisional member of the International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry: Organic and Biomolecular Chemistry Division. A vigorous researcher in the field of natural products chemistry, Professor Abegaz has supervised the research of numerous PhD and postdoctoral students. From 1984 to 1996 he was a founding member of the Natural Products Research Network for Eastern and Central Africa (NAPRECA), and from 1992 to 2011 founded and coordinated the Network for Analytical and Biological Services for Africa (NABSA). He is the Executive Director of the African Academy of Sciences.

The Senate and Council of Rhodes University saw it befitting to confer the degree of Doctor of Letters (DLitt) (*honoris causa*) in recognition and celebration of Professor Abegaz's exceptional intellectual contribution in his chosen scientific disciplines and his long and distinguished lifetime commitment to the advancement of Science in Africa. We salute him as a scholar of exceptional standing who has used the power of creative thinking to make contributions of significant consequence in addressing some of the challenges that face our continent and humankind.