

Doctor Honoris Causa for Gerhard Bringmann

In a solemn ceremony the Catholic University of Graben in the East of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has awarded the honorary doctorate to Gerhard Bringmann from Würzburg. The professor of natural products chemistry took advantage of his visit to the Congo to create new contacts and to plan further scientific research projects.

The Catholic University of Graben (UCG) in Butembo and the University of Würzburg (UNIWÜ) have been linked to each other by a joint agreement since 2010. By the award of the honorary doctorate the African partner university has now honored Gerhard Bringmann's merits in the use of tropical plants for the search for new bioactive compounds against infectious diseases like malaria and African sleeping sickness. Bringmann has been collaborating in this field with the Congolese chemist Prof. Virima Mudogo, alumnus of the UNIWÜ and previous Vice President of the University of Kinshasa, since 1994.

Excellence Scholarship System as a Motor for the Congo

Bringmann was, however, mainly honored for the Excellence Scholarship System BEBUC, which he initiated together with Mudogo. This program, in which the UCG actively participates, is of a large importance for the entire Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The BEBUC scholarship system is organized by the German non-profit NGO *Förderverein Uni Kinshasa e.V. (fUNIKIN)*, which, by its Congo-wide activities, has by far extended its activities beyond its name.

BEBUC shall give outstanding students in the Congo the chance to study rapidly and in depth, to deepen the studies abroad and then to return to Africa, where they shall pass their knowledge on to young Congolese students. The intention is not only to give a perspective to the scholars themselves, but also to the Congolese universities, which, once, were excellent sites of research and education, but have severely suffered from civil war and dictatorship. By the scholarship system, the universities shall again become a motor for the reconstruction and the development of the Congo.

A First Primary School Included into the Scholarship System

During Bringmann's visit to the Congo, now also a first primary school was integrated into the scholarship system: It is the Groupe Scolaire Vabatu Ngoma in Kinshasa, which has been constructed by the partner NGO *Mbonda Lokito e.V.* from Würzburg. Here now for the first time two girls and two boys have been selected as scholars and were given their scholarship certificates in a small ceremony in the presence of the school inspector. Furthermore, as already in the case of the other eleven institutions, a partnership agreement was solemnly signed with the UNIWÜ and the NGO *fUNIKIN*.

Furthermore, eight Congolese universities are affiliated to the scholarship system, and they are, all of them, linked to the University of Würzburg by partnership agreements, as also the three Congolese high-schools, which have been participating since March 2012. Taken together, there are now 69 BEBUC scholars in the Congo, from primary-school and high-school scholars, up to bachelor, master, PhD, and re-entry scholars.



Gerhard Bringmann after having been presented the certificate of the honorary doctorate by the Rector of the UCG, Prof. Angelus Mafikiri Tsongo. Photo: V. S. Mambo



The short talk by the new honorary doctor Gerhard Bringmann earned large interest of the media. In the background His Excellence Bishop Melchisédech Paluku Sikuli and UCG Rector Prof. Angelus Mafikiri Tsongo. Photo: V. S. Mambo



Happy about their scholarships: The primary-school pupils (from left) Léon Loshima Emengo, Esther Biaka Bazungula, Bénédicte Kombo Donge, and Dibril Nzita Nzita. Photo: G. Bringmann

Further Activities in the Congo

Bringmann took advantage of his stay in the Congo for other activities, too. Together with his Congolese colleague Virima Mudogo he selected further BEBUC scholars, attended seminars organized by the students, visited important personalities from politics, and planned new scientific projects for the research network SFB 630 in Würzburg.

Solemn Ceremony for the Honorary Doctor

During the solemn award of the honorary doctorate in Butembo the laudatory speech was given by the Vice President of the UCG, Abbé Prof. Emmanuel Kakule Vyakuno. Likewise present were the entire Executive Committee of the Catholic University Graben, representatives of the town and the province as well as His Excellence, Bishop Melchisédech Paluku Sikuli, who simultaneously is the Grand Chancellor of the UCG.

By this, the UCG, which was founded in 1989, has donated an honorary doctorate for the very first time. Together with Bringmann it likewise honored two further personalities, who also had great merits about the UCG: His Eminence, Cardinal Fiorenzo Angelini from Rome and David McAllister, Director of the Irish section of *Christian Blind Mission*.

Career of Gerhard Bringmann

Gerhard Bringmann, born in 1951, studied chemistry and biology in Gießen and Münster (Germany), did his PhD there in 1978, and then worked as a post-doctoral fellow with the Nobel Prize awardee Prof. Sir Derek H. R. Barton at the renowned *Institut de Chimie des Substances Naturelles* in Gif-sur-Yvette near Paris (France). In 1984 he passed his habilitation in organic chemistry at the University of Münster.

In 1986 and 1987 Bringmann got offers for full professorships of organic chemistry at the Universities of Vienna (Austria) and Würzburg (Germany); he accepted the latter and has been holding the Chair of Organic Chemistry I since November 1987. He declined an attractive offer for the position of the Director at the *Leibniz Institute for Plant Biochemistry* in Halle in 1998.

From 2000 to 2004 he was the dean and vice-dean of the Faculty of Chemistry and Pharmacy; for many years he has been a member of the Standing Committee for Strategic Plannings, the Senate, and the Council of the University of Würzburg, and has also been the liaison professor of the DFG (German Research Council) and the FCI (Fonds der Chemischen Industrie) at the UNIWÜ.

Since 2003 he has been the foundation speaker of the interdisciplinary research network SFB 630 (*Recognition, Preparation, and Functional Analysis of Agents against Infectious Diseases*) in Würzburg. He has more than 660 publications in scientific journals and patents.

In 1999 Bringmann obtained the Award for Good Teaching of the Free State of Bavaria as one of the first docents. In 2006 he received the Adolf-Windaus Medal for Natural Products Research and in 2007 the Paul-J.-Scheuer Award for Marine Biotechnology. Since 2008 he has been an honorary professor at the famous Peking University in China. Of particular importance for the 'Congo project': In 2006 he obtained – as the first one since the Independence of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 1960 – the honorary doctorate of the University of Kinshasa.

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Speaking about the eventful history of the Congo at the blackboard: BEBUC scholar Bénédicte Kombo Donge from the third class of the primary school Vabatu Ngoma, which was built by the non-profit NGO Mbonda Lokito from Würzburg. Photo: G. Bringmann



Talk at the blackboard with rule and chalk: Léon Loshima Emengo, from the second class, and likewise BEBUC scholar. Photo: G. Bringmann



With the freshly signed partnership contract between the University of Würzburg (pre-signed by the President, Prof. Alfred Forchel), the primary school Vabatu Ngoma, and the non-profit organization "Uni Kinshasa" in hands: Gerhard Bringmann (left) and school director Jean René Vangu (right). Photo: H. Muhindo Mavoko