

With highest respect and gratitude to a Chemist who led IChemC to the top:**Dr R O B Wijesekera**

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Rahula Oliver Barnes Wijesekera (ROB to his many friends and colleagues) was the eldest son in a family of 7 siblings. He was an excellent student at Royal College Colombo. He graduated from the University of Ceylon with a BSc (Hons) degree in Chemistry. He then joined MRI as a Research Officer and was awarded a government scholarship in 1955 to follow post graduate studies in University of Sheffield where he obtained his PhD in 1958, and later DSc from the same university. On his return in 1959 from the UK, he moved to CISIR in 1966 and founded the Natural Products Section (NPS) of CISIR. Dr. ROB led NPS team initiated systematic scientific research on Sri Lankan medicinal and aromatic plant extraction and distillation technology. His publications on Ceylon Cinnamon, Ceylon Citronella and other spices and essential oils are still popular as reference material for most scientists not only in Sri Lanka but internationally as well.

In 1977, he left to British Guyana to serve as a scientific advisor. In 1978, he joined WHO in Geneva and worked as an expert on medicinal plants. In 1980, he was transferred to UNIDO in Vienna where he served until his retirement as Expert Technical Advisor. Dr. Wijesekera a fellow of Royal Society of Chemistry, Chartered Chemist and also fellow of the National Academy of Science (Sri Lanka), he has also been awarded a DSc Honoris Causa by the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka. Just to name some of the key positions held during his illustrious career. He was one of the past presidents of Chemical Society, Ceylon. He served in the capacity of President of SLAAS, Chairman -National Science & Technology Commission, Chairman of CISIR and Director, Link Natural Products. He was the recipient of the title "Vidya Jyothi", presented by the President of Sri Lanka, the highest award given away by the Government in recognition of his achievements as a scientist. Also, he was the recipient of the famous Guianese Award for Scientific Achievement in 1976 which is given as stated

"In recognition of service in applying science to the service of the community" and was administered by the Commonwealth Science Council.

Dr. Wijesekera happened to be the founder member of Asian Symposium on Medicinal Plants and Spices (ASOMPS) representing IChemC. He was a member of the Ceylon Chemical Society established in 1941 and instrumental in changing the British Colonials background of the Chemical Society and transforming it into IChemC what it is today, a well-recognized Govt. approved professional Institute. The IChemC logo -Adamantane structure- was one of the ideas; of Dr. ROB and that time President of Chemical Society Dr. Devanandan, it symbolizes strength and stability. In recognition of his valuable contributions towards the advancement of IChemC, he was invited to lay the foundation stone for the construction of the headquarters of IChemC, presently known as Adamantane House and to open the building. Further a lecture hall also named after him and Dr. ROB's portrait was unveiled, on his 82nd birthday 10th Oct 2010 by diplomat Jayantha Dhanapala.

Let me quote from Dr. R.O.B Wijesekera book 'Clouds are not spheres, nor mountains cones' posted on January 9, 2012 by Smriti Daniel:

"In these pages, Dr. Wijesekera recounts science and research 'missions' that took him to Guyana, Geneva, Vietnam and Vienna and also details trips to London, Madagascar, Hawaii, Seoul, Hong Kong, Chambésy, Mali, Mulund, Budapest, Kathmandu, Hangzhou, Bonn, Prague, New York, Delhi, Portofino, Barbados and Chicago with most of personal experiences during his missions."

On a personal note, may I take this opportunity to offer a "special thank you" to Dr ROB for his role in supporting me in many ways. During his tenure at UNIDO as Expert Technical Advisor not only myself but the entire CISIR staff benefited immensely from

his advice and guidance. With his numerous contacts with many countries, several of us were afforded opportunities to spend time in Perfumery Flavour laboratories in Grasse-France, Poznan, essential oil labs in Poland and India. I well remember the plaque "Finn Sandberg Laboratory" at Natural Products Section of CISIR (established before I joined) that was unveiled in appreciation of the Swedish Govt. assistance through Uppsala University for the development of medicinal plant research. He could have named it as "ROB Laboratory" like our politicians; he did not. After he

returned to ITI as the Chairman, he was very much closely associated with me and Dr. Upali M. Senanayake. Dr. ROB encouraged us to write chapters for the book published on Ceylon Cinnamon "Cinnamon and Cassia - Genus of Cinnamomum".

Let us all remember Dr. ROB as a great scientist for his contribution to the nation and for all the great work he did for the IChemC. Let us try to emulate the exemplary life of Dr. ROB and follow in his footsteps. Let his memory linger in our hearts and minds for posterity.

Mr. Ranjith Dayananda graduated from the College of Chemical Sciences, Institute of Chemistry Ceylon and obtained his MPhil from the University of Kelaniya. He has served at the Industrial Technology Institute and Silver Mill Group, and as a Past President of the Institute of Chemistry Ceylon.