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“A scientist who creates knowledge and translates complex issues into accessible language”

German Environmental Award 2015: Individual commendation of Prof. Mojib Latif

“He captivates, he galvanizes people. He stimulates and encourages both normal citizens and experts to engage with the challenges of climate change. He is one of the outstanding personalities in the field of climate research: a scientist who creates knowledge and translates complex issues into an accessible language. A climate expert who provides paths to solutions as an expression of his personal concern and his personal commitment.” This is how Dr. Heinrich Bottermann, Secretary General of the Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt (DBU), today announced the choice of Prof. Mojib Latif (60) from the GEOMAR Helmholtz Centre for Ocean Research Kiel as the recipient of the 2015 German Environmental Award. German President Gauck will present him with the award in Essen on November 8. His prize money: 245,000 euros.

Bottermann described Latif as one of Germany's best-known climate experts, who had written numerous specialist articles and books. His publications were directed at experts and a broad target audience that included children and youth, Bottermann said, adding Latif thus showed his high scientific standards and his aspiration to write books in such a way that their contents were more easily accessible to a wide public readership. His writings perfectly complemented his public appearances as a speaker, the secretary general went on, mentioning that Latif gave lectures and children's universities and schools, as well as being a sought-after expert on various science shows and supplying scientific articles for numerous printed media outlets. He noted that Latif had appeared as a guest expert more than 330 times from 1986 to the present day on public-service broadcaster ZDF and its partner stations.

Latif has received a number of awards for his publications, including those for children and youth, and for his achievements in publicly communicating the results of research. The awards include the Max Planck Society's prize for “Public Science” and the “DUH Environmental Media Prize 2004 in the lifetime achievement category” presented by the Deutsche Umwelthilfe. In 2000, the American Meteorological Association presented him with the “Sverdrup Gold Medal” for his outstanding scientific work.

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Bottermann said that besides Latif's research, the dissemination of knowledge about climate warming caused by humanity was the main objective of his work. Bottermann: "Latif devotes himself to his topic in a manner that is eloquent and full of optimism, passion and fascination. He does not content himself with just conveying facts, however, but calls very concretely for action." This exceptional commitment to research and society was documented in Latif's numerous specialist publications and his contributions to the public communication of research results, Bottermann said, while his co-editorship of international journals such as "Monthly Weather Review" and "Journal of Climate" underlined his scientific repute.

The secretary general praised the outstanding way Latif had drawn attention for years – most recently with his book "The End of the Oceans" – to the fact that our planet risks becoming uninhabitable for humankind without intact oceans. In this book, Bottermann said, Latif provided an extremely instructive and readable introduction to current marine research, describing the world of marine life and conveying the complex and sometimes abstruse physical connections between climate and oceans in an understandable, vivid manner. In addition to depicting the pollution of the oceans through plastic waste, the problems caused by over-fishing and the effects of climate warming, Latif showed the oceans to be an integral system, the secretary general said.

Latif has worked as a visiting researcher in the USA and Australia and in numerous national and international research organisations: in the World Climate Research Programme (WCRP), the German Meteorological Society, the American Meteorological Society, the Academy of the Sciences and Humanities in Hamburg, the Deutsche Gesellschaft Club of Rome and in the German Climate Consortium (DKK). In 2001 and 2007, he also co-authored the reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Bottermann: "Latif is an outstanding scientist. He consistently succeeds in creating enthusiasm for environmental and climate-protection issues among broad target groups."

The Hamburg-born scientist is the director of the research division Oceanic Circulation and Climate Dynamics at the GEOMAR Helmholtz Centre for Ocean Research Kiel. After studying business administration and meteorology, he did his doctorate at Hamburg University in 1987 on the El Niño weather phenomenon. In 1989, he received a post-doctoral degree in oceanography at Hamburg University. From 1983 to 1988, Latif was research assistant at the Max Planck Institute in Hamburg, becoming research group leader from 1989 to 2002. He worked on various issues connected with natural variability of climate and anthropogenic climate change. He is particularly interested in exploring mechanisms of climate fluctuation on time scales ranging from a few years to decades, using combined models of ocean and atmosphere. Since 2003, he has been professor in the Marine Science faculty at the Christian Albrechts University (CAU, Kiel), today the GEOMAR Helmholtz Centre for Ocean Research Kiel. Since 2006, Latif has also been a member of the Cluster of Excellence "Oceans of the Future" at CAU. He is also chairman of the German Climate Consortium.

Note to the press: detailed commendations of the prizewinners, their CVs, audio material and photos for free publication at www.dbu.de