



◀ Former TWAS President Jacob Palis receives the Abdus Salam Medal in Vienna.

IN THE SPIRIT OF ABDUS SALAM

✍ by Cristina Serra

In a joyous ceremony at the TWAS General Meeting, former President Jacob Palis received the Abdus Salam Medal and recalled the guidance and friendship of TWAS's founder.

Brazilian mathematician Jacob Palis has been a prominent presence in TWAS's life, shaping the Academy's programmes and global presence since the turn of the century. For his achievements and dedication to the Academy, Palis was awarded the prestigious Abdus Salam Medal at the 26th General Meeting in Vienna.

In a warm, intimate remembrance

at the prize ceremony, Palis recalled the work that earned him this latest recognition – and the friends he met along the way. "Perhaps," he said, "this most special honour ... was bestowed upon me in view of my great passion for TWAS, designed by its founder Abdus Salam to carry on the building up of science all over the world, with much focus on developing countries."

Indian chemist C.N.R. Rao, a TWAS Founding Fellow who preceded Palis as president, introduced him to the audience. Palis, as Rao recalled, served as the secretary-general from 2001 to 2006, and then was elected president [2007-2012]. He also has served as president of the Brazilian Academy of Sciences since 2007.

A native of Uberaba, in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais, Palis earned his master's degree in mathematics [1966] and PhD [1968] at the

University of California at Berkeley [USA]. In 1968 he returned to Brazil to begin a career as a researcher at the *Instituto Nacional de Matemática Pura e Aplicada*. From 1993-2003, he served as the institute's director.

As he delivered the Vienna lecture, "The Spirit of Abdus Salam", Palis' shared heartfelt emotion with the audience in the ornate Festive Hall at the Austrian Academy of Sciences.

"The title I chose for this lecture is indicative of my feelings with respect to Salam," said Palis, beginning his speech. Then he shared with the audience personal memories of a pivotal chapter of science history – written by Salam, by himself and other eminent scientists at the International Centre for Theoretical Physics in Trieste from the 1960s onward.

"For scientists from the developing world," Palis said, "coming to ICTP was an important step towards the realization of Salam's dream...as this confirmed their faith in their own talents and the importance of the work they were doing."

He recalled when TWAS created its PhD Fellowship Programme, which has now grown to more than 460 positions for applicants of developing countries. "We hope, not too far in the future, to achieve as much as 1,000 fellowships," said the Brazilian scientist, triggering a sustained ovation.

Palis also paid a special tribute to longtime friends and colleagues: Rao, founding Executive Director Mohamed Hassan, current President Bai Chunli, secretary-general Ajay Sood, the TWAS Council, and current Executive Director Romain Murenzi. ■

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