

İhsan Dođramacı as recalled by Şinasi Özsoylu

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İhsan Dođramacı, a retired professor of pediatrics at Hacettepe University who was also visiting professor at Université Descartes (Paris V) [9], honorary rector of Hacettepe University, honorary president of the International Pediatric Association (IPA) who served two terms as chair of the Executive Board of UNICEF, long-term Turkish delegate to the World Health Organization (WHO), and holder of honorary doctorates from 30 universities and membership in eight national academies as well as being an honorary member of 23 national pediatric societies, died of multiple organ dysfunction on February 25, 2010, in Ankara. He had been hospitalized since early November.

He was born in Erbil (Iraq) as a citizen of the Ottoman Empire on April 3, 1915 and attended Turkish primary school there where life was lived in at least three languages: Turkish, Kurdish, and Arabic [10]. He went to high school at the Preparatory School of the American University of Beirut where, apart from adding English and German to his linguistic skills, he was proud to have learned a smattering of the languages of his classmates including Aramaic and Hebrew and, not surprisingly in a school full of boys, with a healthy dose of swear words in all which he trotted out decades later to astonish visitors [4]. He graduated from Istanbul Medical Faculty in 1938; in that same year he started his pediatric residency at Ankara Numune Hospital under Professor Albert Eckstein, continued his training at Boston Children's Hospital under Professor Charles Janeway, and spent the following year as lecturer at St Louis Children's Hospital under Professor Alexis F.

Hartmann Sr. During the same year (1946), he signed the "birth certificate" of WHO at 31 years of age. During his stay in St Louis, he introduced a new method for measuring the specific gravity of urine in young infants [2].

After settling in Turkey, he became an associate professor in 1949 and a full professor of pediatrics at Ankara University in 1955. In the same year, he established the Child Health Society and was appointed as the first director of the clinic of Pediatrics and Child Health. He established the Hacettepe Children's Hospital (now the İhsan Dođramacı Children's Hospital), which gave birth to the Hacettepe Medical School (1963) and Hacettepe University (1967). He was elected rector of Ankara University in 1963 and first dean and rector of Hacettepe Medical School and Hacettepe University, respectively [3].

He personally established Hacettepe and Bilkent Universities, helped in the establishment of another four universities and seven medical faculties in different universities, and facilitated the establishment of another 11 during his presidency of the Council of Higher Education [5]. His devotion to medicine and higher education were confirmed by his refusal of offers to serve as minister of foreign affairs and prime minister [1].

He was awarded prizes by four national and eight international bodies including WHO and UNICEF and received some 250 certificates of appreciation from different national and international governmental and non-governmental institutions. Professor Robert Haggerty, as president of the American Academy of Pediatrics, proclaimed that "He has succeeded beyond what anyone could have imagined" [11].

Most importantly, he was extremely successful in steering his residents' and colleagues' mind-set and behavior toward novel approaches in patient care and research. He stimulated his colleagues to perform to their full capacity.

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In this connection, he introduced compulsory full-time employment of physicians at Hacettepe University with no private practice permitted, supplementing through private funding the very low state salaries. He was extremely successful in changing completely the educational philosophy in his institutions, introducing, for example, an integrated system of medical education which he had observed at Case Western Medical School and which influenced other universities in Turkey as well as many medical schools in other developing and developed countries [7].

He started the *Turkish Journal of Pediatrics*, now in its 52nd volume and recognized internationally.

His wisdom, tolerance, and selflessness, his ability to understand novel ideas and apply them, his capacity to accomplish what he set out to do, his understanding of different perspectives and viewpoints, his generosity in lending a helping hand, his capacity for learning foreign languages, his respect and support for the arts and artists, his effectiveness in diplomacy, his magnanimity and modesty, and his courage in visiting areas of conflict (such as Bosnia, Afghanistan, and several African countries) on behalf of children were extraordinary.

His genuine love for human beings shown through his contacts with them. All new visitors were greeted by him with details of their careers and accomplishments, which he had carefully investigated in preparation for their meeting. He was pragmatic, claiming as his motto that “Perfection is the enemy of good” and yet he planned seating in great detail in order to honor all rather than only a guest of honor.

In addition, he was generous with his vast inheritance [6] and a slave to his work. On the occasion of receiving an honorary doctorate from the University of Nebraska in 1965, Clifford Harding, chancellor of the university, introduced him as a “new champion of progress: ... physician, educational executive, teacher and scientist, prolific writer in his professions, and uninhibited planner, organizer and builder” [8].

He devoted his entire life, energy, and creativity and his whole family fortune to the sake of underprivileged children in Turkey and the causes of child health and higher education of the world. Former secretary general of the United Nations Kofi Annan said: “Professor Doğramacı, you are indeed a model citizen of the world such as the United Nations would wish to find in every country” [11].

Halfdan Mahler, while director general of WHO, said: “I think all of us are aware of how you have embodied the energy of knowledge and its ability to be translated into action. ...you stand as a clear symbol of the types of energy we need in your organisation in order to go forward with Health for All” [11].

He lived most of his adult life in Turkey, but he was truly a model citizen of the world. Professor Jane G. Schaller, while president of the International Pediatric Association, described him with these words: “He has also been a leader in broadening the concept of pediatrics and child health to include not only physical illness, but also physical wellness and social and psychological health” [11].

All people who had the chance to come into close contact with him will agree that not only was he a great pediatrician, a great administrator, a great organizer and builder, and a great philosopher, most of all he was the best friend of children everywhere.



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