

March 12, 2023

Dear ICS members,

It is with deep sadness that Prof. Raphael Mechoulam of the School of Pharmacy at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem passed away last Thursday, March 9. The funeral will occur today, March 12, in Givat Shaul, Jerusalem.

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**Prof. Raphael Mechoulam (1930 – 2023)**

Raphael Mechoulam was born in Sofia, Bulgaria, on November 5, 1930, to a Sephardic Jewish family. His father was a physician and head of a local hospital. He attended an American Grade School until his parents were forced to leave their hometown to hide in a small village, and his father was subsequently sent to a concentration camp, which he survived. After the communist takeover of Bulgaria in 1944, he studied chemical engineering, and in 1949 the family immigrated to Israel. Mechoulam received his M.Sc. in biochemistry from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (1952) and Ph.D. from the Weizmann Institute (1958) under Franz Sondheimer, working on the chemistry of steroids. After postdoctoral studies at the Rockefeller Institute, New York (1959–60), he joined the scientific staff of the Weizmann Institute (1960–65), working with Yechiel Gaoni and Youval Shvo on the isolation, structure elucidation, and total synthesis of  $\Delta^9$ -tetrahydrocannabinol, the main active principle of cannabis. In 1965 he moved to the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where he became a professor (1972) and Lionel Jacobson Professor of Medicinal Chemistry from 1975. He was a Rector (1979–82) and pro-rector (1983–85).

Mechoulam's primary scientific interest is the chemistry and pharmacology of cannabinoids. He and his research group succeeded in synthesizing the significant plant cannabinoids  $\Delta^9$ -tetrahydrocannabinol, cannabidiol, cannabigerol, and others. Another research project he initiated led to the isolation of the first described endocannabinoid anandamide, which was isolated and characterized by two of his postdoctoral researchers, Lumír Ondřej Hanuš and William Devane. Another endogenous cannabinoid, 2-AG, was soon discovered by Shimon Ben-Shabat, one of his Ph.D. students. He published more than 450 scientific articles.

Mechoulam was a member of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities since 1994, President of the International Cannabinoid Research Society (1999–2000), winner of the Israel Prize in Exact Sciences – Chemistry (2000), Honorary Member of the Israeli Society of Physiology and Pharmacology (2002), Honorary doctorate of Ohio State University, Complutense University (2006), University of Guelph (2018), and the Weizmann Institute of Science (2019). He received the NIDA Discovery Award (2011), the EMET Prize in Exact Sciences – Chemistry (2012), the Rothschild Prize in Chemical Sciences and Physical Sciences (2012), the IACM Award (2014), the Genius 100 Visionary (2016), the Harvey Prize of the Technion (2020), and the ICS Prize for Outstanding Scientist (2008).

The ICS and the entire community of Israeli scientists mourn the loss of a great scientist.

*Ehud Keinan*