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OBITUARY

In memoriam: Prof. Dr. R. A. (Rob) Schilperoort

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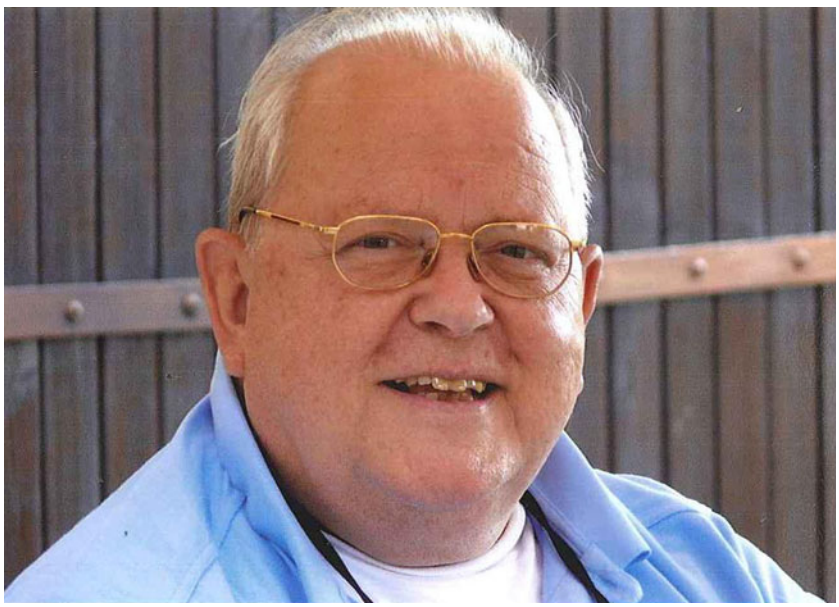

Rob Schilperoort (1938–2012)

We received the sad news that on 25 June 2012 Prof. Dr. Rob Schilperoort passed away.

Rob was the founding Editor-in-Chief of Plant Molecular Biology in 1981, the first journal devoted exclusively to plant molecular biology. The journal became formally affiliated with the International Society of Plant Molecular Biology (ISPMB), in which Rob played a very active role from the start. He chaired the organizing committee of the very successful 4th International Congress of Plant Molecular Biology held in Amsterdam in June 1994.

Rob Schilperoort was a pioneer in modern plant biology. For his Ph.D. research in Leiden in the late 1960s he was studying the plant disease crown gall, which is caused by *Agrobacterium tumefaciens* and especially was trying to find evidence for the possible presence of bacterial DNA in crown gall tumour cells. Although the technology available at that time did not allow detection of the T-DNA, his research spawned a lot of interest and stimulated other researchers, for example at the Universities of Gent and Seattle also to enter into the Agrobacterium field. After his

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Ph.D., Rob stayed at Leiden University as a member of staff, eventually becoming professor of biochemistry and head of department. Together with Marc van Montagu and Jeff Schell he co-authored the two milestone Nature papers describing the Ti plasmid as the tumour-inducing element of Agrobacterium in the mid-1970s. Rob and his team were among the pioneers discovering the molecular mechanisms used by the bacterium to provoke the crown gall disease and describing this unique natural form of genetic engineering of a eukaryotic host (the plant) by a bacterium. His group subsequently made pivotal contributions to the plant transformation technologies that are still in use today and which gave birth to the fields of plant molecular biology and plant biotechnology. In his Leiden laboratory the binary vector system was developed that is still in use worldwide today as the preferred vector system for the genetic modification of plants.

As a pioneer not only in research but also in technical applications, Rob was a major player in getting plant biotechnology on to the research agenda. He has been an architect for the current Dutch experimental plant research. Rob was also a pioneer in the valorisation of the results of university research in the Netherlands and was one of the founders of the Leiden Bioscience Park. In 1998 Rob received the AKZO-Nobel science award for his work.

Rob was also an excellent teacher with a great sense of humour. But above all he was a great friend and colleague. We shall miss him very much.