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Former world church President Jan Paulsen's home country of Norway is recognizing the veteran church administrator for his "service for the good of humanity."

Paulsen was recently appointed Commander of the Royal Norwegian Order of Merit, one of the country's highest civilian honors. In an announcement, Norway's Royal Palace stated that King Harald V appointed Paulsen for "meritorious" humanitarian work.

Paulsen said the recognition came as a surprise. "It warms my heart that the accolade came with the recognition, 'service for the good of humanity,' for that is what the life of Christian service is all about," he said.

Paulsen will receive the insignia of the order at a presentation ceremony expected later this year, officials said.

The Royal Norwegian Order of Merit was established by King Olav V in 1985 and is conferred on foreign and Norwegian nationals as a reward for "outstanding service in the interest of Norway."

"It is a great honor for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Norway that the global service of Dr. Paulsen has been recognized in this way," said Reidar Kvinge, president of the Adventist Church in Norway.

Paulsen served as Adventist world church president from 1999 until 2010. He began his ministerial service in 1953 in Norway and later held educational and leadership positions in Ghana and Nigeria. From 1976 to 1980, Paulsen served as principal of church-run Newbold College in England, which houses the main theological faculty of the church's Trans-European Division. For twelve years, Paulsen helmed the church's Trans-European Division, headquartered in St. Albans, England.

Throughout his career, Paulsen prioritized the furthering of higher education in Africa and was instrumental in shaping the humanitarian response of the Adventist Church to the AIDS pandemic.