

OBITUARY

ZACHARIAH KEODIRELANG MATTHEWS

It is with regret that we record the death in Washington on 11 May of Professor Z. K. Matthews, Botswana's Ambassador to the United States and the United Nations. He was 66.

Zachariah Keodirelang Matthews (often referred to simply as ZK or Zac) was a person who distinguished himself in many fields, including those of diplomacy, law, education and race relations. He was an eminent academic with a reputation not only in southern Africa but overseas as well.

The son of a mineworker, he was born in 1901 in Kimberley. He received his initial education at an Anglican school, later winning a bursary to the mission college of Lovedale. In 1923 he became the first African to graduate in South Africa from Fort Hare College. He was also to be both the first African headmaster of Adams College in Natal and, in 1930, the first African Bachelor of Laws in South Africa, being admitted as an attorney to the Transvaal division of the Supreme Court.

It was whilst at Adams College that he married Freda Bokwe, a fellow-teacher, and it was also in Natal that Matthews was to establish the African Teachers' Organization in conjunction with his fellow-teacher and friend, Albert Luthuli.

But Matthews was not destined to stay there for long. He went first to Yale, where he was to submit for his M.A. a thesis on Bantu Law and Western Civilization, and then to the London School of Economics and Political Science in 1934, where he studied Anthropology. In the mid-thirties, he was made Research Fellow of the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures in London. He was also appointed by the Secretary of State for the Colonies to act as

a member of a Commission on Higher Education for Africans in East Africa and the Sudan.

Matthews returned in 1936 to Fort Hare College, where he became a lecturer in Social Anthropology, Native Law and Administration. He became Professor and Head of the Department of African Studies in 1945 and was to be Acting-Principal between 1955 and 1957, eventually resigning in protest when the College was taken over by the Government.

In 1942, he had joined the African National Congress, and was also duly elected to the Native Representative Council, an advisory body which the Government had established. By the early 1950's, he had become president of the Cape A.N.C. In 1956, he was amongst those who appeared in the Treason Trial, but the charges against him and others were eventually withdrawn. During the 1960 State of Emergency, he was again detained and imprisoned for nearly six months without charge or trial.

He practised law for a few years in Alice, but left to join the World Council of Churches in Geneva, remaining with them up to the time of his last appointment as Botswana's Ambassador to the United States and the United Nations one week after that country's attainment of independence from Britain.

Professor Matthews, who is survived by his wife, two sons and three daughters, was more than a mere symbol of achievement to which Africans could point with pride. He was a person of international stature and integrity, whose distinguished accomplishments in the fields of law, education, international Christian service and political endeavour left an indelible mark and brought him universal respect.

N.J.P.