

OBITUARIES

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Francis Kofi Ampenyin Allotey

Francis Kofi Ampenyin Allotey, one of Africa's most influential physicists and cofounder of the African Physical Society, died on 2 November 2017 in Accra, Ghana.

Born in Saltpond, Ghana, on 9 August 1932, Francis studied at Imperial College London and in 1960 received a degree in mathematics and physics. In 1966 he obtained his doctorate from Princeton University, where he had also received his master's. He was especially noted for his theoretical work concerning the effects of electron-hole scattering resonances on soft x-ray spectroscopy in metals.

Francis declined to take part in the diaspora of African scientists who sought academic positions abroad; instead he returned to Ghana, where he became a key leader in the promotion of physics nationally. He served as president of the Ghana Institute of Physics, chairman of the Ghana Atomic Energy Commission, and president of the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Early on, Francis saw the great potential of African students in physics and mathematics. He was instrumental in bringing international attention to the urgent need to support science education and research in developing countries to avoid an irreversible brain drain. His influence grew through his 1996 appointment as a member to the Scientific Council of the International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP) in Trieste, Italy. He served for more than 20 years as a trusted adviser to the directors who succeeded Abdus Salam. In addition to advising the ICTP on its programs for



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scientists throughout the world, Francis provided an important connection between the United Nations (UN) and African scientists, particularly in the least-developed sub-Saharan region. Additionally, he served as a consultant to the International Atomic Energy Agency in the 1970s and focused on issues of nonproliferation.

Francis worked with UNESCO to mobilize international partnerships to see to fruition the International Year of Physics in 2005 and the International Year of Light in 2015, both of which were declared at the UN General Assembly. Indeed, because of the importance of making tight UN committee deadlines, in spring 2012 Francis went to Paris immediately following an ICTP Scientific Council meeting in Italy to ensure that Ghana's diplomatic services placed the proposal for the International Year of Light before UNESCO's executive board. He was extremely happy to see Ghana take a lead role in the initiative; in a 2015 interview on CNN's *African Voices*, he proudly remarked that "because of this little nation, this year has been declared the International Year of Light." More recently, Francis worked with UNESCO to have 16 May, the anniversary of the first functioning laser, recognized as an an-

nual celebration of science. Designated the International Day of Light, it is set to commence this year.

Development was what Francis always had in mind for Africa, and he knew where he had to focus first—Africa's youth. He also understood the need for a broad brush, from advanced physics to applied technologies to the training of teachers who feed the pipeline of future scientists. Francis helped bring to Ghana the first of a series of teachers' workshops called Active Learning in Optics and Photonics, organized jointly by UNESCO and the ICTP. Eugene Arthurs, CEO of SPIE, which has supported the program since that first workshop, made a simple remark on Francis's passing that will resonate with those who knew him and reveals one of the keys to his success: "Francis had a wonderful charm to match his brilliance."

Francis served as vice president at large of the International Union of Pure and Applied Physics from 2011 to 2017. He was a founder and trustee of the African Institute for Mathematical Sciences Ghana, which was launched in 2012, and the founding president of the African Physical Society, which was launched in Senegal in 2010. The society's goals, in Francis's words, were to "promote and further research in physics and its applications in order to enhance technological, economic, and socio-cultural development in Africa." Francis continued to work toward that goal during 2017; on the day he died, he was preparing for a trip to Paris on 4 November to participate in the UNESCO General Conference.

Francis was, in our opinion, the most recognizable voice for physics in Africa. A kind and highly principled man with a ready smile, he is greatly missed by his friends and family. His work lives on through the organizations and institutes he founded, and he leaves a remarkable human legacy in the thousands of students and colleagues who have been inspired by his example. We will remember him with great fondness.

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