

CITATION ON  
**PROFESSOR DAVID PETER SIMON WASAWO**  
ON HIS CONFERMENT OF  
THE HONORARY DOCTOR OF SCIENCE (D.Sc.)  
OF THE  
**UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI**  
AT  
NAIROBI, KENYA  
ON  
29TH NOVEMBER, 1999.



UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

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**EAST AFRICANA COLLECTION**



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## Citation on

### **Professor David Peter Simon Wasawo**

M.A. (Oxon), Ph.D. (London), Hon. D.Sc. (Kenyatta University).

The school motto of the Alliance High, the most famous school in Kenya founded in 1926, is a phrase which simply reads "Strong to Serve". Today the University of Nairobi is honouring an Old Boy of that school who has literally lived up to just that expectation. As a distinguished scholar and scientist he has selflessly served Kenya, East Africa, Africa and indeed the world in multifarious capacities ranging from a brilliant academic career to other key activities involving the application of science and technology for development. He is the current Chairman of the Council of the University of Nairobi and yet one can pass without noticing him because he is so immensely simple, humble and approachable despite his remarkable achievements and valuable services he has rendered to Society. This great scholar and scientist is Professor David P.S. Wasawo.

Professor David Wasawo was born in Gem Location of what was then called Central Kavirondo, but now Siaya District, in 1923, the son of the late Mzee Peter Osare. His early education took him through Gem and Kisumu before he joined Maseno School in 1937. He passed the Kenya Junior Secondary School Examination in 1941 with distinction and was declared the best overall candidate in the country. Between 1942-43 he attended the prestigious Alliance High School where he passed the Cambridge Overseas School Certificate Examinations with flying colours, scoring distinctions in all the subjects he sat. Once again he was declared the best candidate in the country. His



brilliance was best summarized by Edward Carey Francis, the legendary Headmaster who taught him at Alliance. While being interviewed by the Sunday Nation Newspaper in 1965 and asked who he thought was the most brilliant pupil he had ever taught, he promptly answered "*Far and away, David Wasawo*".

EAST AFRICANA COLLECTION

In 1944 Professor Wasawo was admitted to Makerere University College in Kampala, the only institution of higher learning in East and Central Africa at that time which granted only diplomas rather than degrees. He enrolled for science courses with an emphasis in Biology leading to London Higher Matriculation Examinations. Towards the end of 1945 young Wasawo had demonstrated superior academic prowess to his all-British academic tutors such as had never been witnessed before at that institution. Margaret Mcpherson in her book "*They Built For The Future, A Chronicle of Of Makerere University College, 1922-1962*" published in 1964 wrote: "Tutors (Lecturers) had the joy of reporting an outstanding student in Biology, D.P.S. Wasawo, who is now the Vice Principal and Professor of Zoology, having been sent straight to Oxford University from Makerere". Professor Wasawo was on his way to higher academic achievement when in 1946, the Principal of Makerere, C.G. Turner, himself a graduate of Oxford, provided full support to enable him to study for a degree course at Oxford University.

In 1951 David Wasawo became the first East African ever to be awarded a degree in Science: an Oxford M.A. degree in Zoology. Upon returning to Makerere in 1952 he again made history by becoming the first African member of

teaching staff in the Faculty of Science. Elsewhere at Makerere at that time there were only four other Africans in the teaching staff, namely, the late Professor Simeon Ominde (Arts), Professor Joseph Lule (Education), Professor Wilbert Chagula (Medicine) and Professor Y.M. Bosa (Veterinary Science). By this time David Wasawo had become a household name not only in his native Nyanza but far beyond and anxious parents could be heard exhorting their sons and daughters to work hard in their studies in order to emulate him by also going to Makerere!

RAEY AFRICANA COLLECTION

Professor Wasawo taught in Makerere between 1952 and 1965, going through all the academic ranks to full Professor and Head of Zoology Department. During this period he taught students from various Faculties such as Medicine, Agriculture and Veterinary Science. So powerful was his intellect that many of his students recall his extraordinary ability to conduct a three-hour lecture without referring to his notes! Many of his former students were later to become prominent in academic circles. Some of the eminent people he taught include the late Professor H.P. Ojiambo (Professor of Medicine), Professor J.M. Mungai (former Vice-Chancellor of this University), Professor Fred Kayanja (Vice-Chancellor, Mbarara University), Professor Richard Musangi (former Vice-Chancellor, Egerton University); Professors G.K. Kinoti and C.P.M. Khamala (Zoology, University of Nairobi); as well as Professors N.O. Bwibo (Paediatrics), J.K. Mati (Obstetrics and Gynaecology) and A.O. Wasunna (Surgery), all senior Professors who pioneered the Faculty of Medicine here at the University of Nairobi. While at Makerere Professor Wasawo was the first East African to hold the post of Vice Principal between 1962 and 1965. Professor Wasawo was awarded the Ph.D. degree by London University in 1959.

In 1965 Professor Wasawo transferred from Makerere to University College Nairobi to become its first Deputy Principal, a post he held until 1970 when the University of Nairobi was inaugurated into a full University and a new Vice-Chancellor appointed. He reverted to teaching and became the first Kenyan Professor and Head of Zoology Department and Dean, Faculty of Science, at the University of Nairobi. He served in that capacity until 1971 when he took an early retirement to join the United Nations. After 19 years of University teaching, research and administration he established himself as, and is truly regarded in East Africa as, not only the father of science but the father of Professors as well. He has performed extensive pioneering research on various biological species in East Africa and published many scientific papers on them. But Professor Wasawo will always be remembered on his original contribution to the study on the Lungfish (*Protopterus Aethiopicus*), the largest fish in the Lake Region before the introduction of the Nile Perch into Lake Victoria.

After retiring from the University of Nairobi, Professor Wasawo's first assignment was with the United Nations Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) between 1971 - 1973 as Scientific Adviser to the Government of Tanzania during which he assisted in establishing the Tanzania Scientific Research Council.

Between 1973 and 1979 he was the Chief, Natural Resources Division of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) based in Addis Ababa. In this senior position he was in charge of programmes in science and technology, mineral resources, energy and water resources, human environment, remote sensing, cartography and



marine resources. In this capacity he was instrumental in establishing the Regional Centre for Services in Surveying, Mapping and Remote Sensing Office in Nairobi. During this period Professor Wasawo authored and edited a host of technical reports and publications.

From 1979 to 1982 Professor Wasawo was appointed the Managing Director of the Lake Basin Development Authority from its inception. The many papers and blueprints he wrote and developed at this time are still being implemented up to now by the Authority.

From 1982 to 1986 Professor Wasawo was appointed as a Development Adviser in the Ministry of Energy and Regional Development. In this capacity his duties included advising the Minister on energy and development matters, assisting the planning division of the Ministry in the preparation of national energy policy and participating in negotiations with donors and donor agencies.

Throughout his career Professor Wasawo has been a member of numerous councils and committees at the national, regional and international levels. He has chaired many ECA and OAU panels and committees. In 1994 he became the first post apartheid Director of Training, Africa Institute for Policy Analysis and Economic Integration in Cape Town, South Africa. At the end of his tenure in 1996 he prepared a report entitled "A Reconnaissance Visit to South Africa on Science and Technology", which he presented to President Mandela's Government as the way forward in co-operation in science and technology for development.

After retiring from his advisory position with the Kenya Government in 1986, Professor Wasawo has devoted his

time as a free-lance development consultant to UNEP, GTZ, UNESCO, IDRC, IGADD, SIDA, FAO, the World Bank and many others.

More recently Professor Wasawo, being very concerned about the poor performance in examinations in science subjects in our schools, has initiated a project which is aimed at remedying the situation.

It is in recognition of his impeccable academic credentials, his enormous contribution to research and teaching in science, his outstanding role in the application of science and technology for development and, above all, his unsurpassed humility, that the University of Nairobi is proud to award the Degree of Doctor of Science (*Honoris Causa*) to Professor David P.S. Wasawo.

~~WEST AFRICAN COLLECTION~~