

**PROFESSOR GODWIN OLU PATRICK OBASI
SECRETARY- GENERAL EMERITUS AND EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF THE
AFRICAN WATER JOURNAL PASSES AWAY**

**A Tribute by
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Professor Godwin Olu Patrick Obasi, Secretary General of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) from 1 January 1984 to 31 December 2003 died in Abuja, Nigeria on 3 March 2007, aged 73 years. He was Secretary General Emeritus of WMO till he died.

An ardent family man, he married Madam Winifred on 1 October 1976 and they had six children: Jane Abisola, Omowumi, Christine Folakemi, Albert Babatunde, Margaret Iyabo and Mary Omotayo Obasi.

Professor Obasi was born in Ogori, Kogi State, Nigeria on 24 December 1933. After schooling and early life in his home country, he proceeded for university studies in North America where his distinguished academic record included a Bachelor of Science (1959) with Honours from McGill University in Montreal, Canada and a Master of Science (1960) and Doctorate (1963) in Meteorology from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the USA. At MIT, he received the Carl-Gustav Rosby Award for the best doctoral thesis of his graduating year.

Following his graduation, Professor Obasi joined the National Meteorological Service of Nigeria. Four years later, he joined the Faculty of the University of Nairobi, where he was later appointed Chairman of the Department of Meteorology and Dean of the Faculty of Science. In 1978, he moved to Geneva to join the WMO Secretariat as Director of the Education and Training Department.

In May 1983 the 9th World Meteorological Congress elected him Secretary-General of WMO with a four-year mandate beginning 1st January 1984. He was subsequently re-elected for four terms (in 1987, 1991, 1995 and 1999). Upon completion of his fifth term, he became Secretary-General Emeritus of WMO as decided by the 14th World Meteorological Congress.

During his tenure, Prof. Obasi was active in promoting global solutions to environmental issues, with special attention to the atmosphere, fresh water and the oceans. He was at the forefront in drawing the world's attention to the issue of climate change, notably in convening the Second World Climate Conference, held in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1990. He played an important role in the negotiations leading to the establishment of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the World Climate Research Programme, the Global Climate Observing System and the Vienna Convention on the Protection of the Ozone Layer and its Montreal Protocol.

During his twenty years as Secretary General, Professor Obasi was untiring in his promotion of international cooperation in Meteorology and Operational Hydrology, in his initiatives for strengthening the NMHSs of all countries and in his commitment to enhancing the impact and influence of WMO within the United Nations and the broader international system. He worked hard to build links with WMO's sister organisations and to promote the vision of an Integrated World Geophysical organisation supporting the goals of sustainable development. He worked closely with his good friend Dr Mostafa Tolba, Executive Director of UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme), to provide the scientific underpinning for the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer. He championed the setting up of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). He led the organisation of the 1990 Second World Climate Conference and played a key role in pointing the way towards the negotiation of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Professor Obasi travelled widely to represent the interests of WMO and he was always there for the opening of regional association and technical commission sessions to meet the delegates, commend their achievements and explain the WMO vision for the future. He was both outward-looking and forward-looking and he gained particular satisfaction from the outcome of the Eminent Persons Group that he brought to Geneva in 1996 to help map out a visionary future for WMO. He was a determining influence in strengthening the role of WMO and NMHSs in natural disaster reduction and climate. Though his scientific and policy interests ranged widely, however, his own special focus remained on education and training and capacity building for the NMHSs of developing countries.

His service to Africa and his fatherlands, Nigeria was enormous. Aside from his distinguished teaching career as University Professor in Kenya, he contributed to

development of scientific institutions and policy through the African Academy of Sciences and the then Third World Academy of Sciences. He strongly supported the African water community, in several ways.

Professor Obasi was proud of what he achieved as an African head of a United Nations organisation and the entire developing world was rightly proud of him. His greatest legacy lies in the scientific calibre and commitment of the meteorological and hydrological communities of the developing countries as much as it is in the United Nations system and the broader institutions of international scientific collaboration. He also pushed for and ensured the construction of the new WMO Headquarters building in Avenue de la Paix, This beautiful Geneva landmark will stand as a publicly visible legacy of his WMO career.

No other meteorologist in history has visited so many countries, opened so many meetings and conferences, met so many Prime Ministers, Presidents and Kings and been so widely honoured by so many governments and organisations. No other meteorologist in history has done more to promote the role and influence of the National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHSs) of the developing countries and no other meteorologist from a developing country has achieved so much status and influence in the highest levels of international affairs.

To many of his peers, he was known as “GOP” (Godwin Olu Patrick Obasi), to several of his staff, he was known as “SG” (Secretary General), while to some of us, he was known as “Oga” (the Master, in an African parlance). I was privileged to work with him directly as Executive Assistant from 2002 till his retirement in December 2003. I can confirm, without any iota of doubt, that he was a very strong, courageous, determined and honest man till the end.