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Special Release

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OBITUARY

PROFESSOR FOLAKE ONAYEMI (1964 – 2024)

The Vice-Chancellor, Professor K. O. Adebowale, mni, FAS, announces the transition of Professor Folake Onayemi, a distinguished Professor of Classics in the Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan. She was aged 60 years.

Late Folake Onayemi was born on Sunday, 04 October 1964, to Mr. Festus Akinwole Olapetun (Oladeti) and Mrs. Patricia Esimaje Akinwole (nee Magbeleye) in the historic town of Ijebu-Jesha. She embarked on her educational journey at Sacred Heart Primary School before moving on to Our Lady of Apostles Secondary School. Her scholarly path was marked by determination and excellence, leading her through the Federal School of Arts and Science and finally to the University of Ibadan, where she did not only study but also shaped the field of Classics.

Late Folake Onayemi obtained a Master's Degree (M.A. Classics) in 1990 and an M.Phil. in Classics in 1997. She then proceeded to the PhD programme, having the honour of conducting part of her research in world-class libraries at the prestigious Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, United States of America. She returned to Nigeria and successfully defended her thesis in 2001, becoming the first woman to obtain a PhD in Classics in Nigeria.

Late Folake Onayemi was employed as an Assistant Lecturer on 01 July 1994, at the Department of Classics, University of Ibadan. She was promoted to Lecturer II in 1996, Lecturer I on 01 October 1999, Senior Lecturer on 01 October 2002, Reader on 01 October 2005, and Professor on 01 October 2008. By her elevation to professorship, she became the first female professor of Classics in Africa, south of the Sahara.

Late Professor Folake Onayemi was a member of several learned societies, including the Classical Association of Nigeria, Classical Association of Ghana, Concerned Circle of African Women Theologians in Culture and Religion, and the Network for Archaic and Classical Greek Song and Lyrics.

Late Folake Onayemi's honours and distinctions include: Visiting Scholar, Department of Classics, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, USA (2000–2001); Visiting Professor, Department of Classics, University of Texas at Austin, USA (January to March 2001); Appointment to the Professorial Women's Advisory Board of the American Biographical Institute (2004); Nigerian Academy of Letters (NAL) Bayo Kuku Postdoctoral Fellowship (2004); John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Fellowship (2005); Alexander S. Onassis Foundation Fellowship (2006–2007 Cycle); Visiting Scholar, Department of Classics, University of Ghana, Legon, Ghana (August 2009–December 2010, August 2013 to July 2014, 2018–2020); and Advisor, American Council of Learned Societies' 19 Humanities Programme.

Late Professor Folake Onayemi served at the University of Ibadan and other universities outside Nigeria in many capacities; as External Examiner, University of Cape Coast, Ghana (2006 to 2009, 2011 to 2014); External Examiner, University of Zimbabwe, Harare, Zimbabwe (March 2014–2017); Acting Head, Department of Classics (2005 to 2007, 2007 to 2009); Head, Department of Classics (2014 to 2018); and Hall Mistress, Awolowo Hall, University of Ibadan (2013 to 2017).

She attended conferences across the United States of America, United Kingdom, Greece, Spain, Italy, South Africa, Canada, and Ghana, where she presented keynote addresses and seminar papers. She had over 30 publications, including three books, and supervised many M.A., M.Phil., and PhD theses, including the doctoral works of three of her colleagues in the Department of Classics of the University of Ibadan, namely Professor E. F. Taiwo, Professor G. O. Adekanni, and Dr. Bosede A. Adebowale.

Beyond her academic achievements, Late Folake Onayemi was a mentor, a leader, and a beacon of inspiration to all who had the privilege of knowing her. Her service to the University of Ibadan, her involvement in various learned societies, and her role as a mentor to numerous students and colleagues exemplified her deep commitment to the advancement of knowledge and the empowerment of others.

Late Professor Folake Onayemi was married to Mr. Olumuyiwa Adesola Onayemi (of blessed memory) and was blessed with three children, all of whom are alumni of the University of Ibadan.

She passed away on 14 February 2024.

May her soul find eternal rest and may her work continue to light the path for the scholars who walk the road she paved. May she continue to rest in the bosom of the Lord. Amen.

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