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REMEMBERING JOSEPHAT M. MATHE (30/5/47 – 23/4/13)

Nigel, Hall

IFSW Human Rights Commissioner

Josephat Mathe, a well-known member of the social work fraternity in Zimbabwe, died at St Anne's Hospital, Harare, Zimbabwe on 23rd April 2013. Joe had been unwell for more than eight years previously, had suffered from diabetes and his sight had been badly affected. Following a mass organised at his house in Strathaven, Harare, his body was taken to his rural home in Dufuya Village, Lower Gweru for burial on Saturday 26th April. He left behind his wife, three children and five grandchildren.

Joe was born in Lower Gweru communal lands. He did his primary education at Bembe St Joseph Primary School and Railway Block Primary School in Shurugwi and then undertook secondary education at Cyrene Mission School near Bulawayo. In 1975 he started social work training at the School of Social Work in Harare where he attained a Diploma of Social Work in 1977, Bachelor of Social Work in 1985 and Master of Social Work in 1991.

His work career began in 1970 as a dispatch clerk at Textile Mills in Bulawayo until 1975. Upon completion of his diploma of social work qualification, Joe joined the Department of Social Welfare in Bulawayo. After two years, he was tasked to develop a Department of Social Work in Hwange and was then appointed as administrator to a refugee camp in Plumtree. This was during the time refugees were returning to the country from Botswana and other countries at the end of the war of liberation. He later assumed the same role at a refugee camp in Rusape for returnees from Mozambique. In 1986, he took up a lecturer post at the School of Social Work, then an affiliate of the University of Zimbabwe. During his tenure at the School, he also sat on the Board of Governors' meetings representing staff members. However, his stay was short-lived as it was only about six months before he joined Redd-Barna Zimbabwe (now Save the Children Norway) as programme director.

Josephat is remembered for working to promote the recognition of the social work profession with institutions such as the National Association of Social Workers – Zimbabwe (NASW-Z), Council of Social Work (CSW), Commonwealth Organisation for Social Work (COSW) and International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW). Josephat was always a stalwart member of the NASW-Z and had been involved for many years in building up the Association and providing leadership and direction, including as National President. He was a founding member of the Council of Social Work in Zimbabwe and at a much earlier stage had worked with others to draft the legislation that eventually set up the Council.

Joe was also a founding member of the COSW and was on the Executive Board of the organisation for many years. Terry Bamford, also on the executive said: *"I remember him well as he was in Colombo when COSW was formed and was part of a formidable Zimbabwean delegation. The many messages show the high regard in which he was held by so many colleagues"*. He had also been a valued member of staff at the School of Social Work. Father Rogers, former Principal of the School sent this message: *"I remember Josephat Mathe well. I offer my condolences and prayers to him and his family and friends"*. Joe was a very sincere and knowledgeable person, who worked quietly behind the scenes to promote social work in Zimbabwe and Africa generally. He also worked in a developmental role within the Norwegian NGO, Redd Barna.

Joe worked with IFSW on various committees, including the six-year project to build the social work association in Zimbabwe during the 1990s and in planning to hold the 2002 IFSW World Conference in Zimbabwe. The conference was expected to run from 28 July to 2 August 2002 but was cancelled due to political developments in Zimbabwe at that time. The conference was to run under the theme *'Building effective strategies in social work practice in a new era'*. The theme meant that social work strategies should reflect the situation on the ground and reflect directly on the needs of the people served by social work – a belief Joe shared. David Jones, former President of the International Federation of Social Workers noted that Josephat played a significant role in Zimbabwe and was bitterly disappointed with the decision which was one of the factors which contributed to the decline of the Zimbabwe association for many years.

Joe will be sadly missed by many who worked closely with him in Zimbabwe in trying to develop the social work profession, by his former students at the School of Social Work, and by colleagues at the International Federation of Social Workers. Sue Dvorak-Peck, IFSW's Ambassador noted: *"I remember Josephat as very dedicated to IFSW and NASW-Z. He represented not only NASW-Z, but the entire African Region with his expertise. He was always a global team player who was ready, willing and able to work on behalf of IFSW and*

the social work profession. Josephat was an unassuming person who worked diligently over many years to achieve a multitude of goals for all social workers". Charles Mbugua, the former IFSW Africa President noted: "Joe was a committed social worker. I had the privilege of working with him closely. It a loss to the social work fraternity not only in Zimbabwe and Africa but the world as a whole. I share this loss with his family, friends and colleagues in Zimbabwe".

Daniel Asiedu, then current IFSW Africa President wrote: "I have not known Josephat Mathe personally but from what I know about him I am convinced that he has made a very significant contribution to the development of the profession in the Africa Region. I am very aware of the stature of the NASW(Z) within the Africa region in the recent past until the political crisis. Josephat contributed significantly to the development of the Zimbabwean association. We have lost a stalwart of our profession and I am deeply saddened by his death. On behalf of the IFSW Africa Member-at Large, the membership of the IFSW Africa Region and myself, I wish to convey my deepest condolences to NASW-Z. May his soul rest in perfect peace".

Other former colleagues and students sent in their messages. Tsitsi-Stella Dangarembizi wrote: "Oh what a blow the loss of Mr Joe Mathe is to our profession! A very humble but knowledgeable man, who imparted knowledge and skills in various ways to all of us his former students and peers alike. My heartfelt condolences to his family and all who were touched by Mr Mathe. Although we may not have been in touch in recent years, his work has benefited most, if not all of us, who have passed through the School of Social Work. He will be sorely missed. We pray He Rests in Eternal Peace". Lovemore Matikinyidze, a former social work student noted: "A sad loss indeed. We will forever be indebted to him for his sterling efforts to the development and recognition of the profession of social work in Zimbabwe. May his soul rest in peace".

Many of Joe's colleagues have expressed their sorrow. Professor Edwin Kaseke, former Principal of the School of Social Work, now Chair and Head of Social Work at the University of the Witwatersrand noted: "It is with great sadness that I have learnt of the passing on of Josephat Mathe. What a sad loss to the profession. My deepest condolences to the family and the social work fraternity". A fellow colleague also from the School of Social Work in Zimbabwe and now Head of the School of Social Work in Botswana, Professor Rodreck Mupedziswa said: "It is with shock and a great sense of loss that I have just learnt about the untimely death of a dear comrade and former workmate, Josephat Mathe. This is indeed a sad loss to the profession; we have been robbed of an icon, and left much poorer. We shall however remember all his hard work in getting NASW moving and getting the Social Workers Act in place".

Professor Mupedziswa suggested preserving his legacy in some way – for example coming up with a Joe Mathe Prize for Best Social Work Student which he would be willing to personally contribute towards. This idea has been supported by several others and Leon Muwoni, another former student, noted: "The idea of the annual award is a noble one and I would be happy to contribute towards the setting up and success of the initiative".

I also extend my condolences to Josephat's family and having known and worked with him in Zimbabwe endorse the comments that others have made concerning his contribution to the social work profession. The suggestion of a contribution in Josephat Mathe's name seems a very worthwhile suggestion and a fitting tribute to a person of his stature.

TRIBUTES TO JOSEPHAT MATHE

Hall, N. 2013. Tribute to Joe Mathe. Available at: <http://ifsw.org/news/tribute-to-joe-mathe/>. Accessed 3 October 2016

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